

Meditations on First Philosophy, by Rene Descartes

narrative work, wanted his philosophy available to the common people
wrote in French, not Latin like most scholarly work

Descartes is a rationalist
truth derives from reason, from the mind

First Meditation: Concerning Those Things That Can Be Called Into Doubt

meditator reflects on the number of falsehoods he has believed during his life
he has subsequently built a body of faulty knowledge from these falsehoods
as a result, he resolves to build a new foundation for his beliefs
wants to find the truth about the world
concerned with science (knowledge), not ethics (action)

Method of Doubt

anything that is not certain, he will treat as false
rather than doubt every one of his opinions individually, he reasons to cast them all into doubt

Yet to bring this about I will not need to show that all my opinions are false, which is perhaps something I could never accomplish. But reason now persuades me that I should withhold my assent no less carefully from opinions that are not completely certain and indubitable than I would from those that are patently false. For this reason, it will suffice for the rejection of all these opinions, if I find in each some reason to doubt.

Nor therefore need I survey each opinion individually, a task that would be endless. Rather, because undermining the foundations will cause whatever has been built upon them to crumble of its own accord, I will attack straightaway those principles which supported everything I once believed.

in order to examine his opinions, he first examines his senses
he concludes that small/distant objects deceive us; e.g. the solar system
close objects can be doubted because of dream experiences

Dreaming Argument

the meditator cannot distinguish between being awake and dreaming
in dreams, sensation is reporting falsely; what you're dreaming isn't there
empirical beliefs are false; he is still having sensation, but they are false

however, elements in dreams come from true things
dream images are drawn from waking experience
e.g. when a painter creates an imaginary creature, like a mermaid, the composite parts are real
thus, though he can doubt composite things, he cannot doubt their simple and universal parts
e.g. shape, quantity, size, time, etc. come from the real world

Nevertheless, it surely must be admitted that the things seen during slumber are, as it were, like painted images, which could only have been produced in the likeness of true things, and that therefore at least these general things--eyes, head, hand, and the whole body--are not imaginary things, but are true to exist.

Pure Science

physics, astronomy, and medicine are dependent on things being real
 thus these composite sciences are doubtful
 mathematics and geometry are indifferent to whether things exist
 these pure sciences are certain and indubitable

Thus it is not improper to conclude from this that physics, astronomy, medicine, and all the other disciplines that are dependent upon the consideration of composite things are doubtful, and that, on the other hand, arithmetic, geometry, and other such disciplines, which treat of nothing but the simplest and most general things and which are indifferent as to whether these things do or do not in fact exist, contain something certain and indubitable. For whether I am awake or asleep, two plus three makes five...it does not seem possible that such obvious truths should be subject to the suspicion of being false."

however, on further reflection, even the pure sciences can be doubted
 God could be deceiving him into thinking mathematics is true

some might argue that God is supremely good and would not lead us to such false conclusions
 but by this reasoning, we should think that God would not deceive us with regard to anything
 some want to throw away the idea of God, making mathematics certain
 however, this is just as bad, because now our origin would be imperfect
 with no perfect origin (God), he is more likely to be deceived
 the mind would not work properly; it would be internally flawed (not from dementia)

Evil Genius Hypothesis

some evil power is diverting his mind and deceiving him
 and even if not, the mind could just be drifting
 no coherent structure, memory could be deceptive, no train of thought

as a result, there are two components of the Method of Doubt:

- 1) empirical beliefs - based on the senses
- 2) a priori beliefs - not based on experience, just reason

dreaming argument invalidates empirical beliefs

the evil genius invalidates a priori beliefs

by doubting everything, he can at least be sure not to be misled into falsehood by this demon

Meditation Two

Thus, after everything has been most carefully weighted, it must be established that this pronouncement "I am, I exist" is necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive it in my mind.

