

531 - MEDITATION ONE

I. SETTING THE STAGE

A. Descartes is considered the father of modern philosophy

1. So what does that mean?
2. In order to understand that we have to understand term "modern philosophy"
3. So I'll provide a distinction between the three major periods of philosophy.

B. Ancient Period

1. Major figures: Plato, Aristotle, Stoics etc.
2. Characterized by: a dialectical method of philosophical investigation
 - a) **A DIALECTIC INVOLVES AN INTERLOCUTOR WHO QUESTIONS A PERSON TAKING A COMMONSENSE POSITION**
 - b) **THE METHOD SHOWS THE ERRORS OF THE OTHER POSITION AS WELL AS MAKING THE PERSON HOLDING THAT POSITION ABLE TO SEE THE ERROR OF HIS OR HER WAYS AS WELL.**
3. Also characterized by: thinkers doing sweeping complete philosophical investigations
 - a) **THE CURRENT STRATEGY IN PHILOSOPHY IS SPECIALIZATION**
 - b) **ARISTOTLE BY CONTRAST WROTE ON METAPHYSICS, ETHICS, EPISTEMOLOGY, POETRY AND AESTHETICS. FOR HIM UNDERSTANDING WAS AN EXPANSIVE ENDEAVOR.**

C. Medieval Period

1. Major figure: St. Thomas Aquinas
2. Characterized by: an extreme focus on God and Religion
 - a) **FAITH WAS A SORT OF PARAMETER FOR ALL THOUGHT DURING THE PERIOD—SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY AS WELL AS RELIGION**
 - b) **EVERYTHING HAD TO BE EXPLAINED WITHIN THOSE PARAMETERS.**
3. Also characterized by: Philosophy was largely a subject for academics. It wasn't available to the educated at large

D. Modern Period

1. Major figures: Descartes, Berkeley, Hume, Kant and pretty much all the philosophy that has been done since then.
2. Characterized by:
 - a) **AN INCLUSION OF ALL EDUCATED PEOPLE IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONVERSATION.**
 - b) **THREE WORDS TYPIFY THE BASIC MODE OF THE MODERN PHILOSOPHICAL PROJECT: REASON, NATURE AND PROGRESS**
3. Reason:
 - a) **THERE IS A MOVE TO FOCUS ON "REASON" AS OPPOSED TO RELIGION**

- b) **INVESTED INSTEAD IN A DEDUCTIVE SYSTEM OF TRUTHS THAT COULD GIVE INFORMATION ABOUT THE WORLD**
 - c) **SUBJECTIVE FACTORS—LIKE EMOTION AND RELIGION—ARE ELIMINATED**
 - d) **OBJECTIVITY—ABSENCE OF BIAS—IS ATTAINED**
 - e) **SEEK UNIVERSAL, NECESSARY, IMPERSONAL TRUTHS**
 - (1) This means that the truths holds no matter what your religious commitments, no matter what the circumstances of the world.
 - (2) The truths are necessary because it is commonly believed that once personal bias is removed and universality is achieved the truth of the matter could not possibly be any other way.
4. Nature:
- a) **THE SCIENTIFIC MOVEMENT OF THE RENAISSANCE TAKES COMMAND OF THE CULTURE**
 - b) **THE WORLD IS UNDERSTOOD AS A MACHINE**
 - c) **THE WORLD IS UNDERSTOOD AS DYNAMIC SYSTEM WITH AN INTELLIGIBLE STRUCTURE THAT CAN BE EXPRESSED THROUGH MATHEMATICS**
5. Progress:
- a) **THE FEELING OF THE TIME IS THAT WE AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A SPECIES ARE IN A FORWARD MOMENTUM**
 - b) **WE WILL HAVE GREATER KNOWLEDGE AND BETTER LIVES THROUGH INVESTIGATIONS THAT WILL ENRICH OUR KNOWLEDGE AS WELL AS OUR INDIVIDUAL LIVES.**
6. This conception of the world still exists today.

