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Lisa Whitsett

This is an excellent annotated bibliography that does a thorough job of evaluating the selected texts, and that incorporates a wide range of evidence and close reading that has been successfully incorporated into the structure of your work. There's clear signposting throughout, & you make some very perceptive observations. In a few places there's room for expanding your arguments, but overall this is an excellent piece of work.

First marker: 76%
1st Dec. 2020

Taylor, C. C. W. *From the Beginning to Plato*. 2003. Routledge History of Philosophy; v.1. London; New York: Routledge.

Chapter six, "Anaxagoras and the atomists" by author C.C.W. Taylor (1997) explores

two of Anaxagoras' well-known theories. One theory is Anaxagoras' view of the physical world, sometimes referred to as the principle of everything in everything (EEP) (Drozdek, 2005). The other theory is Anaxagoras' concept of mind, or *nous* in Greek (Taylor, 1997). The scope of this bibliography includes analysis of Taylor's introduction and four main points of his essay focused on Anaxagoras' concept of mind.

In his introduction, Taylor proposes Anaxagoras "stands out from his sophistic contemporaries as a truly original thinker" (1997, 208). Taylor further describes Anaxagoras as one who sought radical transformation and who accepted a challenge to Eleatic logic "which had threatened the coherence of the cosmological enterprise" (1997, 208). In so saying, Taylor promotes the point of view that Anaxagoras positively contributed to the sophistic movement. Taylor does not counter his initial statements with divergent points of view nor does Taylor hint at disagreement about Anaxagoras' influence. Hence, Taylor sets expectations that he will generally present Anaxagoras' theories as significant and important.

Taylor unveils Anaxagoras' concept of mind by proclaiming how dissatisfied Socrates was with it as it theory. Others (Freeman, 1935; Newman, 2020; Patzia 2020) agree with Taylor's account. Taylor (1997) says that Socrates had wished for teleological explanations of existence, a gap in philosophies of the time. Patzia (2020) adds that Socrates desired not just "an account of how the cosmos originated (an efficient cause), but an explanation for why and for what purpose the cosmos was initiated (a final cause)". I do not question if Socrates was

disappointed. I agree that exploring Socrates' disappointment gives historical context for Anaxagoras' theories. However, I do question Taylor's placement and emphasis of this fact in the essay because of the result it produces. Opening the theatrical curtain with Socrates' disappointment is misaligned with Taylor's preceding introduction. Presenting the fact as Taylor does offers little to explain the theory and its value. Opening with this fact implies that Anaxagoras' contribution was disappointing overall, an implication with which I disagree.

Durham University philosophy professor Dr. Anna Marmodoro supports my view. Concerning Anaxagoras, she writes that "the originality of his thought and the uniqueness of his ontology in the history of philosophy make the questions it raises worth exploring and pursuing today" (p.403). Similarly, Patzia writes that Anaxagoras' concept of mind proposes explanations "for movement of the cosmos, something that prior cosmogonies did not provide" (2020). Still others have suggested that Anaxagoras even contributed to fields outside of philosophy. Former professor of neurology Dr. Stavros Baloyannis writes that Anaxagoras' theory of mind "was a strong initial step towards the harmonization of physical philosophy with metaphysics and an essential link between existential philosophy and theology" and offers an attempt "to link the real world with metaphysics, the substance with the energy, the Mind (nous) with the human existence and the universe..." (2017, 64). My revision to Taylor's essay would be to introduce Anaxagoras' theories in the context in which Taylor opened: that the theories had earned their reputation as philosophical innovations.

Many philosophers, including Taylor, understandably question what Anaxagoras meant by *mind*. Taylor asserts that Anaxagoras probably meant two things: a mind instantiated in different individual minds and a singular, cosmic mind. Taylor supports this assertion with

several paragraphs of evidence from Anaxagoras' fragment 12. Further, many interpreters, including Socrates (through Plato in Phaedo 97c) conclude the same as Taylor. With this evidence, I found Taylor's interpretation reasonable and useful.