this statement: "I am, I exist" is self-affirming
 to say it, you must exist; this cannot be doubted
 to have doubts about sensations and extension, he must exist
 for the evil demon to mislead him, he must exist

the statement is basically: "I think, therefore I am"
 he knows that he exists, but not what he is?
 the meditator is a thinking thing

he used to think he had a body and soul
 however, a body requires an external world, which is very doubtful
 it is bounded by shape, place, quantity, space, etc.
 it also had no power of self-motivation, sensing, or thinking
 motion is translated only by some other motion

soul is the animating principle that moves the body
 nourishment, movement, and sensing cannot exist without body
 however, thinking is a property of the soul that cannot be doubted
 he is nothing but a thinking thing, nothing more

metaphysical distinction between mind and body
 there is thought and there is extension
 only know thought/mind exist, body/extension are very doubtful

the meditator tries to clarify what this thinking thing is
 it doesn't just think, but also understands, wills, imagines, and senses
 whether dreaming or deceived by a demon, he can still imagine things and seem to sense them
 sensory perceptions may not be truthful, but they are certainly a part of the mind

senses cannot be trusted; imagination cannot be trusted
 why does he have such a distinct grasp of what his body is?
 to understand this, he considers how we know a piece of wax just taken from a honeycomb
 is it through the senses or some other means?

Wax Argument & Perception of the Mind

the meditator melts a piece of wax with fire
 still the same wax, even though it looks different
 where does he get this idea? not sensation or imagination, but perception of the mind

considers what he can know about a piece of wax by the senses:
 taste, smell, color, shape, size, hardness, etc.
 but if placed by a fire, all these qualities change
 nonetheless, the same piece of wax remains
 thus, knowledge that the hard and melted pieces are still wax doesn't come from senses

considers what else he can know about the piece of wax
 concludes he can only know it is extended, flexible, and changeable
 thus impossible to know the wax by means of imagination
 the wax can change into an infinite number of shapes, can't fathom them all

instead, comes to know the wax through perception of the mind
 mental perception of it can be either imperfect and confused or clear and distinct
 it is imperfect/confused when he allows himself to be led by his senses and imagination
 it is clear and distinct when he applies careful mental scrutiny to his perception

reflects how easy it is to be deceived regarding these matters
 Descartes is a rationalist; truth derives from reason, from the mind
 by saying "I see the wax" we refer to it as the intellect perceives it, not its shape/color

parallel to the wax theory, he sees "men" across the street
 they are really just hats and coats
 our perception, not our senses, allow us to perceive people

contrary to his impulses, the mind is a far better knower than the body
 suggests he must know his mind better than other things
 may not be perceiving wax, but he cannot doubt he is perceiving what he perceives to be wax
 this implies that he exists, and is a thinking thing
 every thought he has about the world outside may be doubtful
 but it must with certainty confirm our own existence and establish the nature of our mind

thus he concludes that he at least knows that he exists and is a thinking thing
 all clear and distinct perceptions come from the intellect alone, not senses or imagination
 the cogito is a clear and distinct idea

Meditation Three

the meditator is certain that he is a thinking thing and he clearly and distinctly perceives this fact
 he could not be certain unless all clear and distinct perceptions can be certain
 thus, he concludes that whatever he perceives clearly and distinctly must be true

Mind/Body Problem

he can only rely on his thoughts to see if other things exist
 the mind and body are different realms of existence
 how do you bring them together? God
 thus he must inquire into the nature of God to assure he is not being deceived

classifies his thoughts into different kinds: ideas and emotions
 meditator cannot mistake ideas on their own, nor emotions; only make mistakes in judgement
 most common error of judgement is to judge ideas as resembling things outside the mind

Sources of Ideas

three sources of ideas: innate, adventitious, and produced by us
 innate ideas are part of one's being; e.g. cogito
 adventitious ideas come from someplace else; e.g. sensations
 latter is just made up by the meditator; e.g. unicorns

it is a natural impulse to see and believe something is there
 different from light of nature, which allows him to know things are true

When I say here "I have been so taught by nature," all I have in mind is that I am driven by a spontaneous impulse to believe this, and not that some light of nature is showing me that it is true. These are two very different things. For whatever is shown me by this light of nature, for example, that from the fact that I doubt, it follows that I am, and the like, cannot in any way be doubtful. This is owing to the fact that there can be no other faculty that I can trust as much as this light and which could teach that these things are not true."

