

Past Paper - Descartes.

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Doubt is the key point of Cartesian Method.
Illuminate. (2020)

Descartes was a French philosopher who was the forerunner of modern philosophy after the Renaissance, whose main concern was with what we can know, or in other words, certain knowledge. In his first and most famous work, Discourse on the Method, Descartes discusses the first set of rules that he created that made him doubt everything he knew that formed the Cartesian Method.

I Cartesian Method

1. Deduction and the exact method of philosophical reflection

Descartes maintains that one cannot accept anything as being true unless it can be clearly and distinctly perceived. To achieve this, Descartes believed that philosophy should go from the simple to the complex. Thus he formed the 'mathematical method' for philosophising that sets out to prove philosophical truths in the same way one proves a mathematical theorem.

2. Method of Doubt

To get clear-distinct conclusions, deliberate and universal doubt of ^{all} existing knowledge is employed. It is important to rid oneself of all

handed down or received learning before beginning philosophical construction. Therefore, Descartes says that in the Cartesian doubt method, one should doubt everything including our senses.

3. Doubting everything ensures that there is certainty of being - "I think, therefore I am", as a rational being.

Descartes said that he could doubt everything but not the doubting process because he exists. When he doubted, he had to be thinking and because he was thinking, it had to be certain that he was a thinking being. Or as he expressed it:

Cogito, ergo sum.

I think, therefore I am.

Descartes perceived that not only was he a thinking being but realised at the same time that this thinking being was more than the material world with which we perceive our senses.

4. The existence of God as a result of Cartesian method of doubt and thinking

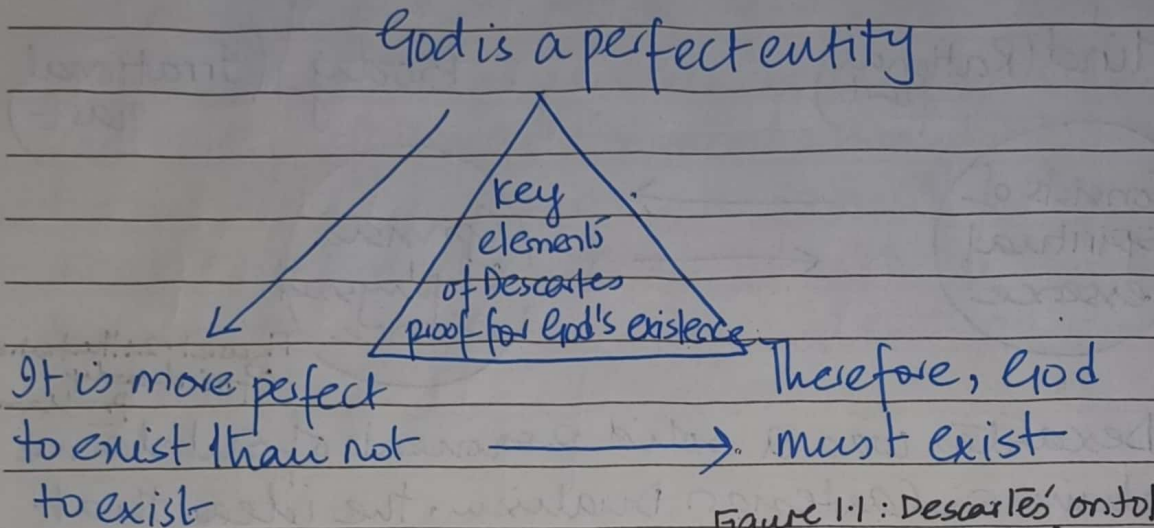
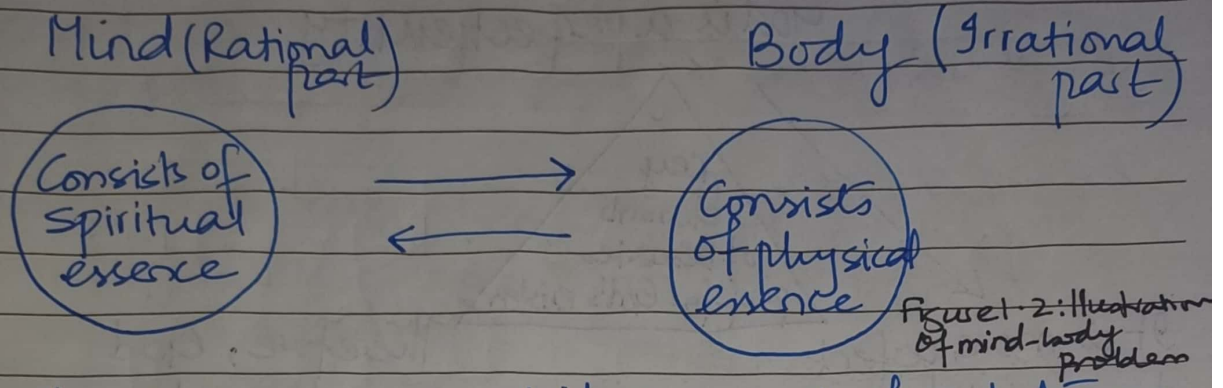


Figure 1.1: Descartes' ontological argument for existence of God

Once he was able to come to the conclusion that man exists solely as a thinking being, he established that perception and imagination have to exist because they are "modes of consciousness." He had a clear and distinct idea of a perfect entity where it was evident that such modes of consciousness could not possibly come from oneself who is imperfect. Therefore, the idea of a perfect entity must have originated from that perfect entity itself, or God. The notion that God exists was, therefore, just as self-evident for Descartes as that a thinking being must exist.

5. Cartesian Dualism - Mind-Body Duality as a result of Cartesian Method of Doubt



Descartes was a solid proponent of substance dualism or Cartesian Dualism, the idea that the mind and body are separate substances.

Descartes believed that the rational mind was in control of the body, but that the body could influence the mind to act irrationally, such as when one performs an act of passion.

Pineal gland as the point of interaction of mind and body

The mind and body interact with each other at the pineal gland, which he called 'the seat of the soul.' According to Descartes, like the soul, the pineal gland is a part of the brain that is unitary and the interaction between mind and body occurs due to God.

II - Criticism

1. Theory of mind - body interaction not convincing

Many people have called the explanation for duality of Descartes's mind - body interaction as not very convincing as he assumed that reality is mathematical whereas a ~~thinking~~ ^{living} being could exist independent of doubting - as in the case of a tree.

III - Conclusion - the use of reason through doubt

Despite the criticism on his mind - body problem explanation, all in all, for Descartes the mind is essentially thought and representative of rationalist thinking. Without having principles and categories in place, humans would not be able to organise or interpret the information provided by the senses. Thus Descartes is an important figure to introduce Cartesian Doubt in modern philosophy that is a method of understanding the world based on the use of reason as the means to attain knowledge.