



The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume II

René Descartes, John Cottingham (Translator), Robert Stoothoff (Translator), Dugald Murdoch (Translator)

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This edition features reliable, accessible translations; useful editorial materials; and a straightforward presentation of the Objections and Replies, including the objections from Ceterus, Arnauld, and Hobbes, accompanied by Descartes' replies, in their entirety. The letter serving as a reply to Gassendi--in which several of Descartes' associates present Gassendi's best arguments and Descartes' replies--conveys the highlights and important issues of their notoriously extended exchange. Roger Ariew's illuminating Introduction discusses the Meditations and the intellectual environment surrounding its reception.

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From Reader Review The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume II for online ebook

Tom says

This volume contains the Objections to Descartes' Meditations and his Replies, as well as a letter to a Father Dinet to complain about the author of the seventh set of objections. I find it fascinating that philosophical disputes at the dawn of modern philosophy were recorded so diligently by one of its founders. Even if the replies Descartes made to his critics aren't always convincing, this book is a testimony to the man's intellectual honesty.

The first, second, fourth, and sixth set of objections and replies are conducted with a high degree of courtesy and thoughtfulness. Even at this point, Descartes' critics were uncomfortable with both his proofs of the existence of God and his mind-body dualism. After set two, Descartes takes it on himself to put these on a more "geometrical" footing, but his axioms are far from what I'd call obviously true, or even obviously meaningful. Take for instance, "Whatever reality or perfection exists in a thing, exists formally or else eminently in its first and adequate cause." He certainly depends on something like this in his meditations, so perhaps it's best to look at this list of axioms as him really outlining what he realizes he's assuming more than a list of inarguable truths.

The third, fifth, and seventh set of objections are another thing altogether. In many ways, these three sections foreshadow the structure of discourse in internet communities. The third set were authored by Thomas Hobbes, who doesn't seem to understand what Descartes is actually saying, and receive a terse set of replies. This is not unlike arguments seen in comment sections when people bring up irrelevancies.

The fifth set, by Pierre Gassendi, is a little more substantial in its dispute over basic assumptions. I think Descartes comes off better in this set, but what's most notable is the sarcastic tone each takes against the other. Gassendi comments near the beginning that Descartes conceives of himself as a disembodied mind and addresses him "O, Mind" throughout his objections. Descartes responds by addressing Gassendi "O, Flesh." The discussion wraps up with each saying how much he actually admires the other, but Descartes can't resist the parting shot, "Among other things I rejoiced that such a long and carefully composed dissertation contained nothing in opposition to my reasoning, nothing opposed even to my conclusions, to which I was not able very easily to reply." This section reads, more than anything, like a well executed flame war. (It's also notable that there was a dispute between these two about how and when these should be published.)

I couldn't say that this was a good foreshadowing of internet-style conversation if there weren't an example of a drunk post. The seventh set covers this. (They are completely left out in another edition, by Jonathan Bennett, who notes, "The seventh set of objections is long, bad, and omitted.") The author of these objections, a Father Bourdin, essentially takes Descartes' hyperbolic doubt as the whole of his philosophy, and incessantly attacks that. The way he attacks it though, really makes him seem like he's intoxicated. He constantly throws in things like the following: "Well why do you say nothing ? do you retreat? I have not yet given up all hope. Follow me now. Hurrah! Courage!" or "Now your face beams. A new springtime of hope opens in it. My formula favours you, and so does the result which the formula creates. But note my sardonic laughter." Even Descartes at one point comments that his arguments are not unlike those of someone who'd been drinking (though he was talking about a particular point and not the overall style.)

As entertaining as I found all that, and I'm sure there are very few other readers who would share that sort of

amusement, I did find some value in the work as both historical record and a more thorough examination of Descartes' philosophy. [A final word of warning: I downloaded the copy I read from <https://archive.org/>. The OCR on the scanned copy was not the best.]

Craig Bolton says

"The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol. 2 (v. 2) by Rene Descartes (1967)"

JDP says

descartes is the greatest thinker of all time. this volume contains his masterpiece, the meditations, as well as the objections and replies to his brilliant opus. reading these works changed my life. i plan on spending the rest of my life studying the contents of this book.

David Haines says

This is a collection of the critiques that were advanced against Descartes philosophy, and of Descartes responses and reactions to these critiques. He gives many important precisions, and explanations.