Two ideas of the sun:
 adventitious - it is very small

innate - the sun is very large

Formal & Objective Reality

all ideas are mere modes of thought; in this sense they are all equal

they all have the same amount of formal reality

however, what they represent differs greatly, so their objective reality greatly differs

formal reality - the actual existing thing

objective reality - depiction/conception/image of the thing

e.g. podium is the formal, brown/wood is the objective

idea of God has more objective reality than idea of a tree, which has more than the color red

however, all three of these are ideas, so they all have the same degree of formal reality

ideas are not spontaneous, they come from somewhere

everything that comes into being must be made of something with equal or greater reality

e.g. a stone can be made by chipping off a rock, but it cannot be made out of a color

idea can only be caused by something with as much formal reality as the idea has objective

the cogito is a formal reality

thinking/doubting/meditating is the objective reality

cogito is a likely candidate for the cause of an idea

returns to the wax argument

he can clearly and distinctly perceive the properties of the wax

cogito is a substance; thus could have created these ideas

but the cogito does not possess size, shape, extension, space, etc.

the idea could still have come from the cogito eminently

substance is more real than properties

his ideas of corporeal things can easily come from himself even if no such things exist

however, if he can conceive of an idea with so much objective reality that it must come from

some cause with more formal reality than he himself possesses, then he will know something

outside his mind exists

cause is more real than effect

FR -----> OR

cogito -----> extension

extension is a property of the cogito

hierarchy of reality

each can generate idea below it:

substance

extension

color

God's Existence

meditator has enough reality to create his own physical world

however, the idea of God has more objective reality than he has formal reality

God is an infinite substance, whereas he is only a finite substance
 he is not real enough to have created an idea of the infinite; he could not have created God
 thus God must be the cause of this idea, and must therefore necessarily exist

counters that he might conceive an infinite through negation
 that is, through conceiving of it in contrast to his own finite being
 however, he could not be aware of this lack unless he is aware of a perfect being
 to think of the finite, we must have the infinite to compare it
 otherwise we wouldn't know anything is lacking

new hierarchy:
 infinite substance
 infinite
 substance
 extension
 color

cannot doubt the existence of God; has a clear and distinct perception of God's existence
 idea has infinite objective reality, and is therefore more likely to be true than any other idea

the meditator entertains the possibility that he may be supremely perfect
 all his deficiencies could be potentialities within him, and he is slowly moving toward perfection
 if this were true, the idea of God could be conceived in him without any outside cause
 but if he is constantly improving, he'll never attain perfection with is no room for improvement

his creator had to have endowed him with the idea of God
 if this creator is a finite being, how did it came to possess the idea of an infinite God?
 looking at the chain of creation, the idea of God can only originate in God, not a finite being

concluding that God must necessarily exist, meditator asks how he received the idea of God
 the idea cannot be adventitious, nor created by the meditator
 thus it must be innate; must have been created by God with this idea already in him

God cannot be a deceiver, because deception is an imperfect quality
 since God is perfect, and lacks nothing, he cannot be a deceiver

...it is impossible for God ever to deceive me, for trickery or deception is always indicative of
 some imperfection. And although the ability to deceive seems to be an indication of
 cleverness or power, the will to deceive undoubtedly attests to maliciousness or weakness.
 Accordingly, deception is incompatible with God.

