

KNOWING VS BECOMING II: The epistemology and ontology of learning.

We mentioned before that Descartes is going to be the starting point of this present essay. And that shall be.

Descartes initially arrived at only one principle/ part—I think—of his famous cogito. If thought cannot be separated from me, then, I exist. *Thinking* must only come from and happen in an *existing* subject. By this conclusion, Descartes poses another question which one can formulate as follows: “If I am sure I exist because I think, then, in what way? What form should my thinking be to lead to knowing that I exist?”.

One of the things Descartes doubted are human senses. We, as humans, cannot trust our sensations because we sometimes have illusions. The senses are unreliable: for if they fool us some of the time, they could be playing tricks on us all of the time (1985 [1641] cited in Dooremalen, De Regt, & Schouten, 2007, p. 65). By this conclusion, Descartes discards perceptions as reliable modes of investigation, admitting deduction the appropriate method.

Later, Descartes started investigating the relation between mind and body. The Cartesian dualism of mind and body embraced the idea that mind and body are distinct yet closely joined. For him, two substances are distinct when one can exist apart from the other. Descartes concludes he is both a thinking entity called the *res cogitans* and a physical entity with height, width and length called the *res extensa* (1985 [1641] cited in Dooremalen, De Regt, & Schouten, 2007, p. 67). The mind was for Descartes the most important and indivisible: “when I consider the mind, or myself in so far as I am merely a thinking thing, I am unable to distinguish any part within myself; I understand myself to be something quite single and complete”ⁱ.

Mind and body, thinking and perception are essential ideas in Descartes’ thought. We will continue with Descartes in our next essay. There is still a lot to say about his idea of mind and body and its implications to what we call *Learning*.

ⁱ David Cunniff (2014). *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes' Meditations*. Cambridge University Press. p. 280.

