

Meditations on First Philosophy

Rene Descartes

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**SUMMARY**

The Meditator reflects that he has often found himself to be mistaken with regard to matters that he formerly thought were certain, and resolves to sweep away all his pre-conceptions, rebuilding his knowledge from the ground up, and accepting as true only those claims which are absolutely certain. All he had previously thought he knew came to him through the senses. Through a process of methodological doubt, he withdraws completely from the senses. At any moment he could be dreaming, or his senses could be deceived either by God or by some evil demon, so he concludes that he cannot trust his senses about anything.

Ultimately, however, he realizes that he cannot doubt his own existence. In order to doubt or to think, there must be someone doing the doubting or thinking. Deceived as he may be about other things, he cannot help but conclude that he exists. Since his existence follows from the fact that he is thinking, he concludes that he knows at least that he is a thing that thinks. He further reasons that he comes to know this fact by means of his intellect, and that the mind is far better known to him than the body.

The Meditator's certainty as to his own existence comes through a clear and distinct perception. He wonders what else he might be able to know by means of this sure method. In order to be certain that his clear and distinct perceptions are indubitable, however, he first needs to assure himself that God exists and is not deceiving him. He reasons that the idea of God in his mind cannot be created by him since it is far more perfect than he is. Only a being as perfect as God could cause an idea so perfect. Thus, the Meditator concludes, God does exist. And because he is perfect, he would not deceive the Meditator about anything. Error arises not because the Meditator is deceived but because the will often passes judgment on matters that the limited intellect does not understand clearly and distinctly.

Secure in the knowledge that his clear and distinct perceptions are guaranteed by God, the Meditator investigates material things. He clearly and distinctly perceives that the primary attribute of body is extension and that the primary qualities of body are size, shape, breadth, etc. He also derives a second proof for the existence of God from the fact that, while bodies are essentially extended, God is essentially existent. A God that does not exist is as inconceivable as a body that is not extended.

Because the essence of body is extension and the essence of mind is thought, the Meditator concludes that the two are completely distinct. He decides also that while he can clearly and distinctly perceive the primary qualities of material things, he has only a confused and obscure perception of secondary qualities. This is because the senses are meant to help him get around in the world, not to lead him to the truth.

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René Descartes (1596 - 1650) was born near Tours, in France, and was educated for nine years at a Jesuit college. After graduating with a law degree from Poitiers at the age of twenty-two, he traveled about Europe, developing a passion for mathematics and philosophy. He spent most of his life after 1628 in Holland, and published in philosophy, physics, mathematics, and other sciences. In mathematics, he invented analytic geometry and the coordinate system that bears his name ("Cartesian"). He also prepared some significant works in physics, which he withdrew from publication upon discovering that his contemporary, Galileo, had been condemned by the Inquisition for teaching that the earth rotates around the sun, a theory that Descartes also supported. His great achievement, however, is the *Meditations*, published in 1641, and generally considered the starting point for modern Western philosophy. It was widely read and discussed even in Descartes' day. In 1649, Descartes accepted an appointment as tutor for Queen Christina of Sweden. She demanded that her lessons take place at five o'clock in the morning, and the strain of rising early coupled with the unbearable cold of Sweden gave Descartes pneumonia and killed him within a year.

Descartes was writing at a time when a new physics was being developed by Galileo and others. This new physics could be understood as a mathematization of nature. Galileo and others began understanding the processes of movement and change in the universe as being formalized in a small number of mathematical relationships. This led to an understanding of the universe as being governed by a very few, simple, abstract, mathematical principles. The metaphysics developed in the *Meditations* is meant to serve as an underpinning for the new physics being developed at the time. Descartes saw his reason-based and mathematically-inclined metaphysics as providing all the foundations necessary to develop his own physical principles.