God is the connection between the cogito and the external world
 He allows us outside our world into extension

Meditation Four

now he knows God exists, he knows that God would not deceive him

Judgement & Will

God is responsible for his judgement, so it must be infallible if he uses it correctly
 but they why is he mistaken from time to time?

he finds himself somewhere between God and nothingness

was created by a supreme, infallible being, but he was also created to be a finite being while participating partly in the supreme being of God, he also participates partly in nothingness when he is wrong, its not because of some faulty of God, but rather the result of non-being his finitude leaves room for error, he is imperfect

but why wouldn't God just make him perfect?

God's motives and reasons are incomprehensible to finite beings

(similar to medieval science, always want to find the purpose)

won't waste time trying to decipher God's motives

look at the universe as a whole, not just one part of it

he may be imperfect on his own, but he may be perfect in the wider context

judgement/source of errors depend simultaneously on understanding and will

understanding is limited; we do not know everything

will is almost perfect, freedom of choice is unlimited, equal to God in that sense

God's will is only superior in that He has supreme knowledge and can always will what's good

since the will is perfect/unlimited, it can't be the source of error

error results not from imperfections, but because the will has a wider scope than understanding

as a result, the will often passes judgements on matters not fully understood

the correct use of the will in cases of uncertainty is to refrain from judgement

suspend judgement when uncertain, only passes judgement on clear and distinct perceptions

Meditation Five

rather than inquire about material objects, inquires ideas regarding material things

can distinctly imagine extension, size, shape, position, and local motion, which is associated with duration

Math & Science

there are abstract geometrical objects that don't exist in the material world, yet are not nothing

e.g. there are no triangles in the material world, yet they have some kind of being

even if they don't exist outside the mind, have a determinate essence independent of the mind

must exist because the meditator clearly and distinctly perceives them

views mathematical and geometrical objects as more certain than objects of the senses

What I believe must be considered above all here is the fact that I find within me countless ideas of certain things, that, even if perhaps they do not exist anywhere outside me, still cannot be said to be nothing. And although, in a sense, I think them at will, nevertheless they are not something I have fabricated; rather they have their own true and immutable natures."

God, like a triangle, exists as an idea in his mind

similarly, the meditator clearly and distinctly perceives His qualities

one of His qualities is existence, so God must necessarily exist

existence is His essence like three sides are of a triangle

the idea of God and existence are linked

because God is perfect, and perfection entails existence

it is more perfect to exist than to not exist

(this is his ontological argument of existence)

Thus there are two proofs for God's existence:

- 1) causality
- 2) the essence of God

clear and distinct perceptions are always convincing
 some are easy, like three sided triangles
 others are more complex, like the Pythagorean theorem

Only two things exist: the cogito, and God
 God is total perfection
 can a perfect island exist? no!
 it is the added the idea of an island and perfection
 if you took away the perfection, the island would be the same
 only complete perfection proves the idea

there cannot be two examples of perfection
 reason tells us that; one would be lacking

three kinds of reality:
 divine stuff
 thinking stuff
 extended stuff
 how does one cross from one substance to another?
 fundamental problem of meditations: crossing from mind to body
 imagination is the crossroad between intellect and sensation

Meditation Six

meditator considers existence of material things
 goes back to intellection, imagination, and sensation

intellection - the process of understanding (180° in a triangle, 1000 sided shape, etc.)
 imagination - shape of the triangle, etc.
 sensation - sensory perceptions

Material Existence

meditator makes two arguments for the existence of material things
 one is based on faculty of the imagination
 the other is based on the senses

Faculty of the Imagination

distinguishes between imagination and pure understanding
 why can we imagine but not understand?

we can perceive that triangles have three sides, and derive properties using this understanding
 we can also perceive these properties within the imagination by picturing a triangle
 however, weakness of the imagination comes clear when considering a thousand sided figure
 this is difficult to picture, and even more difficult to differentiate from a 999 sided figure

pure understanding can perceive the properties of a 1000 sided figure as easily as a triangle

imagination is not an essential property of the mind because one can exist without imagination
 thus imagination must rely on something other than the mind for its existence
 imagination is connected with the body, thus allowing the mind to picture corporeal things
 in understanding the mind turns inward upon itself; in imagining, the mind turns outward toward
 the body

imagination gives probably conjecture that extended things exist
 why give us imagination if not to perceive the world?
 it allows us to manipulate the physical world without actually being there
 the images created are not actually there; something that represents space

