

Assumptions that Answer the Illusion that is Life

René Descartes magnified the way we approach philosophy. His view centered around the idea that we must first doubt all that we know so as to remove all bias and falsities. This reasoning alludes that when everything is questioned, everything is also an answer. Descartes broke down his thoughts into six centralized ideas, flowing from one to the other, to give the readers, meditators, the chance to experience their identities from purely a metaphysical point of view.

Descartes argues that the very essence of doubt is what gives him life. How something so close can cause much chaos within our reasoning. Since he proclaims himself as a thinking thing, he believes that he exists for he can only think to prove that he is alive. If thought were not a given, then there would be no discussion on the topic to begin with. It is with such reasoning that Descartes describes his six meditations.

Past literature has described the meditations as tools to decipher philosophy or a way to think. These meditations revolve around the illusions that we believe exist in life, or at least that is what Descartes implies in his assumptions. There is neither direct evidence of God nor of our lives (or souls) though which we can prove our beliefs. It is for such cases that Descartes believes that we must first assume that our beliefs are to be held true and then doubt their nature. This allows us to be objective with our claims and clear bias we may hold because out our intrinsic beliefs.

Another underlying factor, which Descartes uses, trying to prove his existence and that of God, is with mathematical, geometrical conjecture. In addition, how it relates to the logic of all things related to physics and our everyday lives. He believes that such a methodology is what makes his argument an intelligible one.

First Meditation: Doubt should only be as Distant as our very Soul

Descartes expresses “it is wiser not to trust entirely to anything by which we have once been deceived”. The most immediate fallacy to any argument is present in its deceitful nature as that itself proves to be a logical fallacy. It is only our limited perceptions, which may lead us to believe such deceptions.

Descartes brings up the idea of dreams and how they are based on corporeal concepts and builds the first step towards the idea that our bodies must be real. There is no science, which proves why we dream or where they come from, except from that they always relate to our objective reality. We experience an image surreal but only to the extent that it originates from the real.

The thinker further exemplifies “for whether I am awake or asleep, two and three together always form five, and the square can never have more than four sides, and it does not seem possible that truths so clear and apparent can be suspected of any falsity”. Descartes aims to put the audience on track that all reasoning must come from that which is always true. This is why he brings up the concept of two and three adding up to five. However, interestingly, there is no such proof that mathematics exists in nature versus the idea that man has created the idea to

prove the identity of physical constructs and observations. He equates life to mathematics to send the message that we should doubt all our ideas but only to the extent that it conflicts previously certified laws.

Finally, to truly give into doubt so that can project that his existence and God are real, Descartes falls into the assumption that he will deceive himself and fall into falsity. Only if he can rise from such falsity into truth then can he validate his thinking self.

Second Meditation: **Human Mind is as likely as its own Thoughts**

Descartes focuses on finding one truth amongst an environment in which nothing is certain. Only one truth is enough to shatter the glass that is falsity. He argues that his thoughts exist for the very reason to prove his life as a thinking thing as he says “for is it not possible that I am capable of producing them myself?”, “of a surety I myself did exist since I persuaded myself of something”, and “I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it”.

Descartes knows nothing else except for the idea that he thinks. For the first time, he brings up the idea of his senses, “this wax was not that sweetness of honey, nor that agreeable scent of flowers, nor that particular whiteness, nor that figure, nor that sound, but simply a body which a little while before appeared to me as perceptible under these forms, and which is now perceptible under other”. All the human mind does is translate our senses and feeling into thoughts of understanding and perception. He says that he only distinguishes and perceives the beeswax because of his own senses and that must mean that since the beeswax exists then he too must form some matter of life. Initially, the beeswax existed because of its own features but now it exists because he can recall such a memory based on his senses. His thinking mind alone is enough to conjure a projection of something that factually exists. And so, his mind is greater than the entity classified as beeswax.

