

# Descartes or the origins of modern thinking

Ion CORDONEANU

“Dunărea de Jos” University of Galați

theosisro@yahoo.com

## Abstract

*Descartes is considered to be the founder of modern rationalism. This is a clear statement which, however, does not show the manner in which rationalism as such appeared in the history of science, taking into account the turmoil of the Renaissance centuries, the significance of the Reform and the birth of modern science. As a founder of a new metaphysics, Descartes, through his work, remains par excellence the case in which the scholastic and Renaissance aftermaths as well as the Reform mutations are mixed in a new synthesis that will be called modernity. This study focuses on reinterpreting Cartesianism from this perspective in the vast context of modernity's metaphysical significance – it is a hypothesis that will need to be developed not only by means of hermeneutical instruments but, especially, by means of those instruments belonging to the history of culture and anthropology.*

**Keywords:** *scholastics, Renaissance, Reform, metaphysics, censorship of the imaginary, subjectum, world image.*

## *The context*

“One cannot speak about Descartes’ absolute independence from his predecessors and from his time”, noted Constantin Noica in the first lines of *The Life and Philosophy of Rene Descartes*.<sup>1</sup> No thinker can be read ignoring the atmosphere he lived up in and without grasping the pattern and development of his thinking. On the other hand, one cannot talk about the “Descartes moment” within its historical framework without talking into account the very becoming and metamorphosis the Western thinking experienced. Therefore, who is Descartes and what is his place not only in the history of philosophy but, perhaps, especially in the history of science, literature, theology and other possible histories...?

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<sup>1</sup> Rene Descartes, *Two philosophical treatises* (Rules of guiding the mind, Meditations on first philosophy) (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1992), 9.

Several important events had happened before Descartes (1596-1650), starting with Columbus' discovery of America (1492) and ending with Kepler (1571-1630) and his three laws of planetary motion. In 1543, Copernicus wrote his treaty *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*, in which he substantiated the heliocentric theory. Giordano Bruno was burn at the stake in 1600, and in 1633, Galilei, the founder of the experimental method and of classical mechanics, uttered, though outside the inquisition court of law, the famous words "And yet it moves!" in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, on the basis of a catalogue of celestial bodies made by Tycho Brahe (1546-1601), the German astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) enounced the three laws that govern the planetary motions. It was still the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the bases of a new epistemology are laid through the cooperation, from that moment on, of mathematics with physics and through the transformation of physics into a science<sup>2</sup>.

At the age of eight, Descartes starts attending La Flèche – a Jesuit college where, although he would never be a religious spirit, he started to respect the Church. In *Discourse on the method* the philosopher himself makes a confession about what he learnt there: letters, Latin and Greek, eloquence, poetry. "I especially liked mathematics for the certainty and obviousness of its reasons..."<sup>3</sup> However, according to his own sayings, Descartes felt for the educational system, one that was essentially scholastic, on the one hand, *dissatisfaction*: "... as soon as I had finished these studies, after which you are considered one of the learned ones, I changed my opinion entirely. I was so overwhelmed with doubts and mistakes that it seemed to me I had not benefited at all in my attempt to train myself; the only result was the discovery of my own ignorance. Yet, I was in one of the most famous schools in Europe where I thought the real scholars were, if there is such a thing"<sup>4</sup>; on the other hand, Descartes manifests *curiosity for "strange sciences"*, those "sciences curieuses", known only to a few and which hide specific secrets: chemistry, a part of optics, several illusory sciences such as judiciary astrology, chiromancy, cabala, magic, etc. Descartes confesses in the same *Discourse*: "dissatisfied with the little that I was being taught, I also went through all studies regarding the strange and rare sciences that I could lay my

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<sup>2</sup> The Antiquity and The Middle Ages, starting from the Aristotelian philosophy, could not concieve, as Galilei did, to treat physical phenomen mathematically; there was clear distinction between mathematics and physics: mathematics studies ideal objects while physics studies the real ones.

