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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

TRAUMA AND HEALING IN DESCARTES' MEDITATIONS ON FIRST PHILOSOPHY: AN ESSAY

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Abstract

I examine René Descartes' effort in his Meditations on First Philosophy to emerge from the trauma of realizing that many of his beliefs held since early youth are false, and that, until now, he has had no means of setting out on a path to truth. Through his new method of inquiry, which, in the Replies to the Second Set of Objections, he refers to as 'analysis', he sets out in his Meditations to begin the healing process, by establishing a secure foundation for knowledge, through what he refers to as his clear and distinct innate ideas. My paper will highlight the fact that Cartesian healing is not a collaborative process, but a personal effort, with a view to establishing that all clear and distinct ideas must be true, given that Descartes' existence as a thinking thing and all his clear and distinct ideas are created by a veracious God.

Keywords: Dubitability, Indubitability, Certainty, Intuition, Deduction, Clarity, Distinctness.

INTRODUCTION

Descartes' Trauma is outlined

This paper is concerned with how René Descartes (1596-1650) deals with trauma and healing. The trauma and healing do not concern economics or war; rather, they concern Descartes' realization that throughout his life he has held many beliefs which are false, despite the fact that he has regarded them as true. As a result, he is convinced that he "must once and for all seriously undertake to rid himself of all the opinions which he had formerly accepted, and commence to build anew from the foundation, if [he] wanted to establish a firm and permanent structure in the sciences" (M 45). Descartes decides that for his personal healing, he must put his quest for knowledge on a secure, i.e. indubitable, footing. This will be undertaken by seeking the first principles of human knowledge, that is, by learning what must be known before anything else can be known. It is in his Meditations on First Philosophy that he seeks the first principles of human knowledge. In the Preface to the Principles of Philosophy, he refers to the subject which seeks the first principles of human knowledge as 'metaphysics' (HR 11, 211). These metaphysical first principles of knowledge must be self-evident; otherwise, they would depend on other knowledge in order to be known, and, as a result, they would not be first.

In the Replies to the Second Set of Objections, Descartes explains the difference between seeking the first principles (axioms) of knowledge in Geometry and seeking the first principles of knowledge in metaphysics.

For there is this difference between the two cases, namely, that the primary notions that are the presuppositions of geometrical proofs harmonize with the use of our senses, and are readily granted by all. Hence, no difficulty is involved in this case, except in the proper deduction of consequences…On the contrary, nothing in metaphysics causes more trouble than the making the perception of its primary notions clear and distinct. For, though in their own nature they are as intelligible as, or even more intelligible than those the geometricians

study, yet being contradicted by the many preconceptions of our senses to which we have since our earliest years been accustomed, they cannot be perfectly apprehended except by those who give strenuous attention and study to them, and withdraw their minds as far as possible from matters corporeal. Hence if they alone were brought forward it would be easy for anyone with a zeal for contradiction to deny them. (M 102-103)

From this passage, we learn that the Meditations has two goals-to remove sensory prejudice (including sensory prejudice regarding the nature of the self and of God), and to lead the mind to attend to the innate ideas which constitute the basis of the first principles of human knowledge. In the Replies to the Second Set of Objections, he refers to the method employed in the Meditations as 'analysis', which he contrasts with the method of Geometry, which he calls 'synthesis'.

In the first meditation, Descartes rules out that the metaphysical first principles he is seeking can be obtained through the senses, inasmuch as any putative metaphysical first principle he examines which originates through the senses can been shown to lead to errors, or can be shown to have the potential to lead to errors. Accordingly, he turns to reason as the only other possible source for the first principles of human knowledge.

