

Descartes Winter

by Rebecca Bynum



Oftentimes I mark time by what I'm reading and I remember time that way. Milton Spring, the year of Donne, Byron Autumn and now my Descartes Winter.

In *Meditations* he makes the argument for the reality of mind using illustrations from mathematics, arguing that the structure of mathematics is a part of the structure of mind, [just as is language](#).

Consider the triangle. The sum of its angles is always equal

to two right angles. A relation of the sides of any right triangle will always be expressed in the $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ formula. These properties are eternal truths. They exist completely independently of man. They have existed before man ever was. Man did not invent geometric proofs, nor can he manipulate or change them.

Though the symbols of mathematics and the words of language are cultural inventions, the underlying structure is not. Consider also the mathematical properties of the elements.

Man is the only self-reflective animal. No other animal ponders what should have been or contemplates what should be. Man is conscious of being conscious, therefore he experiences a higher level of mind/spirit existence – he is uniquely able to rise above himself and examine his own mind. How does he do this without partaking, at least in part, of something higher? This “something” may be termed higher mind or perhaps may be thought of as the mind/spirit nexus, where value comes into play – the realm of ought. Thus man rises above the animal kingdom.

All of this seems so simple and self-evident that it is disconcerting that our supposedly great minds continue to be engaged in the effort to reduce man to a level below animal – to that of a will-less machine – explaining nothing.