Third Meditation: **God Exists and is the Reason why we do too.**

Descartes has reached a point where he fully believes in his entity as a thinking thing, but he still equates it a falsity. The expression “let who will deceive me, He can never cause me to be nothing while I think that I am, or some day cause it to be true to say that I have never been, it being true now to say that I am, or that two and three make more or less than five, or any such thing in which I see a manifest contradiction” concludes that since a mathematical sum always leads to a definitive answer, consequently, humans too branch out from an existing entity. He further says, “thus there remains no more than the judgments which we make, in which I must take the greatest care not to deceive myself” which means that the truth has always been in front of him.

Descartes believes that he should link his internal thoughts to external entities as well, “but the principal error and the commonest which we may meet with in them, consists in my judging that the ideas which are in me are similar or conformable to the things which are outside me; for without doubt if I considered the ideas only as certain modes of my thoughts, without trying to relate them to anything beyond, they could scarcely give me material for error”. This forms the notion that since he is a thinking thing but is not infinite, then there must be an external, infinite entity, which gives him his thoughts and life. It is that being, of God, that allows him to think of

God, satisfying His desire to be known, “whether I will or whether I do not will, I feel heat, and thus I persuade myself that this feeling, or at least this idea of heat, is produced in me by something which is different from me, i.e. by the heat of the fire near which I sit. And nothing seems to me more obvious than to judge that this object imprints its likeness rather than anything else upon me”.

Descartes explains that the power of perspective based on the idea of what is innate versus adventitious. We see the sun to be small while in reality it is much larger than the earth. Our own visual understanding of the environment will never be enough because we can never see the full scope of the entity. It is this concept that Descartes links to God, an entity that is too big for us to comprehend, but one that we can feel around us.

“If ideas are only taken as certain modes of thought, I recognize amongst them no difference or inequality, and all appear to proceed from me in the same manner; but when we consider them as images, one representing one thing and the other another, it is clear that they are very different one from the other”, Descartes explains that our thoughts are always conceived from a larger source and our minds shrink it into the form of an idea, which we can comprehend.

“Not only that something cannot proceed from nothing, but likewise that what is more perfect—that is to say, which has more reality within itself—cannot proceed from the less perfect”, Rene compares reality to heat as in how if a stone is going to be given heat it can only be given heat from source that has more heat, and so since Rene is real (his own heat) then his life must have come from something far more real. This thought is in line with the Law of Conservation of Mass. It explains that we, as thinking things, come from a much larger source based on the chemical interpretation of heat and the mathematical conjecture that two and three from five. We were not always alive but our thinking minds came from somewhere. That entity is God.

“We must remember that [since every idea is a work of the mind] its nature is such that it demands of itself no other formal reality than that which it borrows from my thought, of which it is only a mode – an idea is an offspring of its originator and so if he exists he must have come from something”, which further explains that his thought is only a small package coming from God. The assumption here is that since we exist, hence there exists a far greater power from which lead to our conception.

“That if the objective reality of any one of my ideas is of such a nature as clearly to make me recognize that it is not in me either formally or eminently, and that consequently I cannot myself be the cause of it, it follows of necessity that I am not alone in the world, but that there is another being which exists, or which is the cause of this idea. On the other hand, had no such an idea existed in me, I should have had no sufficient argument to convince me of the existence of any being beyond myself; for I have made very careful investigation everywhere and up to the present time have been able to find no other ground”, just the fact that he is thinking of such a presence means it must exist otherwise he would have been a sole entity and such the thought would never have been conceived.

To combat his doubt, Descartes explains that ideas themselves cannot be prone to falsity as they were nothing to begin with. He brings up the corporeal such as motion and daily scenarios, and how they are not from within but because he too is a substance then they too must exist. Descartes brings this up because he believes that all these finite substances, him including, are derived from an infinite source and he justifies it because he as a finite substance can actually understand that he comes from an infinite substance, “for how would it be possible that I should know that I doubt and desire, that is to say, that something is lacking to me, and that I am not

quite perfect, unless I had within me some idea of a Being more perfect than myself, in comparison with which I should recognize the deficiencies of my nature?" This meditation argues that he himself cannot exist if such a perfect infinite such as God cannot exist.