It is well-known that in Descartes' Regulae (Rules for the Direction of the Mind), he advocates Mathematics as the prototype of human knowledge, given its indubitably and certainty:

> But one conclusion now emerges out of these considerations, viz. not, indeed, that Arithmetic and geometry are the sole sciences to be studied, but only that in our search for the direct road towards truth, we should busy ourselves with no object about which we cannot attain certitude equal to that of the demonstrations of arithmetic and Geometry." (HR 1, 5)

Descartes locates this certainty and indubitability in two features intrinsic to mathematics. First, "deduction, or the pure illation of one thing from another, though it may be passed over, if it is not seen through, cannot be erroneous when performed by an understanding that is in the least degree rational….My reason for saying so is that none of the mistakes which men can make (men, I say, not beasts) are due to faulty inference; they are caused merely by the fact that we found upon a basis of poorly comprehended experiences, or that the propositions are posited which are hasty of groundless (HR 1, 4-5). In other words, errors in mathematics stem from the fact that we proceed in our calculations with premises which are not certain and indubitable; however, errors in mathematics are never due to the mind's inferential process itself. Descartes' second reason for certainty in mathematics is that only Arithmetic and Geometry "deal with an object so pure and uncomplicated, that they need make no assumptions at all which experience renders uncertain, but wholly consist in the rational deduction of consequences. They are on that account much the easiest and clearest of all, and possess an object such as we require, for in them it is scarce humanly possible for anyone to err except by inadvertence. (HR 1, 5) The 'purity' of mathematical objects refers to the fact that the ideas of mathematical objects are innate, and hence have none of the problems which can arise when we form empirical ideas, particularly adding or omitting an essential feature of the idea, inasmuch as the content of an innate idea is fixed and eternal; the fact these objects are 'uncomplicated' refers to the fact that the components of the mathematical innate ideas are necessarily connected, so there cannot be errors of the sort that we make when dealing with empirical ideas, the components of which are all related contingently.

The Regulae is written from the perspective of the mathematician, and so it is the mathematician's notion of indubitability and certainty with which Descartes is concerned in that work. In the fifth meditation, Descartes reveals that the mathematician's notion of indubitability is based on nothing more than psychological irresistibility.

And even although I had not demonstrated this, the nature of my mind is such that I

could not prevent myself from holding them to be true so long as I conceive them clearly; and I recollect that even when I was still strongly attached to the objects of sense, I counted as the most certain those truths which I conceived clearly as regards figures, numbers, and the other matters which pertain to arithmetic and geometry, and in general, to pure and abstract mathematics. (M 81)

On the other hand, the Meditations on First Philosophy is written from the Cartesian philosophical perspective, and from this vantage point, psychological irresistibility does not satisfy the requirement of indubitability and certainty. Already in the first meditation, Descartes begins to doubt the mathematician's view of indubitability and certainty:

> …As I sometimes imagine that others deceive themselves in the things which they think they know best, how do I know that I am not deceived every time that I add two and three, or count the sides of a square, or judge of things yest simpler, if anything simpler can be imagined? (D 48)

Overall, Descartes raises five arguments against the indubitability of mathematics, which challenge the very foundation of mathematics.

In the first argument, he is concerned with the view that God may have brought it to pass that there is no external world; nevertheless, God has given Descartes perceptions which he believes correspond to physical objects in the external world:

> …I have long had fixed in my mind the belief that an all-powerful God existed by whom I have been created such as I am. But how do I know that He has not brought it to pass that there is no earth, no heaven, no extended body, no magnitude, no place, and that nevertheless [I possess the perceptions of all these things and that] they seem to me to exist just exactly as I now see them? (M 48)

But why does it matter to the truth of a mathematical claim whether objects exist with relations which correspond to the relations expressed in the mathematical claim or equation? To answer this, we must recall that the first meditation in its entirety is concerned with whether the senses are able to provide the indubitable first principles of metaphysics, through which he can have knowledge of the external world. The assumption with which the first meditation begins is that the external world exists. Therefore, the view of mathematics in the first meditation must take into account what he believes that the senses reveal to him, namely, physical objects and the relations of their parts to each other, and the relation of a given object to other objects. An example is in order. When he thinks of an isosceles triangle, he finds that he must think that its base angles are equal. On the account of mathematics in the first meditation, he must be confident that if there is an isosceles triangle in realty, it has the same features as the isosceles triangle he is entertaining in thought. As Descartes points out, the mathematician need not locate, or even know, that an isosceles triangle exists in reality: the requirement for knowledge in this instance is that the mathematician can be confident that there are objects in reality, and that if one or more of them has the shape of an isosceles triangle, it will possess features which correspond to the features thought in the idea of an isosceles triangle. This is Descartes' point in the following passage:

> "…Arithmetic, Geometry and other sciences of that kind which only treat of things that are very simple and very general, without taking great trouble to ascertain whether they are actually existent or not (my italics), contain some measure of certainty and an element of the indubitable" (M 48). The portion of this passage which I have italicized makes it clear that the mathematician does not need to undertake an empirical investigation to establish that objects and relations exist which correspond to his thoughts regarding mathematical objects. Rather, the mathematician must be confident that such empirical objects may, or do, exist. Truth in mathematics, on this account, is truth by correspondence. However, if there are no physical objects to which mathematical objects/ equations either do, or can,

> correspond, then mathematics cannot be held to be true and indubitable, for mathematics would not be true of anything.

In Descartes' second argument, he questions whether the mind is trustworthy when it engages in mathematical reasoning. The issue here is, in part, whether he can be deceived by God (presumed at this point to be his creator) in regard to matters which he thinks he knows best, for example, adding 2 and 3, or counting the sides of a square? The relevant passage in the first meditation regarding the possibility of divine deception is this:

> "And, besides, as I sometimes imagine that others deceive themselves in the things which they think they know best, how do I know that I am not deceived every time that I add two and three, or count the sides of a square, or judge of things yet simpler, if anything simpler can be imagined". (M 48)

The relevance of a deceiving deity to this discussion is brought into sharper focus in Principle V of the Principles of Philosophy than occurs in the first meditation; "…[W]e have been told that God who created us can do all that He desires. For we are still ignorant of whether He may not have desired to create us in such a way that we shall always be deceived, even in the things that we believe ourselves to know best; since this does not seem less possible than our being occasionally deceived, which experience tells us is the case" (HR 1, 220). In this passage, Descartes is saying that, even in the case of elementary mathematical claims which he thinks he knows best, God could have created him in such a way that he may be deceived into thinking they are true, when, in fact, they are false, and we would never be aware of the deception which is present here.

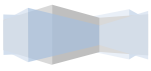
In his third argument against certainty in mathematics, he urges that the dubitability of mathematics can be established, even without factoring in divine deception. Once again, we need to turn to Principle V: "One reason [to doubt proofs in mathematics] is that those who have fallen into error in reasoning on such matters, have held as perfectly certain and self- evident what we see to be false…" (HR 1, 220). He is arguing that the confidence in mathematical reasoning (without the benefit of the teaching of the Meditations, and especially without the divine guarantee) derives from the state of mind experienced when engaging in such reasoning, namely, psychological irresistibility. However, this state of mind obtains not only when his reasoning is correct, but also when his reasoning is erroneous. Therefore, in and of itself, mathematics is unable to provide a test or criterion of the truth of its claims, but must ultimately rely on the state of mind which accompanies mathematical reasonings, which is unreliable, given that the identical state of mind obtains with both correct and incorrect reasoning.

In Descartes' fourth criticism (provided in the first meditation, but omitted in Principle V), he asserts that, even if God is not responsible for the deception he experiences in mathematics, what cannot be denied is that the presumed goodness of God does not prevent him from being deceived on various occasions.

> But possibly God has not desired that I should be thus deceived, for He is said to be supremely good. If, however, it is contrary to his goodness to have made me such that I constantly deceive myself, it would also appear contrary to His goodness to permit me to be sometimes deceived, and nevertheless I cannot doubt that He does permit this. (M 48)

Hence, even if we assume that God is good, this alone cannot be the basis of confidence in mathematical reasoning. This is, of course, a matter with which Descartes will have to deal, in the third, fourth, and fifth meditations, when he deals with God and deception.