<sup>3</sup> Alexandru Boboc, *Descartes și spiritul științific modern* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1990), 116.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, 115.

hands on”, sciences which the philosopher, a supporter of exactitude, frowns upon as they contradict the scientific rationality.

*Heir of the Middle Ages...*

In the preface of *Metaphysical Meditations*, Descartes addresses the *Dean and Doctors of the Sacred Faculty of Theology in Paris*, in which he submits this work to the judgment of theologians, wishing that they took it under their protection. The main reason for writing the *Meditations* was to supply the infidels, *by means of natural reasoning*, with evidence regarding two questions that are considered fundamental in metaphysics: the existence of God and the immortality of the Soul. When Descartes considers that the two questions, God and the Soul, are “the chief of those that ought to be demonstrated by philosophical rather than theological argument”, he admits a separation between the two fields, like Thomas of Aquino in whose opinion the existence of God and the immortality of the soul are essentially philosophical questions. Both Thomas and Descartes philosophize in a Christian way. From this point of view, E. Gilson does not hesitate to consider that Descartes does the work of a theologian<sup>7</sup>, because the *Meditations* abide by the requirements of a Council: “And as regards the soul, although many have considered that it is not easy to know its nature, and some have even dared to say that human reasons have convinced us that it would perish with the body, and that faith alone could believe the contrary, nevertheless, inasmuch as the Lateran Council held under Leo X (in the eighth session) condemns these tenets, and as Leo expressly ordains Christian philosophers to refute their arguments and to employ all their powers in making known the truth, I have ventured in this treatise to undertake the same task.”<sup>8</sup>

The connection between Descartes and the spirit of the mediaeval philosophy can be seen more clearly in the very title of the *Meditations*: *Meditations on the first philosophy*, in which the existence of God and the real difference between the soul and the body are demonstrated – *Meditationes de prima philosophia*. This *prima philosophia* is the niece of Aristotle’s metaphysics, of πρώτη φιλοσοφία. “Aristotle’s theory was embraced in the Middle Ages in a totally determining manner. This «mediaeval» Aristotle was exposed during the late scholastics through the Spanish philosophical schools, especially through the Jesuit Suarez, to a comprehensive interpretation. Descartes receives his first and fundamental philosophical education with the Jesuits, in La Flèche. Both of these

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<sup>7</sup> Etienne Gilson, *Filosofia în Evul Mediu* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995), 701.

<sup>8</sup> Descartes, *Meditații metafizice* (Bucharest: Crater, 1997), 5.

facts are expressed in the title of his main work, i.e. the controversy with this tradition and the will of asking again the question regarding the *Sein* of *Seiendes*, the thingness of the thing, the substance.”<sup>9</sup> According to Heidegger, Descartes is tributary to the mediaeval scholastics and uses its terminology.<sup>10</sup>

... annoyed by the Renaissance...

How did the modern paradigm appear in science? Or, more precisely, *when*? In order to re-contextualize the Cartesian philosophy, I take the perspective presented by Ioan Petru Culianu in *Eros și magie în Renaștere* (Eros and magic in the Renaissance): “modern science steps in precisely when *there was no need for it*.”<sup>11</sup> According to Culianu, the appearance of modern science looks very much like the natural selection of species; it is the result of the complex interaction of the ideological forces. To put it differently, pure science does not exist. There is science that is dependent on people with interests in society; a science that reflects human history. The most suitable metaphor to describe the birth of modern science is, in Culianu’s opinion, the condition of an insect – the aptera fly: “...our modern scientific spirit was born like an aptera fly which, amidst the historic turmoil of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, was lucky to go unnoticed and not be eliminated by the merciless natural selection. The latter hit the Renaissance sciences so hard that they lost all chances of ever getting back”.<sup>12</sup>

