

# Phil. 401: Discussion Questions

## Bacon and Descartes

February 23rd, 2017

### New Readings:

- *Rules for Direction of the Mind*. Rule 4. Lines 371-374. In R. Descartes. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Ed. by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch. Vol. 1. Cambridge University Press, 1984. Vol. 1.
- *Principles*. Part I. Articles 1-9 and 71-74. In Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 1. Pages 193-195 and 218-222
- *Discourse on method*. Part II. In Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Vol. 1. Pages 126-132.

### Readings from Previous Classes: Bacon. *Novum Organon*.

- Book I. Aphorisms 1-3, 14-15, 19, 31, 39-44, 50, 70, 100-103.
- Book II. Aphorisms 1, 11-13 (you may skim the long lists), 18, and 20.

### Baconian Methodology

1. Compare your answers to the following question from the reading assignment. Then pick the best answer among your group, and try to improve that answer by providing further examples of what might belong in a table of instances, a table of nearby absences, and a table of comparisons for the phenomenon under discussion.
  - In no more than two paragraphs, explain what Bacon means by constructing tables of instances, tables of nearby absences, and tables of comparisons. Here, you should illustrate your claims using an example. Because Bacon explains how to construct these tables to discover the nature of heat, you may not use heat as your example.
2. Bacon uses his tables to make an inference about what heat is; he calls this the “first harvest” of his method. What is Bacon’s conclusion?

## Bacon vs. Descartes

1. Bacon recommends avoiding reliance on authority and on the word of others. Instead, he emphasizes the value of direct experience. Experimenters in the modern period, however, often relied on others. In which texts that we've studied have you seen such reliance? How was that reliance similar to and different from the reliance on authority and testimony criticized by Bacon?
2. Given what you've read, what attitude do you think Descartes would recommend to have towards testimony and philosophical authority, and why?
3. Review your answer to the following question from the reading assignment:
  - In *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes summarizes several sources of erroneous beliefs. Describe three sources, and give your own (concrete) example of each type.
4. In Articles 71-74 of Part I of his *Principles*, Descartes describes several sources of false beliefs. Compare and contrast Descartes' sources with Bacon's idols. What sources of error do both discuss? What sources of error are discussed by one philosopher and not the other? Which sources are most important for each, and why?
5. Review your answer to the following question from the reading assignment:
  - In your own words, describe what Descartes means by a "method" in his *Rules for Direction of the Mind*.
6. In *Rules for Direction of the Mind*, Descartes describes the importance of a "method" for discovering truths. Would Bacon's method of constructing tables count as a method for Descartes? If so, why? If not, why not?