Descartes was also writing at a time when Catholic philosophy inherited from Aristotle had a tremendous influence. Descartes himself was raised in the Jesuit tradition, and the *Meditations* in many ways resemble St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. Both are framed in a meditational form meant to span six days' meditation. Descartes also imitates Loyola's three stages of purgation (skeptical doubt), illumination (proof of the existence of the self, of God), and union (linking this knowledge to the material world). In imitating Loyola's style, and opening the *Meditations* with a very Aristotelian outlook, Descartes hoped to seduce the conservative thinkers of his day into following his line of reasoning. After having witnessed Galileo's fate, he had every reason to be cautious. This method also makes Descartes far more accessible to the largely Jesuit audience that he is addressing.

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

Mediator—The narrative voice of the *Meditations*. In the *Meditations*, the Mediator is left gender-neutral. The opinions expressed in the *Meditations* are no doubt Descartes' opinions, and it is significant that he writes in meditational form with a distinct and carefully chosen voice. (The style and narrative are imitative of the Jesuit founder Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*.) The voice is not that of Descartes so much as it is the voice of guidance to lead the reader through the *Meditations*.

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OVERALL ANALYSIS AND THEMES

The *Meditations* are generally considered the starting point of modern Western philosophy, and with good reason. In this one brief text, Descartes turns many Aristotelian doctrines upside down and frames many of the questions that are still being debated in philosophy today. Among other things, Descartes breaks down the Aristotelian notion that all knowledge comes via the senses and that mental states must in some way resemble what they are about. In so doing, he develops an entirely new conception of mind, matter, ideas, and a great deal else besides.

We might understand the philosophical outlook that Descartes develops to be marked and defined by the skepticism he employs in the First Meditation. He begins by asking how he can be certain of anything and then develops all sorts of inventive and outlandish reasons as to why he ought to mistrust his senses. Philosophy ever since has been marked a constant skepticism toward knowledge claims, and the very question of how we can come to know anything with certainty has been much debated.

Skepticism also informs the mind-body problem which has come to define our conception of the human mind. Descartes develops a conception of the mind where the senses and the imagination are also mental faculties. Further, he argues that we are essentially thinking things that can know our minds clearly and distinctly, but must work much harder to come to an understanding of our bodies. Most important, he draws a very sharp distinction between mind and body. Mind is essentially thinking and body is essentially extended, so the two have nothing at all in common. Ever since, philosophers have striven to understand how mind and body can interact and relate with one another.

Skepticism and mind-body dualism have combined to create an understanding of the human mind as being locked away inside a body and separated off from the world. How this mind can come to know anything at all about the world is a mystery, and the certainty of this knowledge is sharply questioned. This conception of mind is so natural to us that it is sometimes difficult to understand that the pre-Cartesian world had a far less skeptical outlook toward knowledge and sensory perception.

Descartes locates himself firmly in the rationalist camp, as opposed to the empiricism of Aristotle or his contemporary, John Locke. He constantly asserts that the clear and distinct perceptions of the intellect are the only sure means of securing knowledge, and ultimately concludes that the senses are not designed to give us knowledge at all, but are rather meant to help us move through the world in a very practical way.

While we can trace Descartes' tremendous importance and influence to the development of mind-body dualism and modern skepticism, he has also provided a number of other seeds for debate. The Cartesian Circle, the Wax Argument, and Descartes' theories of ideas,

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of body, and of perception are all important matters for discussion. His proofs for the existence of God, however, are not original, nor are they very successful. Descartes makes a fascinating subject for study since we can see a modern worldview emerging as he writes.

**SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS****First Meditation: skeptical doubts****Summary**

The First Meditation, subtitled "What can be called into doubt," opens with the Meditator reflecting on the number of falsehoods he has believed during his life and on the subsequent faultiness of the body of knowledge he has built up from these falsehoods. He has resolved to sweep away all he thinks he knows and to start again from the foundations, building up his knowledge once more on more certain grounds. He has seated himself alone, by the fire, free of all worries so that he can demolish his former opinions with care.

The Meditator reasons that he need only find some reason to doubt his present opinions in order to prompt him to seek sturdier foundations for his knowledge. Rather than doubt every one of his opinions individually, he reasons that he might cast them all into doubt if he can doubt the foundations and basic principles upon which his opinions are founded.

