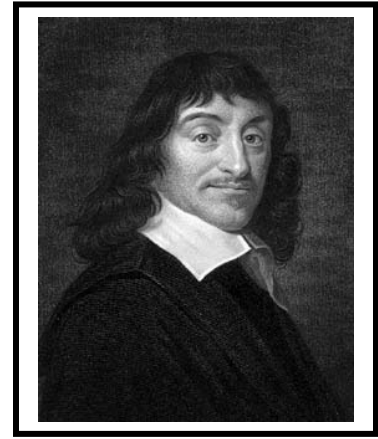


René Descartes (1596-1650)

The Latin phrase cogito ergo sum ("I think, therefore I am") is possibly the single best-known philosophical statement and is attributed to René Descartes. Cogito ergo sum is a translation of Descartes' original French statement, Je pense, donc, je suis.



The argument that is usually summarized as "cogito ergo sum" appears first in Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, where he attempts to build an entire philosophical system with no prior assumptions. He reasons that since all his beliefs have been derived from potentially misleading sense data or potentially fallacious logic, he can trust nothing that he has hitherto taken to be true. That is to say, he decides to systematically doubt all that could conceivably be doubted. He discovers the one thing that he cannot doubt is his own existence. After all, he claims, something nonexistent is incapable even of the act of doubting. Thus the formulation, "I think, therefore I am", was the starting point of his philosophy.

Although the ideas expressed in cogito ergo sum are most commonly associated with Descartes, they were present in many of his antecedents, especially Saint Augustine in *De Civitate Dei* (books XI, 26) who makes this argument, and anticipates modern refutations of it. See *Principia Philosophiae*, §7: "Ac proinde haec cognitio, ego cogito, ergo sum, est omnium prima et certissima etc." *From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.*

1 Rene Descartes: 'I think therefore I am'
2
3 ['I THINK, THEREFORE I AM' - DESCARTES - FROM DISCOURSE ON
4 METHOD]
5
6 I HAD long since remarked that in matters of conduct it is necessary sometimes
7 to follow opinions known to be uncertain, as if they were not subject to doubt;
8 but, because now I was desirous to devote myself to the search after truth, I
9 considered that I must do just the contrary, and reject as absolutely false every-
10 thing concerning which I could imagine the least doubt to exist.
11
12 Thus, because our senses sometimes deceive us, I would suppose that nothing is
13 such as they make us to imagine it; and because I was as likely to err as another
14 in reasoning, I rejected as false all the reasons which I had formerly accepted as
15 demonstrative; and finally, considering that all the thoughts we have when
16 awake can come to us also when we sleep without any of them being true, I
17 resolved to feign that everything which had ever entered my mind was no more
18 truth than the illusion of my dreams.
19
20 But I observed that, while I was thus resolved to feign that everything was false,
21 I who thought must of necessity be somewhat; and remarking this truth--I think,
22 therefore I am--was so firm and so assured that all the most extravagant
23 suppositions of the sceptics were unable to shake it, I judged that I could
24 unhesitatingly accept it as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking. I
25 could feign that there was no world, I could not feign that I did not exist. And I

1 judged that I might take it as a general rule that the things which we conceive
2 very clearly and very distinctly are all true, and that the only difficulty lies in
3 the way of discerning which those things are that we conceive distinctly.
4

5 After this, reflecting upon the fact that I doubted, and that consequently my
6 being was not quite perfected (for I saw that to know is a greater perfection than
7 to doubt), I bethought me to inquire whence I had learnt to think of something
8 more perfect than myself; and it was clear to me that this must come from some
9 nature which was in fact more perfect. For other things I could regard as
10 dependencies of my nature if they were real, and if they were not real they
11 might proceed from nothing--that is to say, they might exist in me by way of
12 defect.

13
14 But it could not be the same with the idea of a being more perfect than my own;
15 for to derive it from nothing was manifestly impossible; and because it is no less
16 repugnant that the more perfect should follow and depend upon the less perfect
17 than that something should come forth out of nothing. I could not derive it from
18 myself.

19
20 It remained, then, to conclude that it was put into me by a nature truly more
21 perfect than was I and possessing in itself all the perfections of what I could
22 form an idea--in a word, by God. To which I added that, since I knew some
23 perfections which I did not possess, I was not the only being who existed, but
24 that there must of necessity be some other being, more perfect, on whom I
25 depended, and from whom I had acquired all that I possessed; for if I had
26 existed alone and independent of all other, so that I had of myself all this little
27 whereby I participated in the Perfect Being, I should have been able to have in
28 myself all those other qualities which I knew myself to lack, and so to be
29 infinite, eternal, immutable, omniscient, almighty--in fine, to possess all the
30 perfections which I could observe in God.

31
32 PROPOSING to myself the geometer's subject matter, and then turning again to
33 examine my idea of a Perfect Being, I found that existence was comprehended
34 in that idea just as in the idea of a triangle is comprehended the notion that the
35 sum of its angles is equal to two right angles; and that consequently it is as
36 certain that God, this Perfect Being is or exists, as any geometrical
37 demonstration could be.

38
39 That there are many who persuade themselves that there is a difficulty in
40 knowing Him is due to the scholastic maxim that there is nothing in the
41 understanding which has not first been in the senses; where the ideas of God
42 and the soul have never been.