The Renaissance sciences? Those that made Descartes curious – *les sciences curieuses*, the strange and rare sciences, the false doctrines about which Descartes says: “I already knew their worth to let myself deceived neither by the promises of an alchemist, nor the predictions of an astrologist, nor the imposture of a magician, nor the fireworks or boastfulness of those who claim that they know more than they do”.<sup>13</sup> We are dealing here with what was called, using a formula belonging to Gaston Bachelard, “epistemological break”. In defining science, Descartes starts from the premise that what has been done before him was, in fact, a *pseudo-*

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Timpul imaginii lumii* (Bucharest: Paideea, 1998), 143.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Ființă și timp* (Bucharest: Jurnalul literar, 1994), 43. At the beginning of the *Discourse about the method* we find *găsim*: “I follow the opinion shared by philosophers who claim that there are differences only between *accidents* and under no circumstances between the *forms or natures of individuals* belonging to the same *species*” (see Alexandru Boboc, *op. cit.*, 114). Scholastically speaking, *nature* means realization, *accidents* are determinations that do are not related to the essence of the species; the “form” defines *species*, “accidents” are related to the *individual*. It is worth noticing the fact that, according to Gilson, by “philosophers” Descartes refers to scholastics.

<sup>11</sup> Ioan Petru Culianu, *Eros și magie în Renaștere. 1484* (Bucharest: Nemira, 1994), 252.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, 253.

<sup>13</sup> Descartes, *Discurs despre metodă*, in Boboc, *Descartes și spiritul științific modern*, 117.

*science*. The true science did not exist yet. Along this line of thoughts, defining science through the break with the past represents a positivist defining of science which consists of disqualifying the “non-science” before it.<sup>14</sup> This remark that is drawn from the factual-descriptive history of science is somehow imprecise because it starts from an unverifiable hypothesis, therefore purely speculative, an expression of the progressionist, rationalist, scientist prejudices – that of the existence of a special canon of scientificity, of certain vectors that express the interests of the *scientific* spirit. All these could be expressed like this: “...science always stands against the obstacle represented by the opinion, an obstacle defined by Bachelard as a quasi-anthropological datum. During the most lyrical moments, the fight between science and opinion becomes a confrontation between the *interests of life* (to which the opinion is subscribed) and the *interests of the spirit* (the vectors of science)”<sup>15</sup>.

Here we have to revisit the question of *how* modern science appeared in history. Descartes already *knew* the value of pseudo-sciences “not to be deceived *anymore*” by their promises. The philosopher was, therefore, familiarized, back then and outside the official doctrine of the Catholic Church, with the scientific canon of the Renaissance – a society which displays only a few symptoms of decadence. What precisely determined Descartes to repudiate “les sciences curieuses”? Because, according to Culianu, “the hypothesis that the Renaissance sciences had no use value must be removed. It is nothing but an a posteriori explanation of the transformation of the scientific spirit and, as such, void of any verisimilarity”.<sup>16</sup>

However, under the circumstances of the Counter-reform, no science of the Renaissance is tolerated anymore. The epistemological break appears by mutation, whose explanation resides in the censorship of the imaginary: the witch hunt unleashed in Western Europe; Giordano Bruno burned at stake as a result of a trial in which he had been accused of witchcraft; Galileo Galilei threatened just because he was a supporter of Pythagorean ideas; Newton, later on, had to silent his esoteric and occult research, becoming thus a coryphaeus of scientific rationalism. Descartes himself was suspected of sympathy for the Rosicrucian hoax.<sup>17</sup> He knew *pseudo-sciences* (*pseudo* only for the theologians’ ears) and was not deceived by them *anymore*. This was only four years after Galilei had uttered “Eppur si

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<sup>14</sup> Isabelle Stengers, *Inventarea științelor moderne* (Iași: Polirom, 2001), 28-29.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, 29.

<sup>16</sup> Culianu, *Eros și magie în Renaștere*, 252.

<sup>17</sup> The authors of the rosicrucian manifestos place the death of Christian Rosenkreunz in 1484, and the date of the discovery of his tomb, in 1604 – the interval between two conjunctions

muove!” The echo of these words was still hovering in the world of “scientists” and Descartes was able to hear it very clearly...