Taylor says, however, that the link between the two concepts of mind is lacking. This

seems to be, from Taylor's perspective, a subset of Taylor's general grievance of Anaxagoras'

description of the cosmic mind overall. Taylor laments that Anaxagoras provides "scant

information on how the cosmic mind directs and organizes the cosmos" and nothing about "how

mind is supposed to organize" the development of plants and animals; Taylor says that

Anaxagoras says nothing about how "natural change, of whatever kind, is directed towards the

best" (2017, 219). It seems Taylor misses an opportunity to suggest what Anaxagoras' concept of

mind does contribute to philosophy, rather than what it does not. The former is more useful, and

certainly more expected, given Taylor's introductory statements. University of North Carolina

professor emeritus Dr. Shannon Dubose confirms this view; she evokes F. E. Cornford who holds

a similar view. Dubose writes, "If we wish to understand Anaxagoras, we should keep in mind

Cornford's admonition that Presocratic philosophy is concerned rather with definition than with

the causal ordering of phenomena, and examine the consequences of retaining mind in the

important position to which Anaxagoras assigned it" (1964, 50).

In one of his final paragraphs, Taylor asserts that likely, Anaxagoras believed the cosmic

mind to be a divine one. He supports this statement by summarizing Anaxagoras' fragment 12:

the mind's activity takes thought for everything, has the greatest power, and is controlling.

Taylor concludes that these statements are "irresistibly suggestive not only of traditional

divinities such as Zeus but also of the cosmic divinities of Anaxagoras' philosophical.

predecessors" (1997, 219). This seems unfounded and a mental leap I question. Recalling from UWTSD virtual lecture on November 6, 2020, Dr. Rebekah Humphreys underscored a key

contribution of presocratic philosophers like Anaxagoras, which was that natural events were no longer explained as acts of the gods. Newman supports this view when he writes that "One

fundamental point about Anaxagoras' theory of mind is that he nowhere in the extant material

identifies mind with a divine principle or god" (2020). With the latter evidence in mind, it seems uncharacteristic that Anaxagoras would suggest the cosmic mind is a divine one, and I therefore

disagree with Taylor's divinity-focused view of Anaxagoras.

In the end, Taylor's essay provides a general overview of core questions concerning

Anaxagoras' condensed concept of mind. For readers seeking a balanced account of Anaxagoras'

contributions, a nuanced discussion of *nous*, or an understanding of Anaxagoras' influence on

adjacent fields, I recommend referring to this bibliography's references instead.

An excellent review of Taylor's chapter. You present/tailed a analysis. Good use of secondary sources here, especially for such a short piece of work

Descartes, Rene. 1993. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Translated by Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.

At its broadest, Rene Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1993) reflects

influential theories about what can be known and how it can be known. This bibliography focuses on *Meditation One* of the six *Meditations*. *Meditation One* not only establishes a beginning to

Descartes' epistemological journey, but it demonstrates a critical underpinning of the

philosophical method of doubt, sometimes called Cartesian doubt. Newman (2019) writes that

"the ultimate aim of the method is constructive.... Descartes aims 'to reach certainty – to cast

aside the loose earth and sand so as to come upon rock or clay'" (2019). Particularly for learners

new to philosophy, *Meditation One* is a requisite starting point to gain exposure to this method.

As readers will quickly learn, the method employs possible skeptical scenarios in which one's

senses are systematically deceived (Alexander, 2017).

Even if readers have little explicit understanding of the methods behind Cartesian doubt,

readers are quickly introduced to examples of it when Descartes embarks on his quest for

"perfect knowledge" (Newman, 2019). This links to Descartes' insistence on seeking and finding

knowledge that was "...perceived clearly and distinctly" (Newman, 2019). Clear and distinct

knowledge, Descartes said, excluded things in the physical or corporeal world. This is so in part

because the physical world is perceived by sensory experience, the latter being characteristically

deceptive. At this point in *Meditation One*, Descartes introduces the first of his key premises in

the form of a doubt, which Newman (2019) calls the dreaming doubt. This is also the first

example of one of the skeptical scenarios to which Alexander referred. Descartes' dreaming

doubt centers on human states which Descartes observes seem very real to us. Descartes

says that while sleeping, it is difficult to tell if we are dreaming or if we are awake and that during such time "things seen during slumber are, as it were, like painted images in the likeness of true things" (1993, 15). Descartes seems to present two scenarios that denote his dreaming doubt. The first scenario is one in which he cannot tell if he is asleep or awake. The second scenario assumes he is asleep and dreaming. Both scenarios are meant to substantiate his ultimate point that sensory experience should be questioned when the search for perfect knowledge is at stake. I found both scenarios equally compelling arguments for mistrusting sensory experience, though in *Meditation One*, Descartes rejects scenario one in favor of scenario two.