Everything that the Meditator has accepted as most true he has come to learn from or through his senses. He acknowledges that sometimes the senses can deceive, but only with respect to objects that are very small or far away, and that our sensory knowledge on the whole is quite sturdy. The Meditator acknowledges that insane people might be more deceived, but that he is clearly not one of them and needn't worry himself about that.

However, the Meditator realizes that he is often convinced when he is dreaming that he is sensing real objects. He feels certain that he is awake and sitting by the fire, but reflects that often he has dreamed this very sort of thing and been wholly convinced by it. Though his present sensations may be dream images, he suggests that even dream images are drawn from waking experience, much like paintings in that respect. Even when a painter creates an imaginary creature, like a mermaid, the composite parts are drawn from real things—women and fish, in the case of a mermaid. And even when a painter creates something entirely new, at least the colors in the painting are drawn from real experience. Thus, the Meditator concludes, though he can doubt composite things, he cannot doubt the simple and universal parts from which they are constructed like shape, quantity, size, time, etc. While we can doubt studies based on composite things, like medicine, astronomy, or physics, he concludes that we cannot doubt studies based on simple things, like arithmetic and geometry.

On further reflection, the Meditator realizes that even simple things can be doubted. Omnipotent God could make even our conception of mathematics false. One might argue that God is supremely good and would not lead him to believe falsely all these things. But

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by this reasoning we should think that God would not deceive her with regard to anything, and yet this is clearly not true. If we suppose there is no God, then there is even greater likelihood of being deceived, since our imperfect senses would not have been created by a perfect being.

The Meditator finds it almost impossible to keep his habitual opinions and assumptions out of her head, try as he might. He resolves to pretend that these opinions are totally false and imaginary in order to counter-balance his habitual way of thinking. He supposes that not God, but some evil demon has committed itself to deceiving him so that everything he thinks he knows is false. By doubting everything, he can at least be sure not to be misled into falsehood by this demon.

Analysis

The First Meditation is usually approached in one of two ways. First, it can be read as setting the ground for the meditations that follow, where doubt is employed as a powerful tool against Aristotelian philosophy. Second, it can, and often is, read standing on its own as the foundation of modern skepticism. We will briefly discuss these complementary readings in turn.

Descartes saw his *Meditations* as providing the metaphysical underpinning of his new physics. Like Galileo, he sought to overturn two-thousand-year-old prejudices injected into the Western tradition by Aristotle. The Aristotelian thought of Descartes' day placed a great weight on the testimony of the senses, suggesting that all knowledge comes from the senses. The Meditator's suggestion that all her most certain knowledge comes from the senses is meant to appeal directly to the Aristotelian philosophers who will be reading the *Meditations*. The motivation, then, behind the First Meditation is to start in a position the Aristotelian philosophers would agree with and then, subtly, to seduce them away from it. Descartes is aware of how revolutionary his ideas are, and must pay lip service to the orthodox opinions of the day in order to be heeded.

Reading the First Meditation as an effort to coax Aristotelians away from their customary opinions allows us to read different interpretations into the different stages of doubt. For instance, there is some debate as to whether Descartes intended his famous "Dream Argument" to suggest the universal possibility of dreaming—that though there is waking experience, I can never know which moments are dreams and which are waking—or the possibility of a universal dream—that my whole life is a dream and that there is no waking world. If we read Descartes as suggesting the universal possibility of dreaming, we can explain an important distinction between the Dream Argument and the later "Evil Demon Argument." The latter suggests that all we know is false and that we cannot trust the senses one bit. The Dream Argument, if meant to suggest the universal possibility of dreaming, suggests only that the senses are not always and wholly reliable. The Dream Argument questions

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Aristotelian epistemology, while the Evil Demon Argument does away with it altogether. The "Painter's Analogy," which draws on the Dream Argument, concludes that mathematics and other purely cerebral studies are far more certain than astronomy or physics, which is an important step away from the Aristotelian reliance on the senses and toward Cartesian rationalism.

