



Descartes

Mind/Body Dualism

Gentrain 10/410: The Age of Reason
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René Descartes (1596–1650)

- Descartes creative mathematician, scientific thinker, philosopher, etc.
- **Mathematics:** developed techniques that made algebraic geometry possible
- **Natural philosophy/science:** some important achievements:
 - Sine law of refraction
 - Empirical explanation for the rainbow
 - Explanation of earth and planets (early foundation for nebular hypothesis)
- **Metaphysics:** argued for God's existence
 - Also wanted to show that the essence of matter is extension and the essence of mind is thought.

Early life

- His mother died in childbirth, and it was unclear if he would survive → went to live with grandmother and great-uncle
- Descartes's family was Roman Catholic, but the region in which he lived was controlled by the Protestant Huguenots
- In 1607 (Age 11), in fragile health, entered into a Jesuit college where he was introduced to science and the work of Galileo

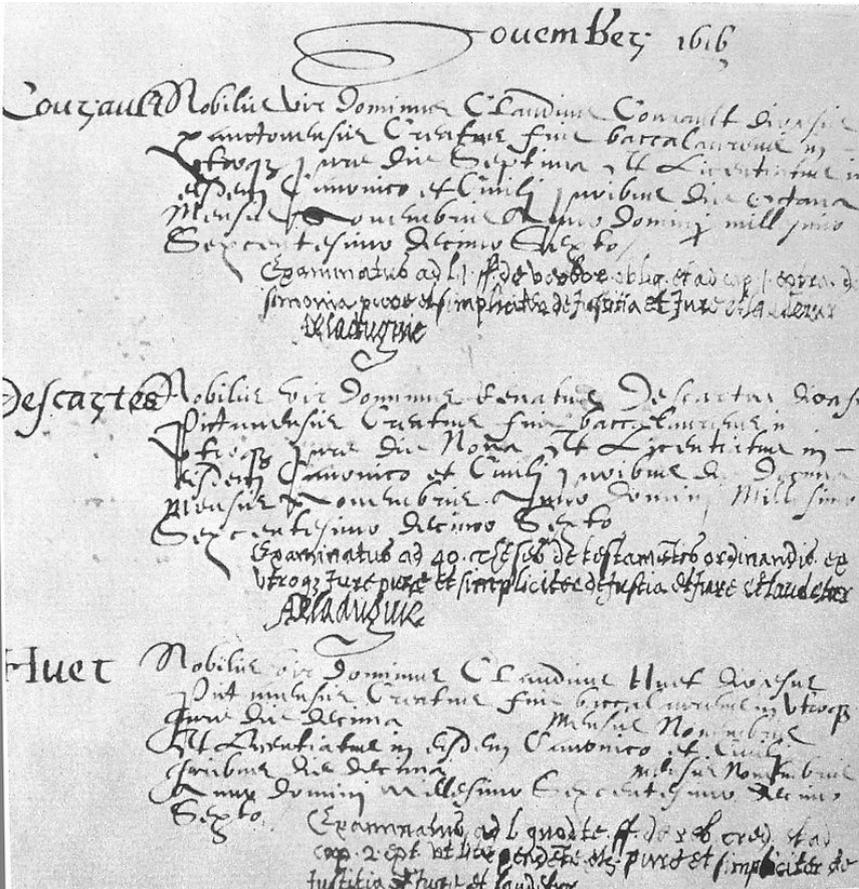


Education

- Graduated in 1614 (Age 18), and attended the University of Poitiers for two years (1615-1616), getting his degree in canon and civil law → following his father's wishes that he should study to be a lawyer

I entirely abandoned the study of letters. Resolving to seek no knowledge other than that of which could be found in myself or else in the great book of the world, I spent the rest of my youth traveling, visiting courts and armies, mixing with people of diverse temperaments and ranks, gathering various experiences, testing myself in the situations which fortune offered me, and at all times reflecting upon whatever came my way so as to derive some profit from it.

- Studied mathematics and engineering in the military.
- Became acquainted with Isaac Beeckman, and together they engaged in thinking around free fall, conic section, and others.



Major works

- *Discourse of Method* (French, 1637)
- *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Latin, 1641, second edition 1642)
- *The Principles of Philosophy* (Latin, 1644) – metaphysics and natural philosophy
- *Passions of the Soul* (French, 1649) – on emotions

POSTHUMOUS WORKS

- *Letters* (Latin and French, 1657-67)
- *World, or Treatise on Light* (French, 1664) – outlines core of natural philosophy
- *Treatise on Man* (French, 1664) – work of physiology
- *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (Latin, 1701) – early and unfinished attempt to outline his Cartesian method

A P P E N D I X,
Continens
O B I E C T I O N E S
Q V I N T A S & S E P T I M A S
In
R E N A T I D E S - C A R T E S
M E D I T A T I O N E S
De Primâ Philosophiâ,
Cum ejusdem ad illas Responsionibus & duabus Epistolis,
Una ad Patrem D I N E Y Societatis Iesu Præpositum
Provincialem per Franciam,
Altera ad celeberrimum Virum
D. G I S B E R T V M V O E T I V M



