

## Tongue in Cheek Philosophy

As a philosophy student, I hoped I would learn the wisdom of the ages. The term is supposed to mean the love of wisdom. But the field doesn't do that. Instead, it seeks knowledge, reality, and existence. All my young life I never questioned reality as it surrounded me, and likewise, I never questioned my existence. I constantly was acquiring knowledge and expected to continue to do so even absent the study of philosophy. Maybe I'd signed up for the wrong course. Is it wise to question my own existence? Am I to deal with someone else's reality? I already have my own. That reality seemed sufficient. People who struggle to find their next meal or seek shelter from the storm don't have time for such questions. These are things pondered by folks with too much time on their hands. Since we would all prefer to have too much time on our hands than to constantly struggle to meet our biological needs, perhaps the study of philosophy is to be desired.

Did my study of philosophy help me find wisdom? I'll let you be the judge. What they taught was eye-opening. Not for the worlds that the study opened up for me, but for the introspective worlds the philosophers plumbed. These giants of human thought felt they needed to prove they existed. They spent a great deal of time on that question. Is this all some artifice that we inhabit and not something real? Those folks looking for something to eat never had to worry about that question. If they didn't find food, they would cease to exist and that was proof enough that they currently existed. Ah, but we are philosophers now and we must dig deeper. And so, we come to Rene Descartes and his "I think therefore I am." So, if we have to think about it, that means we exist? I go with existence as an a priori position. Philosophers like the term a priori. It means I can skip this question and move on to the next question. It means I accept my existence without question. But in the age of scientific or rational philosophy, we need a proof. My proof is, "I stink, therefore, I am." Take that, Rene.

Let's break down my proof. If I stink, that means I have an odor. An odor is something that can be sensed. If something is sensed, then a sentient being of some sort is doing the sensing. That being has recognized my reality independent of my speaking or even being seen. I am acknowledged. I am validated. I have not spoken words that might be misconstrued or even not understood. I am a presence to be dealt with. You will likely be repelled. Maybe you are weird and are attracted to the odor. Either way, you react to my presence and that validates my being. I am in your reality. I may or may not be in my own reality. If I am mentally incompetent, then I may seem lacking in a reality of my own, or perhaps be seen as having an alternative reality. Either way, I am validated as real. So, you see, this philosophy stuff is just so much bad air.

I am struck by the similarity between poets and philosophers. Both seek deeper meaning, and both seek to use elevated language. Both seem connected to a sphere

of human existence that transcends normal thought or conversation. When both express themselves, they do so with words that mere mortals find imponderable. What did he say? What does that mean? Can somebody translate that into a language I can understand? Is it any wonder that both are most frequently relegated to academia? There they can question their existence all day long. They can write essays on the matter and drive students to distraction. Let us continue to play philosopher and parse our words.

Back to Descartes. We've dealt with his "I think." Now let's disassemble his "I am." Where have we heard that one before? Think back to your Bible lessons. Moses asks God who shall I say sent me. God tells Moses, "I am." Yep. "I am" was the name that God says he goes by. Or is it she goes by? Either, or neither. The point is when Descartes says therefore I am, is he saying that by thinking he is God? Is he saying God is thought? These are the kinds of questions you learn to ask when you study philosophy. Here's a thought for you. Is this the pathway to wisdom? Or is this just people playing with words, twisting their meaning to score points and show how clever they are? Such games are called sophistry. That is pretty close to philosophy. Aren't you glad you signed up for this course?

Rene Descartes is not claiming to be God. He was a Catholic and would be appalled that anyone would suggest such a thing. He might appreciate the wordplay if he had a sense of humor. It is hard to tell if philosophers have a sense of humor as their language is so dense that any jokes get lost in the erudition. If your philosophy professor has a problem with your proof of existence being, "I stink, therefore I am", just stop bathing and it in the front row. In a week or two, your proof will be as plain as the nose on everyone's face. You can tell that this essay wasn't written by artificial intelligence. It is experience based in ways that computers lack. It is based on common scents.

Submitted by Bob Rietschel, March 28, 2023

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