1. What is Descartes trying to achieve?

Is Descartes a philosopher or a mathematician or a scientist?

YES. Descartes’ project in philosophy is to provide a secure foundation for scientific knowledge based on mathematics.

Descartes aims to show:
- that I have knowledge
- that my knowledge includes:
  - my existence (and my nature)
  - God’s existence (and God’s nature)
  - Maths
  - Physical world
- Some of my knowledge is more secure than the rest
  - Knowledge of my mind > Knowledge of my body
  - Knowledge that God exists > Knowledge of physical world
  - Knowledge of maths > Knowledge of physical world
- Reason is a better source of knowledge than the senses
- Reason is essential for all knowledge, even knowledge that comes from the senses

Descartes is a rationalist, not an empiricist.

2. What is Descartes’ Method of Doubt?

1. Remove all beliefs which can (reasonably) be doubted. (Meditation 1)
2. Find beliefs that cannot (reasonably) be doubted. (Meditation 2)
3. Build knowledge on these undoubtable beliefs. (Meditations 3 to 6)

Descartes is a foundationalist, not a coherentist.

Descartes’ Scepticism.
- Begins with senses.
- Aims to discredit senses – at least in comparison with reason.
- Only provisional – overall aim is to defeat scepticism.

Dreaming Argument, Evil Demon Argument, Virtual Reality Argument – all have a common structure:

1. I believe that P. (eg: I have a body, 2+2=4)
2. I might be dreaming (deceived by ED, in the Matrix, etc.)
3. If I am dreaming (or ...), then P is false.
4. Therefore: P might be false. (Follows from 2 and 3)
5. Therefore: I don’t know P. (Because I can’t know something that might turn out to be false)
Dreaming Argument – aimed at ordinary sense beliefs
Evil Demon Argument – aimed at all beliefs

3. **What are Descartes’ aims in the Cogito?**

1. Find something that cannot be doubted.
2. Provide a foundation for all knowledge.
3. Establish the distinction between mind and body.
4. Establish the superiority of mind over body.
   a. My mind (not my body) is the real me.
   b. My mind is a more reliable source of knowledge than my body.

Questions for the Cogito.
1. What is it that I cannot doubt? (Descartes’ Answer = I am a thing that thinks.)
2. Why can’t I doubt it? (Why can’t the Evil Demon deceive me about this?)
   (Descartes’ Answer = Because I ‘clearly and distinctly’ see that it must be true.)
3. How do I use it as a foundation for other knowledge? (Descartes’ Answer = By asking why it is that what I see ‘clearly and distinctly’ cannot be false.)

4. **Descartes and God.**

1. Why can’t I doubt that God exists?
2. How does knowing that God exists give me knowledge of other things?

**Descartes’ Argument for the existence of God.**
1. I have an idea of God.
2. Only God could be the source of this idea.
3. Therefore, I know that God exists.

Crucial Premise is 2. Descartes’ argument for it is based on this principle:

**The Causal Principle:** The cause of an idea must be at least as perfect as the idea itself.

**Implications of the Causal Principle:**
- I cannot have invented this idea for myself.
- The Evil Demon cannot have invented this idea either. (Because a deceiving ‘God’ is less perfect than a non-deceiving one.)
- Nothing less perfect that God could have created the idea of God.
- If the idea of God exists (anywhere), then God must exist.

For all my other knowledge, the critical fact is that God is benevolent.
- God will not deceive me.
- My ‘clear and distinct’ ideas are God’s way of guiding me to reliable knowledge.