Rene Descartes (1596-1650)

The Meditations on First Philosophy

Rene Descartes is the founder of modern philosophy. In The Meditations, there are elements of Descartes's Method of Doubt that make his arguments about the existence of God interesting. The main arguments in the Meditations are The Ontological Argument and The Cosmological Argument.

The Ontological Argument contains a Causal Proof that talks about wax and how it changes form when it is put in the fire. Descartes wonders if the wax is just a figment of his imagination because it appears in two different forms. When it is not in the fire, it is hard and is solid. When it is put in the fire, it is liquid. Is this the same wax? Yes of course it is. But to Descartes, it was possible that God or an evil demon was deceiving him. This notion that the wax is not the same type of wax when it is hard and when it is liquid has something to do with our Theory of Types. I think that a type directly relates to an object, in this case wax, which can be explained by Kant's categories, namely, of quantity and shape and form which relate to the object's appearances, in order to show a connection with Descartes's ideas and Spinoza's ideas. Descartes is a substance dualist and Spinoza is a substance monist.

If substance exists in the world, it exists as matter and thus we must be in the world. Scientists must discover methods to prove how we exist in relation to matter and the philosophers say why their ideas might be incorrect. Dualism then is the root of our scientific dilemmas because we do not know if we should explain the universe in terms of our own beliefs or our observations in the field. To be standing on the needle point, we need to go to experience and observe ordinary life. When we do this, we are able to grasp concepts according to the other person's point of view. Logic is a method that philosophers have developed since Parmenides. Did you know that he invented logic while being on a rock in Egypt during 5 BCE? The father of logic is Aristotle. He was a student of Plato who was studying under Socrates.

Wonder provides us with a sense of curiosity to reconstruct the universe according to our metaphysical speculations. It is not only nature that is weird but we are as well in terms of our minds. How do we do anything at all? Well we have bodies and a brain. This is the datum and it might exist because God created us starting with Adam and Eve some 6000 years ago. According to geologists the earth is 4.5 billion years old. I agree with the geologist more than the sages in the Bible because of the fossil record. It gives us proof. But I can see why some people believe in Genesis in the Bible's Story that 6000 years ago the earth was created by some unseen entity named God! Is God a Supreme Being that looks like us or is God faceless and unimaginable?

If God is a Supreme Being, It must have some kind of existence that is not on the earth, what Kant called that which relates to experience. And if God has a face, it won't look like any of us because God is not a human. This is a Muslim belief about Allah. Allah is or isn't Yahweh. I think because of the face issue. Anyway, one time I went for walk in the forest and I was seeing objects, the world and the things living in it in different ways.  Living things were existing among themselves and I was in the picture of this reality and I could see how I was part of something bigger. The mind partakes in life cycle processes. I think of symbiosis and observing how things live together. This is a phenomenon. Living things like clownfish evolve with other living things when they feed on small invertebrates that harm other organisms that they live with such as sea anemones. In retrospect, the clownfish is protected from predators by the anemone's stinging cells. The clownfish is different from the sea anemone because it is a fish and yet it is similar to the sea anemone because they are both invertebrates. Predators that the clownfish is protected from by the anemone's stinging cells all create a biological picture for us to observe. This is the beauty of nature. We can make mistakes in our understanding of the world and the creatures living in it including ourselves. I don't think biological relationships like this one are like the simulations of the things that warned Descartes of his error because there is nothing to doubt about symbiosis. It is a known biological fact.

Are we rational animals like Descartes thought? Do we have an animus spirit that interacts with the other animal spirits to create the Spirit of the Creator one looks like an animal? Perhaps this is the Big Bad Wolf in our fairy tale stories about religion. Humans have the capacity to design characters from signs by using words and pieces of art. This is like symbiosis but it is symbolic. Symbolic logic is the system of signs that individuals develop to explain the world in terms of pictures. It it not quite like the Egyptian hieroglyphics but it is fascinating to do. It gives us a voice. Yet still we are rational and irrational. We have our own theories and become characters because we have personalities. Was Jesus a character like us? We don't like to think so because many of us believe that he is the Son of God and character implies a sense of humor. Many of us when we think of Jesus Christ are serious. I don't have the answer to the question if Jesus is the Son of God but I think that God is an interesting Thing to wonder about especially portrayed as a larger version of us in Animal Form like Rene Descartes did.