"The distinction between creation and conservation is solely a distinction of the reason", he talks about how if he were God then he could have the power to prove his own existence in the future but he is not aware of any such power and so it must be an external source which not only created him but too conserves his existence.

The cause and effect must match, cause being God, and hence the cause can only be an entity which is far more perfect than himself to create and conserve an effect such as his existence. To further clarify, all his parents did was birth him because, if not, then he himself as a thinking thing would be God but then so would be his parents. As such, parents only allow our mind to exist but do not create nor conserve our being, because that is only done by God. He continues that it is God that has put this idea in his mind because there is no real example in life, which would conceive such a thought, and neither is it fiction because there is nothing for him to add or remove from the idea.

To put it in real terms, Descartes explains that the thought of God alludes to any artist imprinting a mark of their own into their product. And the mark can be resonant to the work itself. Our thinking minds are proof of the artist.

"From this it is manifest that He cannot be a deceiver, since the light of nature teaches us that fraud and deception necessarily proceed from some defect", he explains how God wants us to pursue Him because we as humans aspire for greater and we internally know there is much more to be accomplished.

Fourth Meditation: **Of the True and the False.**

"I fall into error from the fact that the power given me by God for the purpose of distinguishing truth from error is not infinite", Descartes brings up how he can err and be wrong because God has not given him an infinite pool of power over what is true and false. However, it is in such a reality that he deems himself human as humans are flawed beings. He brings up the question why God made him to err when God is perfect and could have made him perfect. The meditation points that God is beyond our understanding so it is alright if we do not understand His ways. There is a natural lack of knowledge. Descartes expresses that he lacks certain skills, which may be far greater than he should possess, and he questions how his current skills may be better than he knows. It is such imperfection that makes humans perfect as it inspires us to achieve a far better state.

Descartes introduces the Will and how it is not the choice itself but our choosing of one direction to seek truth, the freedom to test our options. He explains that choosing one over the other is not an imperfection but the freedom of freewill. He explains that if he always knew the right path as per his will's indifferent decisions, then he would not understand what more can be learned.

"They come from the sole fact that since the will is much wider in its range and compass than the understanding, I do not restrain it within the same bounds, but extend it also to things which I do not understand: and as the will is of itself indifferent to these, it easily falls into error and sin, and chooses the evil for the good, or the false for the true", he links his will to how he might be a thinking thing or a corporeal substance, but in the end he is indifferent to one or the other which

is the same as the will. He further explains that it is this indifference, which allows us to remain right as we cannot affirm nor deny what we do not understand. Because we will only be deceiving ourselves if we affirm something not true.

Fifth Meditation: **Materiality of Things add up to God's Existence**

Descartes brings up the idea of a triangle and its dimensions so to say that even though he can think of such a shape, it does not mean that it did not exist before he thought of it. So to say that God exists whether we want or accept Him or not. He also reinforces that he is speaking what he knows to be true as how the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles.

This meditation revolves around the assumption that we have to be open to the idea of God's existence. Bringing up the Pythagoras Theorem, he demonstrates that the square of the hypotenuse does not seem to be the sum of the squares of the other two sides, even if it does not seem to be obvious. This explains that we have to be open to understanding entities that we may not understand at a glance.

He talks about how proofs are not an end all be all as if his mind shies away from the idea then he may not believe in the proof that the angles of a triangle equals two right angles and says that in such forced doubt do we ignore God. That the evidence is all around us yet we ignore it. He says that if a proof exists then there is no denying it and similarly his existence is proof of God. He argues that since all proofs that he knows are true then his thinking of himself derived from a perfect Being must also be true. Descartes elaborates that now because he believes in God, it enables him to fully understand all other proofs. Even mathematically, which has no corporeal form yet we still give it a belief of its own. Philosophers and scientists have created an entity, which may not exist just to explain the very essence of life and the universe. All at once, it does and does not hold the entire universe together. Yet we can so easily believe that such a concept is all factual and undoubted because two and three result always in five.

