

## **Readings notes on Descartes' Meditation Pt 1:**

(PDF can be found @ JonathonKlyng.com)

1. Skepticism and Doubt
  1. Descartes cannot find certainty in school – everyone seems to disagree about certain basic beliefs. The books he reads are often contradictory.
  2. Descartes leaves school and seeks out truth in the real world – he talks to politicians, people in the military, merchants etc... He finds that the people base their beliefs off of customs and traditions. People are inherently biased.
  3. Since Descartes cannot find any certainty by looking outwards, he decides to look inwards.
2. Looking Inward / The problem with our senses
  1. By looking inwards, I will examine all of my beliefs until I find something to be so certain that it is impossible to doubt it. If a belief can be doubted, I will do so.
  2. Descartes' says: The truest things we receive come through the senses. But I notice the senses are sometimes deceptive. And so we should not place our complete trust in the senses since they have deceived us before.
  3. There are people who believe they don't feel their arms and legs
  4. But when I am dreaming, I also sometimes feel as though I don't have arms or legs. I can sometimes buy-in to experiences in my dreams which aren't true.
  5. "How Often does my evening slumber persuade me of such ordinary things as these: That I am here, clothed in my dressing gown seated next to the fire place – when in fact I am lying undressed in bed.
3. Dreams and complete doubt
  1. Perhaps there is a difference in *feeling* between my dream experiences and my real experiences of the external world.
  2. My waking experiences feel very clear and distinct. But, this is only something I can recognize in-the-moment - often times my dream experiences are quite clear and distinct while I am in-the-moment.
  3. I really do think I am interacting with an external world while dreaming.
  4. So I can't tell if I am interacting with an external world. Maybe I am always dreaming - I can't tell where my experiences are coming from.
  5. Descartes says "Eventually I am forced to admit that there is nothing among the things I once believed to be true which it is not permissible to doubt... Thus I must be no less careful to withhold assent henceforth even from these beliefs than I would from those that are patently false, if I wish to find anything certain."
  6. Therefore, it would do well to assume that all of my thoughts are unreliable and an evil genius is planting deceptive thoughts in me at all times
4. I think therefore I am
  1. Even if an evil genius is forcing me to have deceptive thoughts, I cannot deny that I am still thinking.
  2. Descartes says, "Here I make my discovery, Thought exists; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am; I exist – this is certain."
  3. Therefore, it would do well to assume that all of my thoughts are unreliable and an evil genius is planting deceptive thoughts in me at all times.
  4. So the one truth which can be known for certain is that I am a thinking thing. I am having thoughts. I can now use this certain truth as a foundation to conduct the rest of my investigation. It is a truth I can build upon.