AMSTELÆDAMI,
Apud Ludovicum Elzevirium,
c 1 6 5 0

Visions



RENATUS DESCARTES, NOBIL. GALL. PERRONI DOM. SUMMUS MATHEM. ET PHILOS.
*Talis erat vuln. OCASORÆ PILEUS: unus Assignansq; suis quavis miracula cause,
Qui Meati in Matris viscera pandit iter. Miraculum reliquam solus in orbe fuit.*

- According to an early biographer, Adrien Baillet, Descartes experienced visions
- On the night of November 10th, 1619, while stationed with the military, Descartes shut himself in a room with a woodstove to get warm
- While in that room he had three dreams or visions → believed he had a revelation by a divine spirit → reveals new philosophy
- Upon leaving the room, he began formulating his algebraic geometry and began working on the idea that philosophers could apply mathematical methods to their inquiry
- Concludes that the path of science would become the pursuit of true knowledge and a foundation for his life's philosophical work.
- Saw that all truths are connected to all other truths → finding one truth and proceeding with logic will open a pathway to all science
- Descartes discovered this basic truth quite soon: his famous "I think, therefore I am"

Material/Immaterial World

- Created new vision of natural world that continues to influence modern thought
 - Material world reducible to fundamental properties and interacting based on a few universal laws
 - Natural world includes an **immaterial mind** → in human beings this is related to the brain → created the modern version of the mind/body problem
 - **Mind/body problem:** continuing problem in the fields of metaphysics and the philosophy of mind → deals with the problem of the relationship between the mind (consciousness) and the material world
 - **Dualism:** the position that the mind is not physical and exists separate from physical/material forms

Posthumous Reputation

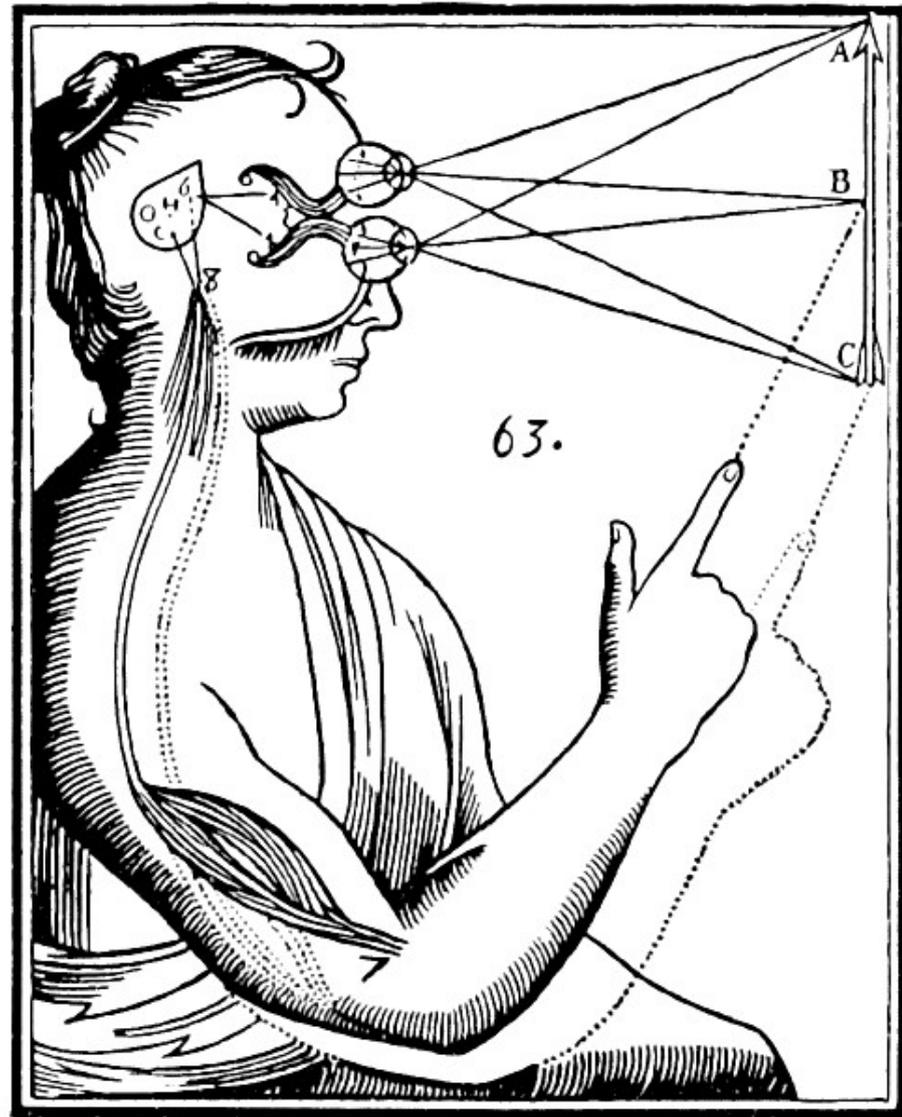
- During his life, he was known as a top mathematician, philosopher working to create comprehensive theory of nature (living things)
- After his death, his natural philosophy taught and debated widely
 - 18th century: Descartes's scientific thinking very influential, especially his physiology (mechanistic movement) → also of interest was his epistemology (assessing the knower and to what extent human knowledge is possible)
 - 19th century: Renewed interest in mechanistic physiology, especially the theory that the bodies of animals are machines (governed by mechanisms and the laws of matter alone)
 - 20th century: sometimes celebrated his famous “cogito” as a starting point, sometimes argued against the idea that sense data is the starting point to skeptical thinking.
- Is variously seen as a villain or a hero; a brilliant philosopher who paved new directions in thought or as the bringer of cold and calculative ideas of human beings and the material world.