II. SKEPTICISM

A. What does it mean to be a skeptic?

- 1. A skeptic doubts the truth or verity of a question put before him.
- 2. The question before Descartes is "what can I know?"
 - a) **WHAT DOES IT MEAN "TO KNOW"?**
 - b) **THIS IS THE QUESTION OF EPISTEMOLOGY**
 - c) **THIS IS PART OF WHAT DESCARTES WILL ESTABLISH IN HIS INVESTIGATION.**
 - d) **HE WANTS TO DETERMINE THE CRITERION FOR HIS INTERACTION WITH A PROPOSITION CONSTITUTES IT BEING KNOWLEDGE.**

B. A brief digression into epistemology

- 1. Ordinarily when we talk about knowledge, part of what's implied is certainty.
- 2. Also by truth we mean that it corresponds with reality, that what we believe about the world is the actual state of the world.
- 3. From these two commonsense understandings come two theories of truth.
 - a) **THE COHERENCE THEORY OF TRUTH STATES THAT A BELIEF IS TRUE IF IT COHERES WITHOUT CONFLICT WITH ALL OF OUR OTHER BELIEFS.**

WE HAVE NO BELIEFS THAT WOULD CAUSE US TO CALL ANOTHER BELIEF INTO QUESTION.

- b) **THE CORRESPONDENCE THEORY OF TRUTH STATES THAT A BELIEF IS TRUE BECAUSE IT ACTUALLY CORRESPONDS WITH THE STATE OF THE ACTUAL WORLD.**

C. Now that we know what a skeptic is and we have some background about what knowledge is, we should make a distinction.

1. It is imperative that we recognize the difference between doubting and knowing that not.
2. Descartes in doubting does not believe that we have information that shows our beliefs to be false. He is investigating this question.
3. When he comes to be certain a belief is false, this is no longer skepticism.

III. MEDITATION ONE

A. What's going on?

1. I have lots of false opinions and upon those were other's built that are dubious as a result.
 - a) **DESCARTES HAS DISCOVERED THAT HE HAS SOME FALSE OPINIONS.**
 - b) **IT IS WORRISOME THAT ANY OF HIS BELIEFS ARE FALSE**
 - c) **WHAT IS MORE WORRISOME IS THAT THE FALSITY OF THESE BELIEFS MY INVALIDATE BELIEFS THAT ARE BUILT ON TOP OF THEM.**
2. I realized that I needs to start with the foundations and establish something firm and lasting in the sciences.
 - a) **FIRM AND LASTING IS A VERY IMPORTANT PHRASE HERE**
 - b) **HE WANTS TO ESTABLISH BELIEFS THAT CANNOT BE DOUBTED AND WILL NEVER BE DUBITABLE.**
3. To begin with, I need to demolish all my old opinions and start again.

B. How do I do this?

1. I needn't show all my opinions are false.
2. He doesn't have to make any claims that his opinions are false. He is a skeptic. It is quite possible that some of his opinions are true, so proving them false is not only a huge project; it is an impossible one. He only needs to show that they are not certain.
3. He doesn't need to evaluate all his opinions because if he can invalidate the foundational ones, the rest will fall with those.

C. He embarks on the journey to examine his knowledge for uncertainty.

1. Where—how—do I acquire knowledge?
 - a) **FROM THE SENSES—FIRST HAND OBSERVATION**
 - b) **THROUGH THE SENSES—FROM HEARING TEACHERS AND OTHER RELIABLE WITNESSES TO REALITY**
2. Philosophy is performed like any other experiment. We begin with a hypothesis and test it.
3. Our Hypothesis: Any belief acquired through or from the senses must correspond to an aspect of reality.
 - a) **THIS IS A VERSION OF THE CORRESPONDENCE THEORY OF TRUTH**

