



A story influenced by the philosopher René Descartes



A remarkable journey awaited in the buzzing classroom, where inquisitive minds sought knowledge. The students embarked on an exciting journey known as "Classroom Time Travel" driven by their fascination with history. A mysterious entrance blended into the walls, ready to transport them back in time. The Philosopher, scientist and mathematician Rene Descartes is there to engage with the students and answer philosophical questions about philosophy, mathematics, and science. Three students, the philosopher and the teacher take part in the discussion. Before them, the students have different philosophical works by Descartes.

Teacher: Please take your seats. We are delighted to have the great philosopher Rene Descartes with us today. We will be discussing his philosophical works with him.

The children were already looking at the philosopher with curiosity and high expectations.

Teacher: Our guest today is called Rene Descartes, widely known as a philosopher, a scientist, and a mathematician. He is highly renowned for his contributions to philosophy and mathematics, and his pioneering work in developing analytic geometry. He is currently engaged in developing a new method for solving geometric problems



using algebraic equations. He has just finished the work “Rules for the Direction of the Mind” and is currently working on “Discourse on the Method.”

Feel free to ask whatever you'd like during the conversation. The discussion will be open.

Descartes: Good morning class. I am delighted to be here with you and thank Mr. Smith, for the invitation. I am confident that we will engage in a very creative dialogue. So, my friends, tell me, do you like science? How about math? Or, perhaps, you have an interest in philosophy?

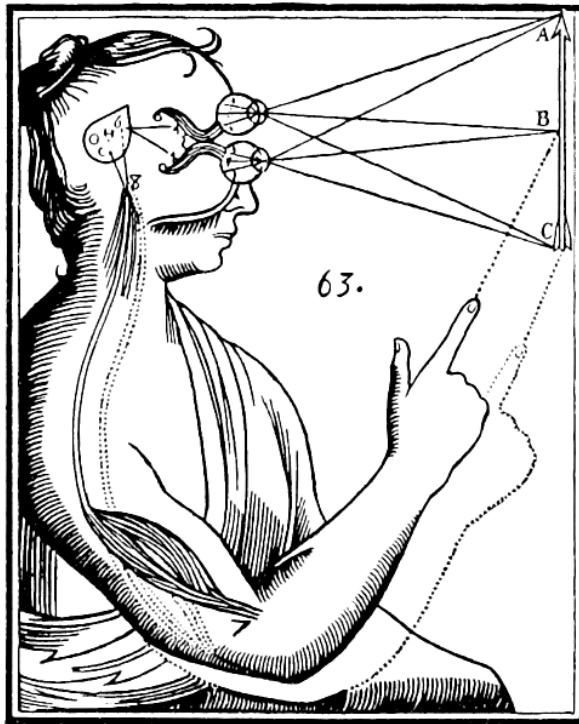
The hand of a student, who was usually the most fearless in the class, shot up in the audience.

Kate: I love math and for as long as I can remember, I have been solving equations. I still remember my first solutions, which were wrong, but as I grow older, I get better and better at it.

Descartes: That is very natural. It is good that you persisted in trying rather than giving up from a young age. So here we see that practice is a key to success. "As we grow, our minds also develop."

Joseph: Can you share a bit more about yourself?

Descartes: Of course. Well, my name is René Descartes. I was born on March 31st, 1596, in La Haye, a small place not far from Tours in France. I am a mathematician, scientist, and philosopher. I am often credited as being the “Father of Modern Philosophy” and that is because I was the first to break away from Scholastic Aristotelianism by forming the first modern version of the mind-body dualism as well as promoting the development of new science that was grounded in observation and experiment.



Maria: How was your childhood?

Descartes: My childhood was not easy. I was raised by my maternal grandmother in La Haye and then by my great-uncle in Châtellerault in the same area.

Kate: Did you receive any formal education?

Descartes: Sure, I did. In 1606 I was sent to Jesuit College at La Fleche, a school where young men were trained for careers in military engineering, the judiciary and government administration. In 1616, I took a law degree in Poitiers. After my studies, I travelled across northern and southern Europe during the period 1619-1628.

Joseph: What happened next?

Descartes: In 1667, the Roman Catholic Church placed my works on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, which is Latin for “Index of Prohibited Books”, since they considered me a Jesuit and papist, which was another way of saying atheist at the time.

Teacher: Dear students, would you also like to hear more about metaphysics?”

Students raise their hands enthusiastically.

Maria: So, what is your perspective regarding knowledge?

Descartes: That is an excellent question my friend. From my point of view, knowledge must be grounded in reason. If we can doubt certain information, it cannot be considered as perfect or complete knowledge.

Joseph: That’s interesting! What exactly do you want to prove through your work?

Descartes: Through my work titled “Meditations on First Philosophy”, I establish my metaphysical roots and attempt to prove the existence of God and the Immortality of the soul.

I set new epistemic foundations on the basis of intuition, expressing the famous phrase “*Cogito, ergo sum*” (I think, therefore I am).

Maria: Can you tell us more about this reasoning?



Descartes: Well, this famous reasoning was first expressed in my Second Meditation. Based on this reasoning, I developed a theory that the mind and body are distinct, and I promoted the development of new science grounded in observation and experiment.

Kate: But what is the theory based on?

Descartes: This theory, known as the “mind-body dualism”, was formulated in my work ‘Principles of Philosophy’, where I merged my physics with my metaphysics.

According to my theory, the mind is a mental, immaterial substance, while the body is a material, physical substance that is influenced by the human mind. I therefore believe that a human being is a union of the mind and body, which are two dissimilar substances that interact in the pineal gland. This leads me to believe that bodily actions “are the outcome of a reflex arc that is initiated through external stimuli”.

Source: “Illustration of the pain pathway in René Descartes' Traite de l'homme (Treatise of Man) 1664.” Source:



Wikimedia Commons

Descartes: Well, let's keep this simple...The mind's desire to raise the arm causes it to be raised. Getting hit on the arm by a hammer or touching fire, causes the mind to feel pain. In conclusion, the mind-body problem leads to a series of questions that can trigger your critical thinking in an attempt to find answers to these questions and even develop personal theories. For example, the mind-body problem raises the question of consciousness: “What is consciousness and how is it related to the mind and body?” as well as questions of the self: “What is the self? How is it related to the mind and body?”.

Kate: Do you think that this theory will be of any help to us, as students?

Descartes: Well, I think that studying this theory will enable you , to gain a deeper understanding of the theories of other philosophers who came after me. It will enable



you to perceive your surroundings from a different perspective and attempt to address existential questions.

Teacher: I'm sure we all have existential questions. I must admit that I am quite proud of you students and the interest you have shown today. Thank you for your time and precious help, Mr. Descartes, it was a pleasure having you!

Descartes: Thank you, Mr. Smith. I must admit you have a lot of bright students. The pleasure is mine!

Students stand up and say goodbye, bowing respectfully at Descartes. The concealed entrance, hidden within the walls, blended back into its surroundings, allowing the students to return to their classroom.