In Descartes' final criticism regarding truth in mathematics, which appears in the first meditation (M 48-49) and in Principle V, he addresses possible alternative accounts of how he came to be-by fate, by accident, by a continual succession of antecedents, or by some other method. In other words, can his concern with deception in mathematics be removed by dropping the hypothesis that God created him, and resorting to a non-theistic account of how



he came to be? Descartes' replies in the first meditation in this way:

> "Since to err and deceive oneself is a defect, it is clear that the greater will be the probability of my being so imperfect as to deceive myself ever, as is the Author to whom they assign my origin the less powerful" (M48-49)

A somewhat clearer account of his position on this matter can be found in Principle V:

> And if we think that an omnipotent God is not the author of our being, and that we subsist of ourselves, or through some other, yet the less perfect we suppose the author to be, the more reason have we to believe that we are not so perfect that we cannot be continually deceived. (HR 1, 220)

In other words, given that only an omnipotent divine cause of Descartes' existence can guarantee that he will not be deceived in mathematics, any alternative causal attempt at explaining his existence necessarily involves a cause which is not omnipotent, and which, therefore, possesses finite power. And, Descartes insists, a non-infinitely powerful cause of his existence would lack the power to prevent him from being deceived in mathematics.
This completes my focus on Descartes' discussion in the first meditation regarding deception in mathematics.

The Healing Begins

Beginning in the third meditation, the Cartesian philosophical concern with truth is always placed in the context of clarity and distinctness (which are not defined in the Meditations, but they are defined in the Principles of Philosophy XLV and XLV1). Having established in the second meditation that he exists as a thinking thing, he proceeds early in the third meditation to inquire what rendered him certain that he exists as a thinking thing. And he answers:

> Certainly in this first knowledge there is nothing that assures me of its truth, excepting the clear and distinct perception of that which I state, which would not indeed suffice to assure me that what I say is true, if it could ever happen that a thing which I conceived so clearly and distinctly could be false…" (M 59, my italics)

Descartes locates this concern that what he perceives clearly and distinctly could be false, principally in mathematics; and, for the first time in the Meditations, he connects the possibility of divine deception to his clear and distinct ideas:

> But when I took anything very simple and easy in the sphere of arithmetic or geometry into consideration, e.g. that two and three together made five, and other things of the sort, were not these present to my mind so clearly [and distinctly] as to enable me to affirm that they were true? Certainly if I judged that since such matters could be doubted, this would not have been for any other reason than that it came into my mind that perhaps a God might have endowed me with such a nature that I may have been deceived even concerning things which seemed to me most manifest…I am constrained to confess that it is easy for Him, if He wishes it, to cause me to err, even in matters in which I believe myself to have the best evidence. (M 59-60)

We can now see that early in the third meditation, Descartes locates the psychological irresistibility which he identified in the first meditation in the case of arithmetic and geometry as originating with his clear and distinct ideas. And he completes this thought by asserting that, in order to remove his doubts about mathematics and other clear and distinct ideas, he must inquire whether he was created by God; and if he finds that God is his creator, he must also inquire whether He may be a deceiver; "for without a knowledge of these two truths I do not see that I can ever be certain of anything" (M60)

Descartes speaks of the need to prove that he was created by a veracious God, if he is ever to be certain of anything. And, because Descartes establishes that he was created by a veracious God in the third meditation, the literature on the Meditations is virtually

unanimous in insisting that it is in the third meditation that he has established that whatever he perceives clearly and distinctly must be true. Now, while Descartes maintains in the third meditation that without knowing that God exists and that God is not a deceiver he can never be certain of anything, we find (somewhat surprisingly) that, in the fourth meditation, he insists that knowing these matters still does not assure him that knowledge through the clear and distinct has been achieved.