Setting himself apart

- Influenced by Aristotelianism, Stoicism, and Augustine
- In his natural philosophy, he diverged from these earlier philosophies on a few major points:
 - Rejected the idea that corporeal (physical matter) is divided into matter and form
 - Reject appeals to find ends, divine or natural, to account for natural phenomena
- In *Passions of the Soul*, claims will write on this topic "as if no one had written on these matters before".
- His best known philosophical statement is "I think, therefore I am" (French: *Je pense, donc je suis*; Latin: *cogito, ergo sum*), found in *Discourse on the Method* (1637; written in French and Latin) and *Principles of Philosophy* (1644; written in Latin).

Mind/Body Dualism

- After seeing the mechanical automatics on display throughout Paris, began to contemplate the connection between the mind and the body → influenced by theology and physics
- His **mind/body dualism (Cartesian dualism)** is considered his ‘signature doctrine’ and is foundational to other theories that he later advances → went on to influence Western philosophies
- *Meditations on First Philosophy*: argues for the existence of God; and distinction between the human body and soul → humans a union of mind and body (closely joined but distinct).
 - Contemporaries found this formulation of the distinction to be confusing, but he thought it was pretty straightforward



Sense data passed from sensory organs to the brain Inputs are passed on by the sensory organs to brain and from there to the immaterial spirit.

Modes of substances



Marc Quinn
Seven Deadly Sins
1995

- Concept of “modes”: the ways that various materials exist.
- *Principles of Philosophy*: "we can clearly perceive a substance apart from the mode which we say differs from it, whereas we cannot, conversely, understand the mode apart from the substance".
- Perceiving a mode separate from its substance requires an intellectual abstraction:

The intellectual abstraction consists in my turning my thought away from one part of the contents of this richer idea the better to apply it to the other part with greater attention. Thus, when I consider a shape without thinking of the substance or the extension whose shape it is, I make a mental abstraction.

Distinct Substances

- Two substances are truly distinct from each other when they can exist separately (compare with form and matter – which then would not be distinct)
- God is distinct from humans → human mind and human body are distinct
- Mind and body are ontologically distinct: body (extended thing), mind (un-extended, immaterial thing)
- The mind is indivisible because "when I consider the mind, or myself in so far as I am merely a thinking thing, I am unable to distinguish any part within myself; I understand myself to be something quite single and complete."
- *Meditations on First Philosophy*: Invokes **causal adequacy principle** (that the cause of something must have as much reality as the thing itself) to support argument for existence of God, quoting Lucretius: "Ex nihilo nihil fit"/ "Nothing comes from nothing"

Immaterial substances

- *Meditations on First Philosophy*: argues that the most characteristic principle of Cartesian Dualism is the idea that the universe has two different types of substances: mind or soul (thinking) and the body (matter and unthinking).
- Contemporary Aristotelian philosophy believed that the universe was teleological: everything (stars' motion or the growth of a tree) explainable by a purpose or goal that manifested within nature (Aristotle's "final cause")
- Cartesian dualism sided with Kepler and Galileo: God/divine mover has no part in attempts to explain nature
- Concept of human: composite being of body and mind → mind given priority, but mind cannot exist without body (body can exist without mind).
- *Meditations*, body and mind are closely joined:

Nature also teaches me, by the sensations of pain, hunger, thirst and so on, that I am not merely present in my body as a pilot in his ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit. If this were not so, I, who am nothing but a thinking thing, would not feel pain when the body was hurt, but would perceive the damage purely by the intellect, just as a sailor perceives by sight if anything in his ship is broken.

Embodiment and Knowledge

- Philosophy of bodies and embodiment raises question: ‘What exactly is the relationship of union between the mind and body of a person?’
 - One of the most complicated and baffling questions to emerge from dualism
 - Accounting for this became the agenda of philosophers working in dualism for years after this death, and is still ongoing
- Rationalist – believed in the power of innate ideas (theory of innate knowledge) → through God all humans born with knowledge
- John Locke (1632–1704) would use this to argue against the theory of empiricism (all knowledge is acquired through experience)