Based on the Senses

next, he reflects on what he perceives by means of the senses
 perceives he has a body that exists in a world
 this body can experience things, and perceive other bodies
 it is not unreasonable to suppose these perceptions all come from some outside source
 they come to him involuntarily, but they are more vivid than perceptions he creates in his mind

still doubt that material things are the way he is naturally inclined to assume they are
 however, he believes he is now well equipped, and that he needn't doubt their existence entirely
 first, he clearly and distinctly perceives that he is, in essence, only a thinking thing
 body is essentially extended and mind is non-extended, so he can conclude that he really is
 distinct from his body and could exist without it

he reasons that imagination and sensory perceptions are not essential to him
 he could conceive of himself without imagination or sensory perception
 but imagination and sensory perception could not exist without the mind to contain them
 similarly, there are modes of extension that cannot exist without a body to contain them

sensory perception is a passive faculty
 thus there must be some active cause that creates sensory perceptions
 cannot be the cogito, because they happen against the will
 (if hidden part gives ideas, can't trust reason)
 thus the source must be either the physical world or God

FR -----> OR
 active -----> passive

formally - actually (podium is wood)
eminently - can produce something (podium has gases that contain fire)
God is not orange formally but eminently
he is not buses, cars, etc. he is not the source, I would be seeing stuff false if so

God would not have deceived us into thinking there are material objects when there are not
 thus God cannot be the source, or he would have inherent deception
 therefore, the world in existence is the source of sensory perceptions
 the world is extended; what we know about the world is its math properties: space, etc.

how do the mind and body work together?

"confused" -- the mind can have clear and distinct idea, but the physical world cannot
 the mind and the body must be commingled because we have sensations
 if mind and body were separate, he would perceive pain and hunger by intellect
 instead he feels these sensations sharply and directly as if the mind itself were suffering
 thus the mind and the body must be commingled because we have sensations

what we can learn from experience is pain or pleasure
 nature, as the combination of mind and body, teaches us to seek out pleasure and avoid pain
 we cannot discover this from intellect, only from sensory perception
 however, everything else is the result of intellectual observation applied to the world
 e.g. only way we know a star is bigger than a flame is intellect

it would be unreasonable to infer from the sensation of heat in approaching a flame that the heat
 or the pain reside in the flame itself
 the senses are meant to inform us what is beneficial and what is harmful
 in that respect they are clear and distinct
 our mistake comes from expecting them to inform us of the true nature of things we perceive
 they can only give us very obscure info in this regard

we often make mistakes even with regard to what harms us
 sick people may crave food even though it will make them sicker
 to explain this, clarifies that while the body is divisible, the mind is indivisible
 we can break extended things into smaller parts, but the mind can not be divided up

the pineal gland (where all [common] sense is found) sends all sensory perceptions to the mind;
 thus only the pineal gland can send message from the body to the mind; a sensation in another
 part of the body must be transmitted through the body to the pineal gland; these transmissions
 must take place by means of nervous signals that have a limited range of expression; all these
 facts combining to say the body is incapable of sending the right message to the mind

meditator concludes that he can be certain now of things he doubted in the first meditation
 senses are normally adequate in helping us get around in the world
 when in doubt, we can double-check our sensory perceptions with our intellect or memory

our memory can dispel the doubt presented in the dream argument
 any waking experience can be connected through memory to all other waking experience
 whereas in dreams, things happen in a disconnected and somewhat random manner
 since God isn't a deceiver, one is safe from erroneous judgement as long as he applies his mind
 carefully