And no doubt respecting this matter could remain, if it were not that the consequence would seem to follow that I can never be deceived; for if I hold all that I possess from God, and if He has not placed in me the capacity for error, it seems as though I could never fall into error. And it is true that when I think only of God, I discover [in myself] no cause of error, or falsity; yet directly afterwards, when recurring to myself, experience shows me that I am nevertheless subject to an infinitude of errors…(M73)

In addition, there are two passages in the Synopsis to the Meditations in which Descartes insists that it is in the fourth meditation (and not in the third meditation) that he proves that whatever he perceives clearly and distinctly must be true.

In addition to this it is requisite that we may be assured that all things which we conceive clearly and distinctly are true in the very way in which we think them; and this could not be proved previously to the Fourth Meditation. (M 42)

In the Fourth Meditation it is shown that all these things which we very clearly distinctly perceive are true, and at the same time it is explained in what the nature of error or falsity consists. (M43)

The Healing Continues in the Fourth Meditation

I will now explain how Descartes establishes in the fourth meditation that whatever he perceives clearly and distinctly must be true-this will provide the true healing for Descartes.

We have seen that in the third meditation Descartes urges that knowing that God is his creator and that God is not a deceiver are what he must be know, if what he perceives clearly and distinctly can be held to be true. It would seem, therefore, that the truth of the principle concerning clarity and distinctness has been established at the end of the third meditation. Nevertheless, as we have also learned, Descartes tells in the Synopsis to the Meditations that it is in the fourth meditation that this principle has been established. In our effort to understand the manner in which Descartes proceeds in the fourth meditation, it is important to point out that, in addition to a knowledge of the self as a thinking thing, and a knowledge of a veracious God as Descartes' creator, Descartes considers a knowledge of the truth of the principle concerning clarity and distinctness to be a first principle in metaphysics. Therefore, the principle concerning clarity and distinctness must in the end be shown to be intuitively certain; in accordance with the method of analysis, the arguments presented are designed to unprejudice the mind, and to bring the attention to the point where the relevant connections between primary notions can be intuited.

We are informed in the Synopsis to the Meditations that the principle concerning clarity and distinctness has been established "at the same time [as] it is explained in what the nature of error or falsity consists." (M 43) Now, in seeking to account for error in the fourth meditation, he isolates the will and the understanding as the faculties from which error can arise. Error, we are told, stems from assenting to matters which are not perceived clearly and distinctly:

> Whence then come my errors? They come from the sole fact that since the will is much wider in its range and compass than the understanding, I do not restrain it within the same bounds, but extend it to things which I do not understand: and as the will is of itself indifferent to these, it easily falls into error and sin, and chooses evil for good, or the false for the true…. But if I abstain from giving my judgment on anything

> when I do not perceive it with sufficient clearness and distinctness, it is plain that I act rightly and am not deceived. (M 77)

In the third meditation, he questions the truth of clear and distinct ideas, because of a concern with a deceiving deity: his concern is that, perhaps, he has been created by God in such a way that he cannot but think certain ideas to be necessarily connected, and yet the items thought are not connected in the way he finds he must think them. Once he knows that God exists and is not a deceiver, he knows that his faculty of judgment, if used correctly, cannot lead him to error and deception. Since the doubt regarding clear and distinct ideas was generated by the concern with a deceiving deity, once he knows that God exists and is not a deceiver, he presumably knows that the correct use of the faculty of judgment is to assent only to what is clear and distinct. But if this is all that he requires to know in order to establish the truth of the principle regarding clarity and distinctness, then the truth of this principle has been established by the end of the third meditation. That he devotes an additional meditation to this principle indicates that establishing the truth of the principle regarding clarity and distinctness requires knowing more than that he was created by an all-powerful veracious God.

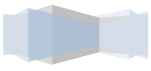
The passage we examined above in which error is held to consist in assenting to what is not perceived clearly and distinctly, and truth is said to consist in assenting only to what is perceived clearly and distinctly, does follow from his analysis in the third meditation. That is, if his only doubt regarding knowledge of truth and the source of error is whether God can be a deceiver, then once he knows that God cannot be a deceiver, he knows both that truth is found in the clear and distinct, and that error is found in the obscure and confused. However, since knowing that an all-powerful veracious God exists who created him is not sufficient to establish the truth of the principle of clarity and distinctness, it follows that the analysis we have examined thus far in the fourth meditation, although it serves to clarify the faculties which are involved in truth and error, cannot be considered a 'proof' of the source of truth and error. His examination shows how truth and error arise, provided the principle of clarity and distinctness is a reliable source of truth; however, the reliability of this principle has yet to be established.

