



DC English IV

World/British Literature

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René Descartes (1596-1650)

René Descartes

- considered the Father of Modern Philosophy
- born to an aristocrat family in France
- educated at a Jesuit boarding school

Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences, 1637

- French: *Discours de la Méthode Pour bien conduire sa raison, et chercher la vérité dans les sciences*
- Completed in 1637; translated to Latin 1656
- In full, it exists as a philosophical treatise
- Helped develop the natural sciences and opened up the era of Rationalism
- First and most famous work
- Established famous line, in Latin: *Cogito ergo sum*
“I am thinking, therefore I exist.”



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Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences, 1637

- Divided into six parts
 - ∴ **Part 1** discusses various importances of the sciences and provides an autobiographical opening
 - ∴ **Part IV** aims to prove the existence of God and the Human Soul
- Other portions of the text establish his thoughts on **Cartesian Dualism**
- Despite his religious leanings, the Catholic Church disliked his establishment human reason over religion / divine mystery



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Some Basic Principles from *Discourse on the Method**

- argues that thought and reason are the essence of humanity
 - ∴ these qualities separate humans from “lower animals”
- for thoughts to exist, there must be a source to do the thinking
- reason is a natural talent *gifted* to humans
- sensory perception (and therefore empiricism) is unreliable and can be misled
- humans are thinking “things”
- perception and imagination exist do not necessarily hold any truths, but are essential to humanity

God Exists*

- since God is perfect, it is impossible for God to deceive someone
- despite the fact humans are imperfect (including Descartes), the fact that we/he can **conceive of the notion of perfection** means perfection must exist; and this perfection is God

Kleinman, Paul. *Philosophy 101*. Adams Media. New York, 2013, pp. 113-114.

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- After the establishment of the Catholic Church and its acquisition of an overwhelming power, theorists and logicians were forced to use religion as a basis of philosophy.
- Descartes separated faith from reasoning by using a concept termed **Methodical Doubt**.
- Humans are allowed doubt as a means for rationalizing the existence of God.

What Eventually Resulted:

Religion (faith)

cannot ask questions
accept all without facts
answers that cannot be questioned

Philosophy (intellect)

must ask questions
denies assumptions without facts
questions that cannot be answered