This causes some of us to believe in an unseen world that is not on earth. I can tell you that everything that exists is among us. Glorious! One song I love to listen to when I think about Spinoza's ideas about substance is Pachelbel Canon in D. It is a great piece of inspirational music that causes this writer to reflect on holy things. To Rudolph Otto, religion is "Numinous" It provokes terror inside of us because it presents itself as an overwhelming power. In my opinion, God is Numinous. Religion isn't. Religion is created by human beings. Even if God exists, and many great writers think this is possible, and if somebody by like Richard Dawkins believes it is, I do too, my point is that the spirit is in individuals and in the Other.

MEDITATION I.

*First Meditation*, 89, [3.]

and universal out of which-as from true colors-are feigned all those images of things which, whether truth or false, are in our cogitation.

*First Meditation*, So therefore we be dreaming. (91 [6.])

*First Meditation*, Of which kind seem to be corporeal in nature and its extension; also, the figure of extended things; also, the quantity, or the magnitude and the number of the same things; also, the place in which they may exist, and the time through which they may endure, and similar things. 93 [7.]

*First Meditation*, Therefore we will perhaps well conclude from these things that physics, astronomy, medicine and all the other disciplines that depend on the consideration of composite things are indeed dubious, but that arithmetic, geometry and the others of this kind – which treat only of the simplest and general things and which care little about whether these would be in the nature of things or not – contain something certain and indubitable. For whether I would be awake or sleeping, two and three added together are five, and a square has no more than four sides. Nor does it seem that it can happen that truths so perspicuous would incur the suspicion of falsity. 93 [8.]

*First Meditation*, And yet there is fixed in my mind a certain old opinion that there is a God who can do all things and by whom I, as such as I exist, have been created. (93 [9.]).

The Cosmological Argument, Cartesian Idealism

*First* Meditation, The Fate Argument (95 [10.])

MEDITATION II.

*Concerning the nature of the human mind:*

*that it be more known than [the] body*.

I am supposing, then, that all the things that I see are false. I believe that none of the things that the mendacious memory represents has ever existed. I have no senses at all. Body, figure, extension, movement, and place are chimeras. What will, then, be true? Perhaps just this one thing: that there is nothing certain (99 [2.])

*Second Meditation* 107 [8.]

In the Second Meditation, Descartes explains that there are eight qualities of the mind that are distinguished our cogitation of the cogito. He asks, But what, then, am I? A cogitating thing. What is that? A thing doubting, understanding, affirming, denying, willing, not willing, also imagining and sensing, of course. (*Meditatio II, Concerning the nature of the human mind: that it be more known than [the] body*. 107 [9.])

*Second Meditation*, 109. [11.] A description of the wax. Does it still remain the same piece of wax?

*Second Meditation*, 113 [13.] But meanwhile I am surprised at how prone to errors my mind might be.

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There are three kinds of thoughts invented by Descartes: fabricated, adventitious, and innate. Each was defined by the images of things such as our thoughts of a person, fantasies, an angel, or God. He thought that the senses were deceptive and denied the images of corporeal things as being false.

From these truths, he said he was a thing that thinks, doubts, affirms, denies, wills, imagines and perceives. He believed that the imagination and his perceptions were modes of thought. He considered these modes as evidence of thinking which implied his own existence. If these kinds of actions and modes were not true, he would not exist. Also, because contradictory ideas like 2 and 3 make more or less than 5 were apparently real but could be proven false meant that God must exist and would not deceive him.

Descartes is the founder of modern philosophy and his works in science and philosophy showed us that novel truths must be discovered by making errors. The Cartesian Philosophy evolves into fallibilism, the philosophy that knowledge is real if we accept that we might be wrong.

One of Descartes’ most important points in the Meditations is that he thinks the existence of God can be proven by the natural reason and inferred from the Holy Scriptures. He thinks that we can prove that the soul does not perish with the body and that God exists by means of the natural reason (Page X).

In Meditations on First Philosophy, Descartes is questioning the objects of science and explains that he should doubt his existence when he is not experiencing the things he has already seen, heard, and touched. Some of these things relate to nature, such as trees, and others are concerning the inner contents of our minds. Thus, there is a duality between the world and our minds, the external world of material things that appear to us and the internal world of ideas that are known to us. The difference is that material things are objectively valid, which means that we can critique them. Our ideas are not subject to a critique unless we explain what they are. Hence the point of psychology is to relate the inner world to the external world and say that there is a relationship outside both that may be explicable by God and God’s existence. The latter relate to God, that he exists and the former have to do with the natural world (Meditation V, Concerning the essence of material things; and again, concerning God, that he exists).