Meditation One continues as Descartes further identifies those things which should be doubted. This leads him to acknowledge that he has long held an opinion about the existence of God "who is able to do anything" (1993, 15). From here, Descartes raises the evil genius doubt (1993). This doubt originates from Descartes' acknowledgement He wonders if God is responsible for falsely presenting the physical world to him. If that were the case, any knowledge he gained would be based on deceptive foundations, and therefore, should be doubted. He soon rejects this idea though, deciding that God is perfect and therefore, not deceptive. Instead, Descartes supposes an evil being, or an evil genius, could be responsible for the deception. Both the dreaming doubt and the evil genius doubt pave the way for Descartes' dismantling the foundation of sensory experience as a reliable source toward perfect knowledge. Taken together, I found Descartes doubling of sensory experience and his focus on perfect knowledge reminded me of the epistemic states of Plato's divided line (Pappas, 1995). Though not identical, Plato's and Descartes' theories share commonalities in their positions on false appearances and their

relationship to sensory experience. Based on class lecture with Dr. Rebekah Humphreys from November 2020 for instance, Plato's visible realm (parts C and D of his divided line) represents reflections and images. Gathered through the senses, reflections and images lead to opinion but not to knowledge. Both theories maintain the notion that only that accessed through reason, the intelligible realm, can result in knowledge. Also interesting, Descartes and Plato also have a more nuanced alignment concerning their views of mathematics. Initially, Descartes proclaims that disciplines like math and geometry are excluded from his concerns about the physical world. Descartes says, "For whether I am awake or asleep, two plus three make five, and a square does not have more than four sides" (1993, 15). Similarly, Plato's divided line categorizes math and geometry as within the intelligible realm and thus as knowledge. Upon deeper inspection of both theories, however, both Descartes and Plato provide a caveat. Descartes suggests that in fact, perhaps the evil genius deceives him into imagining that he is accurately performing math and geometry correctly. Similarly, though Plato considers math and geometry part of true knowledge, he nevertheless places them below the Forms (Pappas, 1995). This suggests that Plato, too, believes in a certain kind of perfect knowledge (to put it in Descartes' terms). Though the comparison between Plato and Descartes is far from fully formed in this bibliography, it was an interesting and unexpected comparison that ties together the history of the presocratic and more modern philosophers. The comparison further suggests how Descartes may have built on those preceding him.

Reading *Meditation One* seems a prerequisite to understanding a core principle of philosophical methods. Regardless of the extent to which a reader agrees with Descartes' reasoning, simply exposing oneself to such a reading is likely to underscore its philosophical

importance and value as part of surveying important philosophical works. Toward that end, I offer two suggestions for interested readers. One suggestion is that those who are non-believers in God may wish to temporarily suspend their non-belief just for the sake of processing Descartes' evil demon doubt. This same suggestion applies if readers wish to continue with the remaining meditations which dive much deeper into Descartes' belief in God. God plays a central role in Descartes process and conclusions. The second suggestion is to read some background material on Cartesian method prior to reading the first *Meditation*. I offer suggestions in this bibliography's reference section. Exploring such background before reading *Meditation One* may offer readers an even greater appreciation for, and better understanding of, Descartes' epistemological process.

Very good.

Descartes, Rene. 1993. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Translated by Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.

In Rene Descartes' *Meditation Two*, he famously proclaims "I am, I exist" (1993, 18). In

Latin, this roughly translates to *cogito ergo sum* and is commonly referred to as the cogito. The cogito is one of three of Descartes' premises from *Meditation Two*. First, Descartes reasons that

though he cannot know the physical world, he knows that he exists. Second, Descartes decides

that he is a thinking thing. Third, he reasons that his understanding of the physical world is

grasped by his mind and not by his senses. This bibliography summarizes these three premises in order and assesses premises and evaluates premises two and three. Regarding the cogito, I raise

questions as to its relationship with mind-body dualism.

