

Murray Miles. *Insight and Inference: Descartes's Founding Principle and Modern Philosophy*. Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1998

Miles contends that Descartes believes that in the self-reflective, inferential, temporal, but non-discursive intuition that accompanies the *cogito*, one obtains certain knowledge of abstract metaphysical notions of thinking, freedom, truth, and God, of common notions such as duration and number, of extension and shapes, of eternal truths of logic and axioms of arithmetic, of metaphysical principles and laws of physics, and of the existence of oneself, God, and the external, material world (297-298, 351, *passim*). Thinking itself is consciousness, which is not an act, but the reflexive structure of thought on which acts of willing, sensing, understanding remembering, imagining, desiring, fearing, etc., supervene. This knowledge is direct by being pre-reflexively innate in the mind and is known immediately but non-temporally in the experience of the *cogito*. Consequently, there is no Cartesian circle, Descartes escapes the scepticism of the deceiving God and demon, and his metaphysics is a realism in which material things exist as they are and independently of being thought of. Our certain knowledge of the essence and existence of material things is based on our primary knowledge of the existence of God who creates everything including the eternal truths themselves. Descartes' revolution in philosophy, then, is the reversal of the order of knowledge, from Aristotle's philosophy of immanence that begins with empirical sensory experience of the material world from which universal principles are derived, to a Cartesian philosophy of transcendence that begins in self-reflexive experience in the mind with rational universal principles from which knowledge of the exterior, material world is gained. But Descartes is neither a representationalist nor an idealist. Although he knows God and the external world transcendent to his own mind by way of ideas, ideas do not represent things but are concepts and common notions of the simples, essences, and principles by which we understand everything including non-mental things in the external world. Descartes' position is a subjectivism because all knowledge begins in the subject's reflexive self-consciousness, but this knowledge is objectively of the world and independent of the knowing mind. Ideas implanted in our minds give us true knowledge of all mental and material things because the non-deceiving God created them and us. The transcendent, metaphysical origin of all knowledge is immanent in the thinking or consciousness of all human beings, but only those who meditate can free themselves from the prejudices and habits of ordinary life where sensible perceptions often overwhelm one.

Miles's deep reading of Descartes stands alongside those of Gueroult and Marion as necessary for all Cartesian scholars. His scrutiny of every occurrence of crucial words in Descartes's *corpus* is virtually exhaustive and his rectifications to support his interpretations are meticulous. Technically, his is a computer book. First, it exhibits his mastery of his files on his readings of Descartes. Second, this technology results in stultifying repetition that bludgeons the reader as argumentative and interpretive movements appear repetitively in chapter after chapter. A competent editor would have cut these 390 pages of text and 119 pages of footnotes by half.

Once it is started, there is no way to interrupt Miles's drive toward complete intuitive knowledge of everything in Descartes's dualistic universe in the *cogito* short of giving an alternative, equally exhausting interpretation of one's own. I interrupt on only two points. Miles insists on an ontological dualism of matter and mind consisting of one finite material universe and a multitude of minds, all finite except for the infinite mind of God. Yet Descartes clearly states that the essence of God is not thinking but necessary existence, and Miles has to tread on

tip-toes through those passages in which Descartes says that we are not capable of knowing God fully through our concepts. I argue that there are four Cartesian substances: matter, finite minds, God, and the mind/matter composite man. Finally, Miles's characterization of consciousness as the structure (not an act) of thinking is apt, but the question is how thinking can be a substance on par with matter. Descartes must say that thinking is a substance in order to avoid the inference from the empirical fact that bodily experience generates a considerable amount of the content of thought, to the materialist conclusion that material motions cause thought.

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