

# DESCARTES “ON THE NATURE OF MIND”

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By Allen Park

2<sup>ND</sup> MEDITATION –THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN MIND,  
AND HOW IT IS BETTER KNOWN THAN THE BODY

6<sup>TH</sup> MEDITATION –THE EXISTENCE OF MATERIAL  
THINGS, AND THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN MIND AND  
BODY

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# HE SEEKS THE TRUTH

- In order to avoid anything except the truth, Descartes first doubts and disposes all ideas and truths that he thought to be true, and assumes that everything he has ever known is false.
- Nothing is guaranteed to be true.

# THE SUN

- Look at the sun, and you'll observe with your eyes that it is a very small dot in the sky.
- Yet, in our minds we know that the Sun is nowhere close to as small as we are perceiving it to be. We know in our minds due to mathematics and understanding of astronomy that the sun is quite enormous.

# THE MACHINATIONS

- You could look outside and see men working in the fields
- The people who you observe to be humans working in the field could actually just be robots dressed in human clothes

# THE DREAM

- If when we are in a dream and believe that everything we perceive while in the dream is real, but later dismiss all those perceptions to be fake when we are awake, what is stopping us to doubt the truth about the reality we perceive while we are awake too?
  - Senses are unreliable.
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# THE SUPREME DECEIVER

- And let us not forget the deceiver that is relentlessly trying to deceive us. Descartes is a religious person and makes the point that there maybe an ultimate deceiver that is tricking us into thinking all of these things. Essentially if a deceiver is real, then even logic and basic reasoning, our mind's only tools for searching for the truth is unavailable to us, for even they are subject to manipulation by the deceiver.

# CAN YOU KNOW ANYTHING WITH ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY?

- Yes, you know that at least the self, the mind, the soul exists.
- Otherwise, how could you be thinking, and doubting everything?
- Even if you are being deceived, you could not be deceived if you did not exist.
- This beginning point that Descartes comes up with is the *cogito*.



# THE MIND EXISTS, BUT WHAT ABOUT THE BODY?

- We can know without any doubt that our self exists, but we cannot be certain about the body. We rely on our perceptions and sensations to detect our body, but there is nothing that stops our perceptions from being complete deceptions. It is very possible that nothing exists but our mind alone are perceiving things.

# THE BODY COULD EXIST, BUT NOT REALLY

- All material things that can be conceived by the mind also have the ability to exist.
- Sensations and perceptions that come through our senses suggest that they are from things outside of the self
- But no, our senses are unreliable, there are account of people who have lost their limbs claiming to feel pain in their missing limbs and such.
- It is also possible that the sensation we experience are coming from a faculty of ourselves, but we are not aware of it.

# GOD SOLUTION

- Descarte's argument that there still probably is a material world and bodies roots from the God argument.
- God is a perfect being.
- It is more perfect to exist and then to not exist.
- God must exist.
- God is a all-powerful, all-knowing, benevolent god.
- Therefore the sensation and perceptions we are experiencing are real, God would not trick us, that is part of who he is.
- The bodies and material things we have are real.

# DISTINCTION BETWEEN MIND AND BODY

- Descartes finally comes to say that the mind is indivisible. There are no parts to the mind, and so you can not divide it. It is one unit.
- The body, however, is divisible. It can be decapitated, chopped, and chopped some more.
- The mind and body cannot be the same thing, because nothing can be both divisible and indivisible.
- The mind is separate from the body.

# THE WAX

- What makes a wax a wax?
- Let there be a big ball of wax and let it sit in a flame for a while
- It will now be melted, and burnt, and in every sense different from before.
- Yet we know it's still wax.

# THE SELF IS THE MIND.

- Though Descartes believes that the body is real, and the materialistic world is real, he still makes the distinction that the self is the mind.
  - If he is simply a thinking, non-extended being, who may or may not have a body. He is distinct from the body, and therefore can exist without the body.
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# A RISING QUESTION

- So If the mind and the body are two different things, and that the self is really the mind, what is causing, or what is the reason why the two things interact with each other at all in the first place?

# CREDITS

- Worked with Jackson Kushner 11/3/14
- Used notes from Russel Marcus
- All unintentional direct quoting will be from Descartes "On the Nature of the Mind"