Nonetheless, resulting from the censorship of the imaginary, the faculty of imagining atrophies, and this phenomenon led to an increased interest in observing the material world in the most rigorous, quantitative terms; hence, the so precise, mathematic nature of the Cartesian method. Modern science is, therefore, the product of a mutation of the imaginary and not the result of an evolution from the irrational to the rational.

*... and the creator of a new metaphysics*

In this context, *ego cogito* is nothing more but a way of camouflaging or some remnant of the Renaissance wearing the coat of the new method, respectively, science. Therefore, what does *ego cogito* become from the perspective of the imaginary and its censorship? Although the books dedicated to the Reform mention, rather superficially, that this shift should have happened *within* the Catholic Church, this detail is too lightly ignored. Culianu – because he still is the starting point of our research – states that the Reform did not manifest as a liberal movement, but as a radical-conservatory one within the Church, aiming at re-establishing the *Christian order*. From this perspective, the Reform “*had reduced to the minimum the external forms, in order to concentrate upon the intimate religious experience*”<sup>18</sup> (With Descartes, in *Metaphysical meditations*, the place of mystical contemplation is taken by intellectual meditation). This attitude defines the iconoclastic nature of the movement which had as a major goal, among others, the removal of idol worshiping from the Church. Iconoclasm acts not only upon the external images, but perhaps primarily upon the internal ones, the phantasms which are in fact idols conceived by the internal sense. Unlike the culture of the Renaissance – a culture of the imaginary by excellence, the Reform manifests itself as an ideological movement whose main task is to implement the *radical censorship of the imaginary*. “Establishing the idolatrous, unlawful character of phantasms, the Reform instantly abolishes the culture of the Renaissance”<sup>19</sup>; that culture which believed that the phantasms had a power of their own and that the internal sense is, par excellence, the place where the trans-natural forces (gods and demons) manifest. If the Imaginary is “the great denominator that rallies all the procedures of human thought” or an “anthropological crossroads” (Gilbert Durand, *The anthropological structures of*

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<sup>18</sup> Culiianu, *Eros și magie în Renaștere*, 265.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, 267.

*the imaginary*), then, with Descartes, the structures of this remnant imaginary are camouflaged: the divinities and imaginary beings are hidden in *ego cogito*, and out of the fantastic/phantasmal constructs we are left with the abstract images of the pure numbers governed by the universal science – mathematics.

*What does the new metaphysics look like?*

Martin Heidegger, in *Timpul imaginii lumii (Die Zeit des Weltbildes)* – a text which is as important for a re-interpretation of modern thinking as Culianu’s research, reaches a number of very interesting theses for this attempt of re-interpreting an author who is considered the founder of modern philosophy.

Heidegger claims that for the first time, along with Descartes’ metaphysics, the *Sein* is determined as objectification of representation and the truth as a certainty of representation. This is possible due to the transformation of man’s essence in general: man becomes *subject*, i.e. *υποκειμενον*, which, as foundation, gathers everything in himself. This means that “man becomes that *Seiendes* which is the foundation of all *Seiendes* in his *Sein*’s manner and truth. Man becomes a way of relating to *Seiendes* as such”,<sup>20</sup> while *Seiendes* in its entirety – the world – becomes image. Heidegger notices the fact that the age in which man becomes *subjectum* accomplishes an objectivism comparable with the change of paradigm; this happens, as we have seen, due to the censorship of the imaginary and the increased interest for the material world.

Censorship with Descartes is so drastic that the material things and the world in its complexity are reduced to surface and their mathematical expression.

