

Philosophy



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19 March 2009 Philosophy The Descartes of the Meditations lends some weight to this charge, with its stress on certainty and clear and distinct ideas. The certainty of knowledge found in the “ cogito” is not found elsewhere. Nor is the existential certainty of Gods existence, which is derived from the metaphysical doctrine of objective reality and the principle that the cause must have as much reality as its effect, applied to our knowledge of body. The proof for the existence of body elaborated in Meditation VI rests on a number of assumptions and premises, the result being far from the certainty of either I exist or God exists. Propositions are most securely knowable and most vulnerable to doubt are based on the idea that doubting, understanding, asserting, denying, willing, refusing, imagining, and seeming to perceive. That proof for body does not involve the inspection of entities in an inner arena, although it is a reflective exercise laying out various possibilities and probabilities, arriving slowly at the conclusion that bodies exist even though they may not be as they seem. Descartes argues that any of the three main truths in the Meditations “ I exist, God exists, bodies exist” is reached by the inspection of entities; certainly they are not modeled on retinal images. These truths are the result of careful analysis of ideas and, in the case of the cogito, of the activity of trying to doubt that a person exists. There really is no account in the Meditations of perception of bodies, no analysis of knowledge of physical objects, of scientific knowledge. When Descartes wanted to discover the nature of some object, event, or activity, such as light, vision, or the mechanism of the body, he resorted to observation and experiment--at least, to what he took to be observation, as with the examination of the eyes of buffs.

By his doubt, Descartes does not mean to reject permanently all of his

former beliefs. Some of them may well be true. Descartes wants to rediscover them, in the sense of showing that they follow logically from basic, indubitable propositions. The main purpose of the doubt is to find these indubitable propositions, so that Descartes can use them as "foundations" upon which to rebuild his knowledge. The doubt is a way of rethinking everything from the beginning, so as to achieve the certainty that Descartes is seeking. One standard interpretation of Descartes's notion of clarity and distinctness sees it as being inspired by mathematics. The truth of the substance theory is based on the correctness of a particular application of it. It has become apparent, then, that despite Descartes's wish to doubt everything that is not certain. Descartes tries to give content to his conception of a purely thinking substance by reminding us of what "thinking" covers -- namely, all conscious states.

His method aims not only at truth but also, and perhaps more so, at certainty, the ultimate foundation of which is the cogito. This implies that any one of Descartes's followers who refused to avail himself of his metaphysics was liable to the charge of being untrue to the master.

Moreover, Descartes seems to have thought that it is impossible to know the truth without acting on it. This same ontology surfaces in Descartes's notion of the objective reality of ideas. He describes that reality in two ways: as the representative of objects and as the being of objects, for example, the sun as it exists in (i. e., as known by) the mind. The paradigm may have been the idea of God (e. g., in Meditation III); for the believer, the being of God exists in the understanding. Descartes's writings offer sufficient hints to suggest the application of this twofold nature of ideas (as modes of mind and as the object perceived) to perceptual experience as well.

Works Cited

Descartes, R. Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy.

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