Can we call it a method? Yes. Is it empirical? No. Descartes meditates by himself in isolation. He does not go to experience to observe things in the world while he is writing The Meditations. In order for philosophers to develop our own ideas we must believe that Descartes’s method is not an empirical one. For a method to be empirical we must go to experience. This idea makes Descartes’s Method of Doubt apparently true because when we are not experiencing reals, we can question their existence. Kant said that reality should be viewed as having both noumena and phenomena. He distinguished between real things and things in themselves. Phenomena were reals and noumena were ideas in themselves. Some phenomena were things like trees, clouds, plants, and animals.

Noumena were contingent on phenomena and this meant that our ideas of something like a tree were different from person to person. This was an important milestone in philosophy and it shows us that things in the world are objective while ideas in our minds are subjective. Science evolves as a process to learn cause and effect relations that we want to explain but have trouble doing so because we don’t know where to look in the world. Descartes was a good scientist but he thought that he should always doubt even things that he believed to be true.

For example, since it was possible that there were such beliefs in our minds like 2 + 2 = 5, it was possible that our knowledge of our a priori truths, not only mathematical truths but a posteriori truths, such as truths about experience, were false. He came to the conclusion that it was possible that an evil demon may be deceiving him into thinking.

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On Cartesian Doubt

Also, we can be forced to admit, on reflection, that there may be some doubt, however slight, as to whether *all* men are mortal. (54)

Hence, we shall reach the conclusion that Socrates is mortal with a greater approach to certainty if we make our argument purely inductive than if we go by way of “all men are mortal” and then use deduction. (55)

This illustrates the difference between general propositions known a priori, such as “two and two are four,” and empirical generalisations such as “all men are mortal.” In regard to the former, deduction is the right mode of argument, whereas in regard to the latter, induction is always theoretically preferable, and warrants a greater confidence in the truth of our conclusion, because all empirical generalisations are more uncertain than the instances of them. (55)

Sensation, Reflection

1 Sensation is distinct from reflection because it is caused by our intimate interactions with solids that are in the world. This distinction was given to us by John Locke and is the foundation for empiricism. Descartes’s Philosophy is incorrect because it explains that objects are dependent on our existence. On reflection, we should not doubt that objects exist in the world. Here I discuss my conceptions, which are terms, to give us reasons to prove that the theory of being is related to the theory of reasoning. Experience is the ground for understanding many of the problems of philosophy. I focus on the distinction of a priori propositions of the principles of logic and mathematics and some propositions of language. The foundations for our proofs, namely, our ideas about how we reason are known according to truths about synthetic inference.

2 In it I explain why the conception of substance is important for us to understand in relation to a substance. Spinoza's conception of Substance is an actual ground for our philosophical stance to unite with our physical stance. I think Spinoza's explanation of Substance supports Descartes’s conception of a substance because he provides us with proofs. If we are alive, we are conscious and doing the things that Descartes says we do when we are awake such as moving the head, eyes, hands, and mouth. This is called sensing. Yet I must show that three or four of Spinoza’s proofs about the world which contain facts a priori are not grounded on experience which Descartes thought when he wrote The Meditations.

3 We know things about our experience because of our beliefs. The principles of logic and mathematics are known according to reasoning. Hence the distinction between some a posteriori and a priori propositions. Kant thought that synthetic propositions can be known in this way not from experience. Synthetic inference is distinguished from analytic inference. Synthetic inference is a priori. For example, we don’t have the idea of 12 from 5 or 7. From the analytic proposition 5+7 we infer 12. This is called a synthetic inference.

A Of experience [3.] Dubious. B Of mathematics [4.] Arithmetical or geometrical contradiction (i.e. 2 + 3 is more or less 5)

* False 2 + 3 = 5

[21.] But some of the things that are clear and distinct…

[23.] For although the idea of substance…which really and truly were infinite…

[24.] And I must not think that I perceive the infinite through a true idea, but rather only through the negation of the finite, just as I perceive rest and shadows through the negation of movement of light (137-139)