But what more does Descartes insist that he must know before the principle in question can be accepted as true? Since he already knows that he was created by God insofar as he is a thinking thing, it cannot be Descartes' causal origin as a thinking thing that must be established. The intellect is God's product; but the ideas to which he finds he must assent-those innate ideas which are clear and distinct-could have been created, and given to him, by the evil genius. This, I submit, is the lingering concern which carries the investigation of the truth of the principle of clarity and distinctness beyond the third and into the fourth meditation: Descartes has still to know the cause of his clear and distinct ideas.

The causal origin of the clear and distinct and its bearing on the truth of these ideas is investigated by Descartes in the last paragraph of the fourth meditation, in the portion of the passage which I have italicized below:

> …It seems to me that I have not gained little by this day's Meditation, since I have discovered the source of falsity and error. And certainly there can be no other source than that which I have explained; for as often as I restrain my will within the limits of my knowledge that it forms no judgment except on matters which are clearly and distinctly represented to it by the understanding, I can never be deceived; for every clear and distinct conception is without doubt something, and hence cannot derive its origin from what is nought, but must of necessity have God as its author - God, I say, who being supremely perfect, cannot be the cause of any error; and consequently we must conclude that such a conception is true. (M 79-80, my italics)

In the portion of the passage that I have italicized, we find his analytic demonstration or proof of the truth of the principle of clarity and distinctness, which I will now detail.



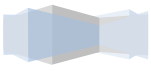
From the Replies to the Second Set of Objections, we learn that an analytic demonstration is designed to bring the attention to the point where all prejudices have been removed, so that the necessary connection between the relevant primary notions can be intuited: Descartes insists that its special value lies in the fact that if the reader follows the analytic demonstration, and attends sufficiently to it, it will appear as though the reader has discovered the particular matter on her/ his own. Our treatment of the analytic demonstration employed in the fourth meditation must accord with these points. The repugnancies and necessities which the demonstration reveals can only be appreciated by entertaining the very ideas of which the demonstration speaks, and apprehending intuitively the impossibilities and necessities. The demonstration is not a substitute for the intuition, nor can it be accepted without the intuition. As a result, the connections which the analytic demonstration is designed to point out do not follow as conclusions from the premises of the demonstration. To hold otherwise is to confuse 'analytic demonstration' with 'synthetic demonstration' - the method of proof in metaphysics with the method of proof in geometry.

When Descartes argues in the third meditation that God cannot be a deceiver, he does so by urging that the light of nature teaches us that "fraud and deception necessarily proceed from some defect" (M 72) Similarly, in the fourth meditation, he asserts that "in all fraud and deception some imperfection is to be found" (M 73) Accordingly, for a clear and distinct perception to be deceptive insofar as its causal origin is concerned, it would have to derive from some imperfect source. Therefore, when he uses the word 'nought' in his analytic demonstration of the truth of the clear and distinct ("for every clear and distinct conception is without doubt something, and hence cannot derive its origin from what is nought, but must of necessity have God as its author") we can take this to mean a cause which falls short of supreme perfection.

Assistance with understanding Descartes' analytic demonstration that all clear and distinct ideas must originate from God can be obtained by studying his analytic demonstration of his existence in the second meditation, inasmuch as the structure of all analytic demonstrations is consistent throughout. Here is the relevant passage in the second meditation, in which Descartes provides the two analytic demonstrations of his existence.