43
44 Than the existence of God all other things, even those which it seems to a man
45 extravagant to doubt, such as his having a body, are less certain. Nor is there
46 any reason sufficient to remove such doubt but such as presupposes the
47 existence of God. From His existence it follows that our ideas or notions, being
48 real things, and coming from God, cannot but be true in so far as they are clear

1 and distinct. In so far as they contain falsity, they are confused and obscure,
2 there is in them an element of mere negation (elles participant du neant); that is
3 to say, they are thus confused in us because we ourselves are not all perfect.
4 And it is evident that falsity or imperfection can no more come forth from God
5 than can perfection proceed from nothingness. But, did we not know that all
6 which is in us of the real and the true comes from a perfect and infinite being,
7 however clear and distinct our ideas might be, we should have no reason for
8 assurance that they possessed the final perfection--truth.

9
10 Reason instructs us that all our ideas must have some foundation of truth, for it
11 could not be that the All-Perfect and the All-True should otherwise have put
12 them into us; and because our reasonings are never so evident or so complete
13 when we sleep as when we wake, although sometimes during sleep our
14 imagination may be more vivid and positive, it also instructs us that such truth
15 as our thoughts have will be in our waking thoughts rather than in our dreams.

16
17 [WHY I DO NOT PUBLISH 'THE WORLD']

18
19 I HAVE always remained firm in my resolve to assume no other principle than
20 that which I have used to demonstrate the existence of God and of the soul, and
21 to receive nothing which did not seem to me clearer and more certain than the
22 demonstrations of the philosophers had seemed before; yet not only have I
23 found means of satisfying myself with regard to the principal difficulties which
24 are usually treated of in philosophy, but also I have remarked certain laws
25 which God has so established in nature, and of which He has implanted such
26 notions in our souls, that we cannot doubt that they are observed in all which
27 happens in the world.

28
29 The principal truths which flow from these I have tried to unfold in a treatise
30 (On the World, or on Light), which certain considerations prevent me from
31 publishing. This I concluded three years ago, and had begun to revise it for the
32 printer, when I learnt that certain persons to whom I defer had disapproved an
33 opinion on physics published a short time before by a certain person (Galileo,
34 condemned by the Roman Inquisition in 1633), in which opinion I had noticed
35 nothing prejudicial to religion; and this made me fear that there might be some
36 among my opinions in which I was mistaken.

37
38 I now believe that I ought to continue to write all the things which I judge of
39 importance, but ought in no wise to consent to their publication during my life.
40 For my experience of the objections which might be made forbids me to hope
41 for any profit from them. I have tried both friends and enemies, yet it has
42 seldom happened that they have offered any objection which I had not in some
43 measure foreseen; so that I have never, I may say, found a critic who did not
44 seem to be either less rigorous or less fair-minded than myself.

45
46 Whereupon I gladly take this opportunity to beg those who shall come after us
47 never to believe that the things which they are told come from me unless I have
48 divulged them myself; and I am in nowise astonished at the extravagances

1 attributed to those old philosophers whose writings have not come down to us.
2 They were the greatest minds of their time, but have been ill reported.

3
4 Why, I am sure that the most devoted of those who now follow Aristotle would
5 esteem themselves happy if they had as much knowledge of nature as he had,
6 even on the condition that they should never have more! They are like ivy,
7 which never mounts higher than the trees which support it, and which even
8 comes down again after it has attained their summit. So at least, it seems to me,
9 do they who, not content with knowing all that is explained by their author,
10 would find in him the solution also of many difficulties of which he says
11 nothing, and of which, perhaps, he never thought.

12
13 Yet their method of philosophising is very convenient for those who have but
14 middling minds, for the obscurity of the distinctions and principles which they
15 employ enables them to speak of all things as boldly as if they had knowledge
16 of them, and sustain all they have to say against the most subtle and skilful
17 without there being any means of convincing them; wherein they seem to me
18 like a blind man who, in order to fight on equal terms with a man who has his
19 sight, invites him into the depths of a cavern.

20
21 And I may say that it is to their interest that I should abstain from publishing the
22 principles of the philosophy which I employ, for so simple and so evident are
23 they that to publish them would be like opening windows into their caverns and
24 letting in the day. But if they prefer acquaintance with a little truth, and desire to
25 follow a plan like mine, there is no need for me to say to them any more in this
26 discourse than I have already said.

27
28 For if they are capable of passing beyond what I have done, much rather will
29 they be able to discover for themselves whatever I believe myself to have found
30 out; besides which, the practice which they will acquire in seeking out easy
31 things and thence passing to others which are more difficult, will stead them
32 better than all my instructions.

33
34 But if some of the matters spoken about at the beginning of the Dioptrics and
35 the Meteors [published with the Discourse on Method] should at first give
36 offence because I have called them 'suppositions,' and have shown no desire to
37 prove them, let the reader have patience to read the whole attentively, and I
38 have hope that he will be satisfied.

39
40 The time remaining to me I have resolved to employ in trying to acquire some
41 knowledge of nature, such that we may be able to draw from it more certain
42 rules for medicine than those which we possess. And I hereby declare that I
43 shall always hold myself more obliged to those by whose favour I enjoy my
44 leisure undisturbed than I should be to any who should offer me the most
45 esteemed employments in the world.

46
47 *from*
48 http://www.publicbookshelf.com/public_html/Outline_of_Great_Books_Volume_I/ithinkth_bga.html