What does it mean when one says that the world becomes an image? To have an image about the world means two things: (i) the world, *Seiendes* in its entirety, is represented and (ii) it is in front of us as a system. *The world is conceived as an image*: the image of the world does not express an image about the world, but the fact that *Seiendes* comes to be understood in as representation. In fact, the world understood as representation and man as *subjectum* represent the one and the same process. To represent means to place something in front of you, to produce the stable as such and to relate to it – this is *cogitans*, in which Descartes includes *voluntas, affectus, actiones, and passiones*. The certainty lies in the foundation of the *subjectum* which is *ego cogitans*, but it is not something subjective or selfish; it is for each ego, taken individually. “To be subjective becomes now the privilege of

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<sup>20</sup> Heidegger, *Timpul imaginii lumii (Die Zeit des Weltbildes)*, 46.

man as a thinking-representing essence”<sup>21</sup> – this is Heidegger’s translation of what Descartes expresses at the beginning of his *Discourse*:

*Reason is the best organized thing; everyone believes he/she is so well endowed that even those who are hard to please in any concern do not wish to have more than they do. It is impossible for everybody to be wrong; this proves the ability to think clearly and to distinguish the truth from the false, i.e. what we call common sense or reason is normally the same in all people; the diversity of opinions is not due the fact that some are wiser than others, but to the fact that thinking takes different paths and we are not referring to the same things.*<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, *if the world is an image, a representation*, we are dealing with a camouflage of what the Reform wanted to eliminate: the imaginary. The “Cartesian imaginary” lacks neither the Renaissance *demon* which makes its presence felt and cannot be ignored (“I will believe that the sky, the air, the earth, the colors, the shapes, the sounds and all the external things that we see are nothing but deceiving illusions which it uses to abuse my credulity”<sup>23</sup>), nor the *dream* (“I happened many times to dream at night that I am in this place, dressed, by the stove [...] there are no conclusive clues, nor signs clear enough by means of which one could distinguish wake from sleep; I am completely amazed”<sup>24</sup>). We should notice, nevertheless, that these two are not taken here as they would have been in the Renaissance; here, they only constitute two methodological hypotheses used to discover *ego cogitum*. They are actually discredited, along with imagination itself, for being obstacles in the path of an authentic knowledge – the leitmotifs belong to the Renaissance while the interpretation belongs to the Reform.

The world is a phantasm of the subject, and the *cogito* is its *pneuma* (spirit). The camouflaging of imaginary in the Cartesian philosophy results in mutation. One can see here the reflection of Culianu’s idea that modernity is “a secularized appendix of the reform”.<sup>25</sup>

*What does the world of Descartes look like? “From the closed world to the infinite universe”...*

... is the title of Alexandre Koyre’s book, which studies the fascinating history of the idea of universe in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, XVI-XVII, where

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, 67.

<sup>22</sup> *Discourse about the method*, 113-114.

<sup>23</sup> Descartes, *Metaphysical meditations*, 33.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, 29.

<sup>25</sup> Culianu, *Eros și magie în Renaștere*, 304.



Descartes is, along Kepler, Newton and Leibniz, one of the protagonists of a debate which led to the change of perspective: the journey that leads from the closed world of Antiquity to the open world of modernity was covered at a surprising speed: only one hundred years separate Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* (1543) from Descartes' *Principia Philosophiae* (1644); and just 40 years separate these *Principles* from Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687).

We did not mention Nicolaus Cusanus, the last philosopher of the Middle Ages and the first to reject the mediaeval conception on Cosmos. Descartes himself thought that Cusanus and many other scholars presupposed that the world was infinite, without ever being scolded by the Church for that; on the contrary, it is believed that conferring such greatness to God's work means to honor him in the most suitable way. Therefore, Cusanus, a forerunner of Copernicus and Kepler, is quoted by Descartes as defender of the world's infinity. However, against the objection that infinity may be attributed to God only – spiritual and non-corporeal being, both Cusanus and Descartes will avoid defining their worlds as “infinite”, preferring the notions of “unfinished” or “indefinite”.

Descartes' world is mathematic, rigorously uniform, the world of reified geometry which contains only matter and motion/movement. Due to identifying surface and space with matter, in Descartes' conception: 1) *vacuum is essentially impossible* and 2) *the finiteness and limitation of space and matter are rejected*.