But I was persuaded that there was nothing in all the world…was I not then likewise that I did not exist? Not at all; of a surety I myself did exist since I persuaded myself of something. But there is some deceiver or other, very powerful and very cunning, whoever employs his ingenuity in deceiving me. Then without doubt I exist also if he deceives me, and let him deceive me as much as he will, he can never cause me to be nothing so long as I think that I am something. So that after having reflected well and carefully examined all things, we must come to the definite conclusion that this proposition: I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it. (M 51)

The analytic demonstration of his existence in the second meditation begins with some matter which he cannot doubt (that he was persuaded of something; that he was deceived), and his demonstration in the fourth meditation begins with what he also cannot doubt - 'that every clear and distinct conception is something [real]'. In the case of his existence, he then attempts to affirm in thought the matter which he cannot doubt (that he was persuaded about something; that he was deceived about something) and his non-existence; in the fourth meditation, we find him attempting to affirm that every clear and distinct conception is something real and that it arises from some imperfect cause. In both the second and fourth meditations, he finds a repugnancy between the ideas involved - being persuaded about something and non - existence, being deceived about something and non - existence, being real and coming from an imperfect source. In each case, he then concludes (intuits) that his initial thought is necessarily connected with the denial of the second: if he was persuaded of something then he must exist; if he was deceived about something then he must exist; if clear and distinct ideas are real then they must come from a



perfect source. Accordingly, in the case of the fourth meditation, he intuits that the clear and distinct is necessarily derived from God whom Descartes knows cannot be a deceiver. This, then, is Descartes' analytic demonstration of the truth of the principle of clarity and distinctness-a principle whose truth is known intuitively.

Descartes makes it clear that he has now reached the point in his inquiry where his healing can begin. Notice the following passage in the opening paragraph of the fifth meditation: "Now (after first noting what must be done or avoided, in order to arrive at a knowledge of the truth) my principal task is to endeavor to emerge from the state of doubt into which I have these last days fallen…(M 80). The healing begins by reassessing all of his clear and distinct ideas, particularly those involved in mathematics.

CONCLUSION

What my study reveals is that trauma and healing are phenomena which can take place in philosophers, such as René Descartes, whose attention is focused on areas not usually regarded as having an existential component, namely, metaphysics and epistemology. In the case of Descartes' Meditations on First Philosophy, the traumatic realization of failure in the search after truth is the driving force of the entire enterprise in seeking indubitability and certainty in the quest for truth.

My study also reveals that Descartes is adamant that the transition from trauma to healing must be performed by each of us. The Meditations on First Philosophy is autobiographical: it is an account of how Descartes' philosophical journey takes him from trauma to healing: this involves attending to the relevant innate ideas, e.g. the idea of the self as a thinking thing; the idea of God; and grasping the necessary connections and necessary repugnancies involved with these ideas. Merely reading about Descartes' philosophical journey from trauma to healing as described in the Meditations will not, by itself, convince the reader of Descartes' new found insights, nor will reading alone convince the reader of the necessary connections and repugnancies which Descartes discovers. The reader can only be convinced of Descartes' insights after all sensory prejudice has been eliminated (accomplished in the first meditation), and attending to the very same innate ideas and necessary connections and repugnancies which Descartes discovers in the second, third, and fourth meditations.

I suggest that this also helps to explain Descartes' impatience, and at times, rudeness, with many of those (e.g. Pierre Gassendi, Antoine Arnauld) who wrote to him with questions regarding his philosophy, as presented in the Meditations. Many who wrote to Descartes focus on arguments that he presents in the Meditations, but they have no understanding that these arguments are put forth in the context of his method of 'analysis', and as such are heuristic devises rather than logical arguments designed to clear the mind of sensory prejudice, with the aim of focusing the attention on the necessary connections and repugnancies between selected innate ideas, through which the first principles of human knowledge can be apprehended. This lack of understanding on the part of Descartes' critics is understandable, given that Descartes' explanation of the method of 'analysis' which he employs in the Meditations appears only in the Replies to the Second Set of Objections, and that most (or, perhaps, all) of the other critics who wrote to him had no familiarity with his explanation of the method of 'analysis'.

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