The *Meditations* can be seen to follow the model of St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. The first step in the Jesuit exercises is to purge oneself of one's attachment to the material, sinful world. In the First Meditation, Descartes leads us through a similar purgation, though with a different purpose. Here he wants to persuade his Aristotelian readers to purge themselves of their prejudices. He also hopes to lead the mind away from the senses that are so heavily relied upon by the Aristotelians. In the meditations that follow, he will argue that our most certain knowledge comes from the mind unaided by the senses. Lastly, this process of radical doubt will hopefully rule out any doubts from the positive claims Descartes will build up in the next five meditations. Read in the wider context of the *Meditations*, these skeptical doubts are a means to the end of preparing a resistant audience to the metaphysics Descartes plans to build.

Read on its own, the First Meditation can be seen as presenting skeptical doubts as a subject of study in their own right. Certainly, skepticism is a much discussed and hotly debated topic in philosophy, even today. Descartes was the first to raise the mystifying question of how we can claim to know with certainty anything about the world around us. The idea is not that these doubts are probable, but that their possibility can never be entirely ruled out. And if we can never be certain, how can we claim to know anything? Skepticism cuts straight to the heart of the Western philosophical enterprise and its attempt to provide a certain foundation for our knowledge and understanding of the world. It can even be pushed so far as to be read as a challenge to our very notion of rationality.

No one actually lives skepticism—no one actually doubts whether other people really exist—but it is very difficult to justify a dismissal of skepticism. Western philosophy since Descartes has been largely marked and motivated by an effort to overcome this problem. Particularly interesting responses can be found in Hume, Kant, and Wittgenstein.

We should note that Descartes' doubt is a methodological and rational doubt. That is, the Meditator is not just doubting everything at random, but is providing solid reasons for his doubt at each stage. For instance, she rejects the possibility that she might be mad, since that would undercut the rationality that motivates his doubt. Descartes is trying to set up this doubt within a rational framework, and needs to maintain a claim to rationality for his arguments to proceed.

Second Meditation, Part 1: *cogito ergo sum* and *sum res cogitans*

Summary

The Second Meditation is subtitled "The nature of the human mind, and how it is better known than the body" and takes place the day after the First Meditation. The Meditator is firm in his resolve to continue his search for certainty and to discard as false anything that is open to the slightest doubt. He recalls Archimedes' famous saying that he could shift the entire earth given one immovable point: similarly, he hopes to achieve great things if he can be certain of just one thing. Recalling the previous meditation, he supposes that what he sees does not exist, that his memory is faulty, that he has no senses and no body, that extension, movement and place are mistaken notions. Perhaps, he remarks, the only certain thing remaining is that there is no certainty.

Then, he wonders, is not he, the source of these meditations, not something? He has conceded that he has no senses and no body, but does that mean he cannot exist either? He has also noted that the physical world does not exist, which might also seem to imply his nonexistence. And yet to have these doubts, he must exist. For an evil demon to mislead him in all these insidious ways, he must exist in order to be misled. There must be an "I" that can doubt, be deceived, and so on. He formulates the famous *cogito* argument, saying: "So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind."

The Meditator's next question, then, is what this "I" that exists is. He initially thought that he had a soul, by means of which he was nourished, moved, could sense and think; and also that he had a body. All these attributes have been cast into doubt, except one: he cannot doubt that he thinks. He may exist without any other of the above attributes, but he cannot exist if he does not think. Further, he only exists as long as he is thinking. Therefore, thought above all else is inseparable from being. The Meditator concludes that, in the strict sense, he is only a thing that thinks.

Analysis

The *cogito* argument is so called because of its Latin formulation in the *Discourse on Method*: "*cogito ergo sum*" ("I think, therefore I am"). This is possibly the most famous single line in all of philosophy, and is generally considered the starting point for modern Western philosophy. In it, the Meditator finds his first grip on certainty after the radical skepticism he posited in the First Meditation. The *cogito* presents a picture of the world and of knowledge in which the mind is something that can know itself better than it can know anything else.