For Koyré, the idea of *infinity* (Descartes prefers the term *indefinite*) is the basis of Cartesian philosophy: “God can be conceived only as an absolutely infinite being; his existence can be proven only as such and the human nature itself can be defined only through this idea – that being that is given the idea of infinity by God”.<sup>26</sup>

### *... and the Cartesian God*

Because he guarantees the truth of our clear and distinct ideas, Descartes' God is *Deus verax* – the epistemological principle. In accordance with the mediaeval tradition, Descartes believes that God, as pure spirit, is outside the material world. He will renew Anselm's demonstration, substituting the concept of infinite being with the Anselmian meaning of being, something in relation to which one cannot conceive anything bigger. For Descartes, God exists by virtue of “the superabundance of his essence” – this allows him to be his own cause (*causa*

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<sup>26</sup> Alexandre Koyré, *De la lumea închisă la universul infinit* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1997), 85.

*sui*) and to give existence by himself – infinity implies being and it cannot be attributed to the creature.

One of the forms of the Cartesian ontological argument is: 1. Anything we perceive clearly and distinctly about something is true; 2. We perceive clearly and distinctly that the conceiving of an absolutely perfect being requires the existence of that Being a) because it is impossible to conceive an absolutely perfect Being who is lacking something; b) but if the absolutely perfect Being does not exist, then he/she is lacking something: existence; c) it clearly results that the concept of an absolutely perfect Being requires his existence; 3. This is why it is true that an absolutely perfect Being cannot lack existence (i.e. he must exist). Descartes warns that this argument applies only to a necessary or an absolutely perfect Being. Only a necessary Being cannot be conceived as non-existing. It is necessary to conceive God as a necessary being because only God is the Being whose essence requires His existence.

The *Discourse about the method*, where the ontological argument is formulated, represents, according to theologian Christos Yannaras, “the ultimate experience of the West’ attempt to confirm God’s existence in a rational-demonstrative manner”<sup>27</sup>. God’s existence is confirmed through conceiving the idea of God as perfect being; therefore, His existence will be included in the idea the same way the idea of triangle includes the truth that the sum of triangles is equal to two straight angles. In demonstrating God’s existence, Descartes remains faithful to scholastics, whose concept about God is “a product of that cognitive *autarki* that is given to our subject by reason, ratio, beyond or outside any experience of the real or life, which is always a relational experience”<sup>28</sup>.

#### *What we inherit from Descartes*

Beyond the Cartesian philosophy and its specific ideas, beyond problems and answers, modernity kept one *teaching* from Descartes’ work: reason is the highest authority, not prejudices or tradition. Cartesian rationalism has an edifying dimension.<sup>32</sup> Starting from this, late modernity initiates the criticism of modern philosophy where the “Cartesian anxiety” – which refers to the epistemological variety of the existential anguish and whose main feature is the uncertainty regarding the legitimacy of our convictions – “is cured not by a rational foundation of the convictions that we embrace but by accepting human fallibility and the

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<sup>27</sup> Christos Yannaras, *Heidegger și Areopagitul* (Bucharest: Anastasia, 1996), 11.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> Radu Neculau, *Filosofii terapeutice ale modernității târzii* (Iași: Polirom, 2001), 12.

contingency of our projects”.<sup>33</sup> The Cartesian anxiety can be overcome by adopting a practical philosophy which, implicitly, has therapeutic functions as well. From this perspective, Rorty, Gadamer and Habermas are those who suggest abandoning the theory of knowledge understood as representation (theory which originates in Cartesianism and reaches its peak in Kant’s philosophy) in favor of hermeneutics, of a critical and pragmatic approach.