b) **THIS WILL BE IMPORTANT**

D. Problem: My senses are at times untrustworthy.

1. My senses sometimes deceive me
 - a) **THINGS THAT ARE FAR AWAY**
 - b) **THINGS THAT ARE VERY SMALL**
 - c) **WITHOUT IDEAL CONDITIONS I CANNOT BE SURE THAT MY SENSES ARE GIVING ME ACCURATE INFORMATION.**
2. New Hypothesis: Whatever is perceived under ideal external conditions certainly exists.
 - a) **SURELY, IT IS TRUE THAT I'M HERE IN MY DRESSING GOWN, IN FRONT OF THE FIRE.**
 - b) **SURELY I CAN BE SURE OF THAT.**
3. New Problem: What if I'm crazy?
 - a) **DESCARTES SEEMS TO DISMISS THIS CONCERN OUT OF HAND AND RENEGE ON HIS PROMISE TO SERIOUSLY CONSIDER EVERY REASONABLE OBJECTION.**
 - b) **BUT HE ISN'T.**
 - (1) First, he isn't trying to establish a foundation for the sciences for anyone. He isn't considering idiosyncratic challenges for the verity of perception
 - (2) Second, if his project fails he will have shown that the difficulty may have been that he isn't equipped with the reasoning skills to fulfill it; that is, he is insane.
4. New Hypothesis: Whatever is perceived under ideal external conditions by an ideally qualified perceiver certainly exists.

E. New Problem: What if I'm Dreaming?

1. First, the kinds of concerns expressed by the insanity question get reconsidered here.
 - a) **THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THE INSANE ARE LARGELY THINGS LIKE A PERCEPTION THAT DOES NOT CORRESPOND WITH REALITY, OR AN ALTERED PERCEPTION OF REALITY**
 - b) **DREAMER'S HAVE THE SAME PROBLEM. THE REALITY THEY ARE PERCEIVING HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ACTUAL REALITY.**
2. Now these concerns are expressed in a non-idiosyncratic way. Everybody dreams.
3. Everyone can identify with the fact that dreams are very realistic.
4. Descartes inquiry has just changed significantly.
 - a) **UP UNTIL NOW, DESCARTES HAS BEEN TRYING TO DISTINGUISH TRUE BELIEFS FROM FALSE ONES.**
 - b) **NOW, THERE IS NOT HOPE OF MAKING THAT DISTINCTION BECAUSE AT ANYTIME YOU COULD BE HAVING A FALSE PERCEPTION.**
5. All that is left now is to determine if the senses tell us anything at all about the world even if we can't apply that knowledge at any particular time.

6. First Descartes imagines that bodies—arm, legs, faces—must be real, but he quickly realizes that the mind could be strong enough to construct those.
7. He quickly reduces the claim he is defending to include only the simplest aspects of reality: extension, number, shape, space and time.
8. New Hypothesis: Surely, the simple universal aspects of the things in my dreams correspond with reality.

F. New Problem: An evil demon might be tricking me.

1. A significant change has occurred.
 - a) **UP UNTIL NOW, WE'VE BEEN CONCERNED WITH AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL QUESTION: WHAT CAN I KNOW?**
 - b) **NOW, THE CHALLENGE HAS TURNED METAPHYSICAL.**
 - c) **THE PRESENCE OF AN OMNIPOTENT BEING MEANS THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE ENTIRE WORLD IS JUST A FANTASY CREATED IN ME BY A CRUEL BEING.**
2. It seems possible to imagine that an evil being could trick me into believing there is a world when there isn't—take the movie "The Matrix" as an example.
3. Could an omnipotent being really invalidate the truth of mathematics. Could he make it such that $2 + 3$ does not equal 5.
 - a) **BEAR IN MIND, THE EVIL DEMON DOESN'T HAVE TO DO THAT.**
 - b) **ALL THE EVIL DEMON HAS TO DO IS FOOL US ABOUT THESE MATTERS.**
 - (1) A man is sleeping in the train station and wakes to hear the clock strike four times.
 - (2) He sits up and says, "That clock has gone crazy; it just struck "one" four times. One, One, One One.
 - (3) You see from this example, that the laws don't have to change for us to be deceived about them.

G. So we've come to the end and by testing he has proved each of his hypotheses dubious. Using skepticism he has cast doubt on all of his beliefs and can not begin again.