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The idea that we know our mind first and foremost has had a hypnotic hold on Western philosophy ever since, and how the mind can connect with reality has ever since been a major concern. In this conception, the mind ceases to be something that helps us know about the world and becomes something inside which we are locked.

We should note, however, the distinction between the "I think, therefore I am" as stated in the *Discourse on Method* and the formulation we get in the *Meditations*: "So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind." Neither "therefore" nor "I think" appear in the *Meditations*. The absence of "therefore" is important, since it dissuades us from reading the *cogito* as a syllogism, that is, as a three-step argument as follows:

(1) *Whatever thinks exists*

(2) *I think*

Therefore (3) *I exist*

The trouble with a syllogistic reading, which Descartes explicitly denies elsewhere in his writings, is that no reason is given why (1) should be immune from the doubt that the Meditator has posited. Also, the syllogistic reading interprets the *cogito* as a reasoned inference at a point in the Meditator's doubt when even reasoned inferences can be called into doubt.

But if everything is to be doubted, how can the Meditator know the *cogito*? A number of readings have been given to understand this step. One is to read it as an intuition rather than an inference, as something that comes all at once, in a flash. Another reading interprets the *cogito* as a performative utterance, where the utterance itself is what confirms its truth. That is, I could not say "I exist" if I did not exist or if I did not think, and so the act of saying it is what makes it true. Thus, I can only affirm my own existence (not anybody else's) and I can only do so in the present tense: I cannot say "I thought, therefore I was/am."

It should be noted that the *cogito* only works for thought. I cannot say, "I walk, therefore I am," since I can doubt I am walking. The reason I cannot doubt that I am thinking is that doubt itself is a form of thought.

After the *cogito*, the Meditator advances the claim that he is a thing that thinks, an argument called the *sum res cogitans*, after its Latin formulation. There are three controversies regarding the claim "I am...in the strict sense only a thing that thinks," which we will examine in turn: whether the claim is metaphysical or epistemological, what is meant by "thing," and what is meant by "thinking."

It is more plausible to read the *sum res cogitans* as an epistemological remark, saying that, "whatever else I may be, I know only that I am a thing that thinks." However, in some of his writings, Descartes makes it plausible to read him as making a metaphysical remark,

that "*I am only* a thing that thinks." His reasoning might go something like this: "I know that I am a thinking thing, and I do not know whether I am a bodily thing. My body and my mind cannot be one and the same, because I should either know both of them or know neither of them. Since I know I am a thinking thing, and know that my body and my mind are two separate things, I can conclude that I am not a bodily thing. Therefore, I am only a thing that thinks." In so arguing, however, Descartes would commit the so-called "intentional fallacy" of basing an argument on what one does not know. If two things had to be either both known or both not known in order to be identical, we could argue that Bruce Wayne and Batman are not one and the same as well.

"Thing that thinks" also carries some ambiguous baggage. By "thing," Descartes could simply be using the word as we do today, as an ambiguous throwaway word when we don't want to be more specific. More likely, though, he is using it to mean substance, the fundamental and indivisible elements of Cartesian ontology. In this ontology, there are extended things (bodies) and thinking things (minds), and Descartes is here asserting that we are minds rather than bodies. Of course, "thinking" is also highly questionable. Does Descartes mean only the intellection and understanding that is characteristic of the Aristotelian conception of mind? Or does he also include sensory perception, imagination, willing, and so on? At the beginning of the Second Meditation, the Meditator has cast sensory perception and so on into doubt, but by the end of the Second Meditation, sensing, imagining, willing, and so on are included as attributes of the mind. This question is further explored in the commentary on the next section.