Premise One: The Cogito

The first premise arises as Descartes puts considers his first item of knowledge. This

arises out of Descartes' method of doubt. By his very effort at thinking, all his thoughts may be

false or mistaken (Newman, 2020). As he continues his meditation, Descartes observes that

something, some entity, is having thoughts and asking questions. Considering that God could be instilling thoughts in him, he then notices that if something is being persuaded, then some *I* must

exist. He pauses here, however, because since he has discarded sensory experience and physical

properties, including his body, he is left to figure out if he can exist in spite of the separation. "Is

it then the case that I too do not exist?" (1993, 18). He considers that that the evil demon

(introduced in *Meditation One*) could be deceiving him into thinking that he exists. Quickly

though, Descartes decides that even if the latter is true, it supports the idea that he exists: even if

an evil demon is deceiving him, then *something* is being deceived. So long as that is true, and he

is thinking, then he will always be something. Taken together, this reasoning brings Descartes to proclaim, "I am, I exist" (1993, 18).

Understandably, a good deal of the literature analyzes the quality of Descartes' reasoning toward the cogito. Within it, I find Descartes' conclusion that even if an evil demon is deceiving him, then something is being deceived (and therefore, he exists), to be among his most clever argument. Perhaps more to the point, the concept neutralizes non-believers in God but avoids alienating believers. As discussed in class with Dr. Rebekah Humphreys in November 2020, it is highly likely that Descartes needed to consider the beliefs of readers and philosophers of the time and in some senses, placate them, if he was to popularize his points of view. That Descartes devotes his *Meditation Three* to exploring God's existence – and concluding the God does exist – supports this hypothesis. While the cogito is focused on a different conclusion, it relies on God and God-like premises to arrive at it. Atheists would quickly discount Descartes' emphasis on God in his arguments. Unfortunately for Descartes, without God, there is no evil demon, and without the evil demon trying to deceive him, Descartes has less support for his conclusion that he exists. However, Descartes cleverly nullifies non-believers' concern: "But why would I think that [God is the thinker], since I myself could perhaps be the author of these thoughts?" (1993, 18). Believer and non-believers, then, are more easily led to the same place: Descartes exists.

A question I raise in response to *Meditation Two* concerns the extent to which Descartes' cogito represents mind-body dualism or an immaterial mind. Despite Descartes' discussion of his existence without his body, some say that *Meditation Two* has been interpreted too literally. The Philosophy Classroom (2017) states that "Descartes does not, in the second *Meditation*, claim that the mind is an immaterial or non-physical thing; all he claims is that the existence which has

So far, his arguments on existence of God - i.e. his arguments not lead him to the cogito

been proved may not be associated with anything corporeal." Lex Newman, author of the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, writes that "Descartes rejects formulations presupposing the existence of a body commits him to no more than an epistemic distinction between the ideas of mind and body, but not (yet) an ontological distinction (as in mind-body dualism). In short, the intended epistemic success of the *cogito* does not presuppose any particular mind-body ontology" (2019).

Premise Two: I am a thinking thing.

Now that Descartes has concluded he exists, that he is, Descartes tries to understand what he is. He starts with what he used to think he was: a man or a rational animal. He abandons this proposition quickly believing it will lead him to more difficult questions. Instead, he acknowledges that off the top of his head, he would have described himself as a body. But now that he concedes that an evil being deceives him that he has a body, what is he? He makes his discovery in the realm of thinking. If he stopped thinking, then he would cease to exist. He concludes, "I am therefore precisely nothing but a thinking thing; that is, a mind, or intellect, or

understanding or reason" (1993, 19).

Descartes' reasoning for his second conclusion could be better supported. His conclusion that he is a thinking thing steps over one of his first questions he asks himself when he considers what he used to think he was before deciding he was a thinking thing. "Might I not say a 'rational animal'? No, because then I would have to inquire what 'animal' and 'rational' mean" (1993, 18). His justification for this dismissal is that it would not be fruitful, that it would only pose a more difficult set of issues, and that he does not have time to waste on it. I find these

statements to be out of character for Descartes. Further, they conflict with Descartes' method and

philosophical principles. Even more unexpected, he follows this dismissal with a request to focus on what came naturally into his thinking when he first asked himself the question. I was not able to determine from the writing how "rational animal" was a less spontaneous thought than his other ones. In that way, it seemed arbitrary.

