

Fernando Pessoa

## The true method of metaphysical examination...

The true method of metaphysical examination has been indicated to us by Descartes — the method of universal doubt.

This is so far the true metaphysical method that more recent philosophy has determined that, before we study metaphysics, we must first criticize human knowledge, perception and its limits and capabilities. Our first mental action, when we philosophize is, therefore, to shake off the tyrannous prejudice of custom, and, not less, the whole weight of knowledge which may seem most legitimately acquired, and may appear endowed with indubitable correctness.

While we thus doubt, however, one thing becomes clear to us, that we, to doubt and to think, must have existence: *Cogito, ergo sum* — I think, therefore I exist.

It is unfortunate that human language cannot furnish a better presentation of the reasoning. It would seem that «*Aliquid cogitat ergo sum*» — «ought thinks therefore I exist» should be better, but, as I have said, human [language] is unequal to reasoning.

Two things are put forth in this reasoning — the proof of the existence of the «ego» and the first of all categories — that of Being.

This reasoning moreover has that in it which it will be convenient to consider. When Descartes reasoned in this way up to the «ego» and the first of all categories — that of Being.

This reasoning moreover has that in it which it will be convenient to consider. When Descartes reasoned in this way up to the «ego» and thence proved the existence of himself, he seems to have forgotten that the principle of doubt might be further extended — namely to the *one* idea he did not criticize nor doubt — namely the idea of *existence* or of *Being*. It is a natural omission, for it is human to err. Hence it is that he says nothing of the meaning of the words «I exist», which, though commonly very comprehensible, are yet philosophically obscure.

Philosophy is all doubt, it is obstinate not to understand.

We can understand what Descartes meant, but his words are badly chosen. Let us attempt to correct them.

We are here at our wits end with all our logic and our grammar. For if we make the expression of Descartes into «*Aliquid cogitat, ergo sum*», (Ought ... exist) we produce no sense at all. If we supply what is needed, that the expression becomes: «*Aliquid, quod cogitat, ergo sum*», we are again guilty of the beforehand introduction of the «ego». Try as we will, the phrase never will yield, the «ego» in the first place cannot be eliminated. And from this lack of result the very highest result is obtained — namely the very finding of Descartes meaning in philosophical language. True, indeed; and the conclusion is this that the idea of the «Ego» is the very first of the human mind; Being the first category we find.

When, at the beginning of this treatise, I had to determine the «ego» by the argument of Descartes: «I think, therefore I exist», and when I say «I exist» the word *exist* has no explainable meaning apart from the one intangible in itself.

Existence has no real meaning to us except as an intuition. It is, as we shall find, however deep we think, an idea entirely primary, it is incapable of analyses, of decomposition — in other words it is a condition of knowledge. Nay more — it is the first condition of knowledge, as individuality, even in childhood unremembered, it is according by the first Category of all.

If to exist be to be conscious, then Descartes reasoning is but a *petitio principii*, since to be conscious is to think, after Descartes own acceptance, and he has it that to think is to exist.

But, as I shall prove, to exist is not to be conscious; existence requires neither time nor space: Being is *absolute*.

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