*Why did Descartes die? An ironic closure*

John Nash, the mad mathematician who believed he was a Russian agent in the movie “A Beautiful Mind”, is a Cartesian ... He solves mathematical problems but he cannot solve his own problem: he is haunted by phantasms, everything for him is as real as possible. The old Cartesian question resurfaces: how to distinguish wake from sleep, phantasms from reality. He accepts he is schizophrenic when he realizes that his phantasms do not grow old. Unlike Descartes, who does not find any difference between the two structures, the real one and the imaginary one, John Nash places time between them.

John Nash is a failed Cartesian: through temporality, he cannot be faithful to mathematics; the latter is ideal, not temporal. Nevertheless, he still does not understand his condition, his phantasms keep visiting him, talking to him and he still believes that he is facing a mathematical problem without solution. He cannot conceive the fact that there are problems which cannot be solved, that there are ideas which cannot be demonstrated. Before getting married, he asks his girlfriend for a *love* proof, some “verifiable data” but she asks him:

*“How big is the universe?”*

*“Infinite.”*

*“How do you know?”*

*“I know because all the data indicate this evidence...”*

*“... But they haven’t proven yet.”*

*“No.”*

*“They haven’t seen it yet.”*

*“No.”*

*“Then, how do you know for sure?”*

*“I don’t know, just believe it.”*

*“Hmmm, the same with love I guess...”*

Admitting he is mad, he believes he is facing a mathematical problem: “This is what I do, solve problems...all I need to do is to plan my mind.” Doesn’t it sound familiar? Descartes’ entire method is meant to discipline the mind: accept as *evident*

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<sup>33</sup> Neculau, *Filosofii terapeutice*, 13.

only *clear* and *distinct* things. But, Professor Nash, things are not just *clear* and *distinct* at all, the truth is not always *manifest*. The psychiatrist tells him he has no way out because he is caught in the trap of his own mind – the latter is the problem without solution. Man thinks he can get out of this immense trap by making the mind work. By what means? Of course, the means of the mind – this is how we are back in the trap...it is true that man needs *time* but not to fix the mechanism, which is the mind, but to make his phantasms bearable. Eventually, he understands that he can live only by ignoring his demons. Descartes made the world a phantasm, doubting even, or perhaps especially, the data gathered by the senses. How do we know, though, if *ego cogito* is not a phantasm too? Ultimately, the very mind becomes a problem. Descartes needs a warrant of truth – God – in order to be able to *reconstruct* the world, but this warrant of truth is still a phantasm of the mind...

There is still the question *how can we escape this immense trap?* The answer to Descartes' philosophic schizophrenia is to be found in "A Beautiful Mind": *the only certainty is love. This is the fulcrum of the entire reality.*

Mathematics shows in this scenario its illusory nature. Yes, yes, be surprised! It was uttered by a mad professor of mathematics in front of an audience who came to listen to a Nobel Prize awardee. Precisely due to this, it could not be addressed to the entire audience but only to the person who made this revelation possible:

*I've always believed in numbers and the equations and logics that lead to reason. But after a lifetime of such pursuits, I ask "What truly is logic?", "Who decides reason?" My quest has taken me through the physical, the metaphysical, the delusional – and back. And I have made the most important discovery of my career, the most important discovery of my life: It is only in the mysterious equations of love that any logic or reasons can be found.*

*I'm only here tonight because of you [to his wife, Alicia]. You are the reason I am. You are all my reasons. Thank you.*

Unlike John Nash, who survived due to his love for a woman, Descartes – without revelation – died because of a woman who, ironically, was passionate about mathematics.

John Nash failed in Cartesianism but survived and received the Nobel Prize. Descartes was read at this time by a considerable number of women but he became famous only after death. To be ironic, I would not be surprised to find out sometime that the French philosopher was a Russian agent who died mad in the trap of his own *mathesis universalis*. Mathematics cannot free us from our demons. On the contrary, it might feed them even more, make them even more real.

One thing is certain: not mathematics is the one that saves; on the contrary, it may kill. Between failure and death, John Nash chose failure and I think that happened because the Nobel Prize is not awarded for mathematics...

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