Further research into this point reveals that in fact, Descartes had a rather well-developed view of the nature of animals and how they differ from humans. Evidence provided by *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* says that

In part five of the *Discourse on Method*... Descartes argues that if a machine were made with the outward appearance of some animal lacking reason, like a monkey, it would be indistinguishable from a real specimen of that animal found in nature. But if such a machine of a human being were made, it would be readily

distinguishable from a real human being due to its inability to use language.

Descartes' point is that the use of language is a sign of rationality and only things endowed with minds or souls are rational. Hence, it follows that no animal has an immaterial mind or soul.

So, while it is not clear if Descartes had other motivations for not wanting to delve

further into issues concerning animals and rationality, it is clear that he already had thought

about the subject having written the *Discourse on Method* in 1637, two years prior to writing the *Meditations*. Ulterior motives do not undermine his argument that he is a thinking thing, but it does raise a question as to what Descartes might have added or subtracted from his argument had

he allowed himself the time to do so.

Premise three: He can know his mind better than the physical world.

Descartes reflects on the nature of physical objects and of the sensible world through a

thought experiment. Considering a piece of wax held to a fire, he thinks about how the wax's

properties change as a result of the wax melting. He asks himself how he knows, despite the

change in the wax's smell, size, shape, and texture, that the substance is the same piece of wax

with which he started. He answers that by saying, "I do not grasp what this wax is through the

imagination; rather, I perceive it through the mind alone" (1993, 22). He adds that "it is utterly

impossible that, while I see or think I see... I who think am not something. Likewise, if I judge

that the wax exists from the fact that I touch it, the same outcome will again obtain, namely that I

exist" (22). As Charles Georgian summarizes in his video (2018), Descartes' experiment aligns

with his general position that all of our knowledge, including of the physical world, derives not

from our senses, but from our mind understanding and processing what we perceive. Descartes

takes this one step further to comment on how this relates to his surrounding external world.

"But what I note regarding the wax applies to everything else external to me" (23).

I find the wax thought experiment and his conclusions from it generally persuasive. The

more independent of sensory experience we become, the more certain we can be. In summary,

Descartes is saying that the physical world is harder known than his mind. However, Descartes

takes this one step further and concludes that attempts to perceive the physical world actually

reinforce the knowledge of his mind and namely, his existence. He says, "For there is not a

single consideration that can aid in my perception of the wax or of any other body that fails to

make even more manifest the nature of my mind" (1993, 23). This conclusion implies that

Descartes is assigning knowledge value to sensory experience, albeit indirectly. I find that doing

so violates his commitment to rationalism and to his method of doubt. For those reasons, I

disagree with that element of Descartes' conclusion.

One of the most interesting facets related to Descartes is his resulting reputation in the

field of philosophy. Owing in part to the significant recognition gained from Meditation Two

(and undoubtedly to his abundant contributions to philosophy), Descartes is often credited with

being the father of modern philosophy. *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2019) states

that "This title is justified due both to his break with the traditional Scholastic-Aristotelian

philosophy prevalent at his time and to his development and promotion of the new, mechanistic

sciences" (2019). In the spirit of constructive doubt, I raise the issue that not all agree that

Descartes' legacy is deserved. A powerful example comes from Dr. Christia Mercer, professor of

philosophy at Columbia University. The author of "Descartes is Not Our Father" published in the

New York Times in 2017, Mercer writes that "Descartes's contemporaries... would have been

stunned to hear these accomplishments credited to him. Although he was rightly famous in his

time for some of his scientific and mathematical ideas, many considered his philosophical

proposals about the radical difference between mind and body implausible and unoriginal." My

purpose in raising this debate is not to evaluate whether Descartes' deserves his place in history

or not. That is beyond the scope of this bibliography. However, I do suggest that constructively

questioning Descartes' reputation may actually illustrate some of his philosophical contributions.

That is, doubting Descartes' reputation using his own method seems a fitting conclusion to

Meditation Two's evaluation.

Very interesting
perhaps examples
of these many
do not give
provide examples

1 copy
good

Annotated Bibliography – Knowledge, Reason, and Reality

Dr. Rebekah Humphreys

Lisa Whitsett – November 27, 2020

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