* False We perceive light through matter in motion (i.e. particles called photos that cause sensations in our eyes)
* Descartes contemplates and reflects on time and experience to prove things. He believes that God would not deceive him and wonders perhaps there is a evil demon that is deceiving him into believing that other things in the world do not exist.
* This is called The Cosmological Argument for God’s existence. It focuses on contingent things in the world that cause us to form beliefs about the world in relation to our minds.
* Thus, what is Cartesian Doubt? In terms of a definition, it is a form of doubt. In terms of language, it is a name that reminds us of Rene Descartes. Descartes’s Method of Doubt is a way for us to understand our self-concepts and say why an empirical method such as science is grounded on discovery. Descartes’s Philosophy explains many of the relations between Thought and Action to prove things. But Science is a method that needs Observation to prove things about the world.
* The term reality was first given to us by Duns Scotus meaning that which is real. Thus, it’s important to think of the cogito not as a name or as a term but as a thinking substance in the world. We can call it the self. It doubts and judges’ things and is constantly affirming and denying ideas about its existence. Doubt is self-explanatory. We can’t prove that we doubt. We just simply do when we are uncertain about something that we regard as a fact such as a fact like the proposition “Socrates is mortal.” Explain why and discuss deduction and induction.
* Thinking is an action that classifies humans as having a different type of existence from other animals. We are rational since we think. The other type of action that makes us different from other animals is reasoning. Aquinas called this ratiocination. I like CS Peirce’s explanation on Aquinas saying that ratiocination is reasoning from the known to the unknown. This raises a difficulty. Why would we want to conceive the practical effects of something by reasoning from what we already know to what we don’t know? This is one thing about our existence that may be explained in terms of science. Hobbes called it curiosity. We must believe that imagination is critical for our psychological development for inferences to occur. According to Kant, there was a datum. Kant was correct. A datum is essential for understanding empiricism because it is what separates us from objects. Hence in The Critique of Pure Reason Kant called experience “that which.”
* Questions about Existence and Idealism. Do things exist because of sensation? Yes. Yet things have an independent existence. Thus, existence is dependent on mind.
* On Sensation and Our Conception of Contradiction, Why Reflection Won’t Suffice
* Hence From the propositions “I think” and “I am” Descartes concludes” I think therefore I am.” This is a true proposition. Such a proposition arises from wonder about the external world and its relation to the mind. Descartes believes we have a thinking substance called the cogito and unlike his predecessors, he attempts to reconstruct a new foundation for philosophy grounded on physics and astronomy. In this sense, he is like Aristotle. His ideas about the mind are similar to Plato's. Say more here from Slide 3.
* In the Third Meditation, Descartes explains two forms of contradictions in terms of mathematics and experience. His ideas about contradictions should be studied in relation to Bertrand Russell’s ideas presented to us in The Problems of Philosophy. We should not reason according to introspection and investigating the own contents of our minds. We must understand that the principles of philosophy that cause many problems arise from the principles of logic and mathematics, which are a priori are not because of beliefs.
* There are three faculties located in us: The Sensibility, Understanding, and Reason
* These faculties have names.
* Reason unites the first two.
* Broughton on Descartes: The Meditator's Persona
* The Problem between these two categories
* Quantity: relate more to feelings that we attach to things
* Sensations like (name them) relate to quantity and the things we observe in the world. They represent things that exist even if we are not thinking about experience There are other living things besides us that can taste, smell, and hear sounds, and who see lights and colors.
* Are these sorts of sensations dependent on our mind?
* Quality: relate to theories about the meaning of ideas
* Sensations such as (name them) originate in the mind and are caused by things in the external world such as objects. Hobbes thought sensations caused ideas. He called them impressions. Do things that exit in the world depend on sensation?
* Are we more inclined to believe that God created us because we can reason?
* To answer this question, we need to show how thought is related to habits and the creation of new theories. What to look for in experience
* Reality is a film that delays because of the emotions. This causes colloquial language extremely difficult. If something unexpected occurs, it's like a change of scenery. Such events are called states of affairs.
* Professor Janet Broughton on Descartes’s Method of Doubt
* Write the names of the sensations that are caused by our interactions with the world.
* These interactions cause habits to develop in the body and to form in the mind.
* Habits are the foundation of reactions, which I call principles of action, and relate to thought which is critical for the evolution of ideas.
* Princeton University
* Types of Ideas [7.] [10.] [11.] Page 179
* Innate
* Adventitious

MEDITATION I. 89, [3.]

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The Cosmological Argument

Cartesian Idealism

The Fate Argument (95 [10.])

MEDITATION II. Concerning the nature of the human mind: that it be more known than [the] body.

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When he says this, he means that all the images we have in our minds are true in a sense.

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I think Descartes says this because he wants to show that he knows of his own existence through knowledge of his mind; more so than awareness of his body.

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Second Meditation, 109. [11.] A description of the wax.

It remains the same piece of wax because it is. When it is under heat, the wax changes from a solid state of matter to a liquid state. Descartes thinks that the ideas about the wax are clearly different but is correct when he says that the wax remains.

Second Meditation, 113 [13.] But meanwhile I am surprised at how prone to errors my mind might be.