Sixth Meditation: **The Real distinction between the Soul and Body of Man.**

Descartes talks about how even if something has been defined such as a *chiliagon*, it does not mean that we can visual its clear corporeal form but it does indeed exist and as such even our imagination can exist. For something simple, like a pentagon, we can see it but also imagine it as it should be. This meditations assumes that the body and soul are separate entities and hence the soul is what links man to God, while the body is only a shell to exercise our will.

He explains that everything he feels due to his senses exists because of some other entity and not because his mind conceived it. His senses are what lead to his thoughts. How the pinching in his stomach causes a desire to eat. Therefore, he only thinks of it after the feeling is already there. However, he says that our senses can be misleading as perspective changes everything. Huge entities can seem miniscule to our mind, which cannot comprehend an essence greater than ourselves. Those without limbs can still feel pain in their missing parts and so that is feeling which opposes corporeal action yet produces a very real reaction.

Back to the idea of falsity, since God does not deceive, He communicates through corporeal objects and hence His senses are messages of His existence. God has given us the power to reach

the truth over falsity and such truth is seen in how his earthly body logically reacts to pain and hunger.

The senses unite the soul and the body. The stars in the sky and the candle light seems the same to his eyes, and as such his individual thinking self must resemble another entity far bigger which only seems as credible as his own thinking self. Which in turn comes back to the idea that since he exists, God exists.

There is perfection in limited knowledge as man is not omniscient and will fail to see the poison amongst his desires for he only sees which is of personal interest. Descartes compares man as a creation of God to a clock as a creation of man. As in, a clock is supposed to function as it should and the purpose is fixed regardless if it acts in according to its function. Time will always exist and move on, regardless of whether a clock can demonstrate its passing. Similarly, a man does good or bad based on their understanding but ultimately it is designed from the goodness of God. He says it's a silly comparison but one with truth as we all are to act in conjunction to what our purpose is, whether we actually follow it or not—it does not make us any less human and even if we cannot comprehend the existence of God, we are still subject to Him.

Finally, the mind and the body are separate as if he were to lose a part of his body he would still have his whole mind. It is even more disconnected as it is only when the brain (the common sense) feels does the body react but the mind always knows. Descartes elaborates on how our bodies are made in such a way that every feeling in the body has a logical reaction given to us by the brain. That the memory and the senses are just tools to distinguish between the falsity and truths of life. That no matter how far he tries to go, he always comes back to the idea of God. His memory, senses, and understanding are tied to the idea that God does exist for there is always an answer to his doubts and that our falsity is just fragments of what is really the truth.

Conclusion: The Meditations are Medications for those Suffering from Thought

The accumulation of these six ideologies expresses the illusion that we call life. We, as individuals, will never experience life similar to another and so we can never proof our perception. If life is all doubt, then death is what is all that's certain. For keeping with matter, based on Descartes' findings, if we come from God and are to find our path to Him (full of doubt) then every path that each of us follows converges to death, and hence we go back to where we came from.

To understand Descartes' view, we have to be open and accept the assumptions. This allows us to align our thinking with Descartes. We all face our illusions in life, but if we can take a step back and proclaim it all false, then we will be able to find the truth. To note, the defining statement Descartes implies is all that we ever conclude originates from what we chose to believe in from the beginning. That no matter how much objectivity we try to employ in our methods, as humans we are prone to some form of confirmation bias—just enough to align our assumptions with what our life experiences have led us to believe. This is our true illusion. In the case of Descartes, this led him to always choose God. That regardless of the illusion of choice that freewill presents him, he is destined to reach God, through the one definitive that is death, “for because God is in no wise a deceiver, it follows that I am not deceived in this. But because the exigencies of action often oblige us to make up our minds before having leisure to examine matters carefully, we must confess that the life of man is very frequently subject to error in respect to individual objects, and we must in the end acknowledge the infirmity of our nature”.

It is the very errors in our life that present to us freewill and as such falsities, and it is upon exercising such will and wrong ideas that we learn from our mistakes and ultimately find the answer that is God.