Second Meditation, Part 2: the wax argument

Summary

The Meditator tries to clarify precisely what this "I" is, this "thing that thinks." He concludes that he is not only something that thinks, understands, and wills, but is also something that imagines and senses. After all, he may be dreaming or deceived by an evil demon, but he can still imagine things and he still *seems* to hear and see things. His sensory perceptions may not be veridical, but they are certainly a part of the same mind that thinks.

The Meditator then moves on to ask how he comes to know of this "I." The senses, as we have seen, cannot be trusted. Similarly, he concludes, he cannot trust the imagination. The imagination can conjure up ideas of all sorts of things that are not real, so it cannot be the guide to knowing his own essence. Still, the Meditator remains puzzled. If, as he has concluded, he is a thinking thing, why is it that he has such a distinct grasp of what his body is and has such a difficult time identifying what is this "I" that thinks? In order to understand this difficulty he considers how we come to know of a piece of wax just taken from a honeycomb: through the senses or by some other means?

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He first considers what he can know about the piece of wax by means of the senses: its taste, smell, color, shape, size, hardness, etc. The Meditator then asks what happens when the piece of wax is placed near the fire and melted. All of these sensible qualities change, so that, for instance, it is now soft when before it was hard. Nonetheless, the same piece of wax still remains. Our knowledge that the solid piece of wax and the melted piece of wax are the same cannot come through the senses since all of its sensible properties have changed.

The Meditator considers what he can know about the piece of wax, and concludes that he can know only that it is extended, flexible, and changeable. He does not come to know this through the senses, and realizes that it is impossible that he comes to know the wax by means of the imagination: the wax can change into an infinite number of different shapes and he cannot run through all these shapes in his imagination. Instead, he concludes, he knows the wax by means of the intellect alone. His mental perception of it can either be imperfect and confused—as when he allowed himself to be led by his senses and imagination—or it can be clear and distinct—as it is when he applies only careful mental scrutiny to his perception of it.

The Meditator reflects on how easy it is to be deceived regarding these matters. After all, we might say "I see the wax," though in saying that we refer to the wax as the intellect perceives it, rather than to its color or shape. This is similar to the way in which we might "see" people down in the street when all we really see are coats and hats. Our intellect—and not our eyes—judges that there are people, and not automata, under those coats and hats.

The Meditator concludes that, contrary to his initial impulses, the mind is a far better knower than the body. Further, he suggests, he must know his mind far better than other things. After all, as he has admitted, he may not be perceiving the piece of wax at all: it may be a dream or an illusion. But when he is perceiving the piece of wax, he cannot doubt that he is perceiving nor that he is judging what he perceives to be a piece of wax, and both of these acts of thought imply that he exists. Every thought we might have about the world outside us can only doubtfully be true of the outside world, but it must with certainty confirm our own existence and establish the nature of our own mind.

The Meditator happily concludes that he can know at least that he exists, that he is a thinking thing, that his mind is better known than his body, and that all clear and distinct perceptions come by means of the intellect alone, and not the senses or the imagination.

Analysis

The first paragraph of the above summary covers the ninth paragraph of the Second Meditation. We could identify this moment as the invention of the modern mind. The Aristotelian conception of the mind separates intellection and understanding as attributes of a soul that survive death. Sensing, imagining, willing, etc., are all attached to the sensory world and

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are therefore distinct, according to Aristotle. In the Cartesian conception of mind, there is a sharp distinction between mind and world, where all those activities—like sensing and imagining—that could take place in dreams or in disembodied minds are considered mental activities, and exist only in the mind. Things in the world such as trees or light waves are then totally separate from things in the mind, and it becomes a major concern for modern philosophy to determine how the two connect. For instance, there seems to be some connection between my visual sensations and the objects in the world that I see, but since visual sensations are a part of the mind and the objects I see are a part of the world, it is very difficult to determine what that connection is. This picture of mind may seem intuitive to us now, but it and the theories of mind that have sprung from it originate in Descartes. Only in the twentieth century have philosophers like Wittgenstein, William James, and J. L. Austin come to question Descartes' sharp distinction between mind and world.

The rest of the Second Meditation concentrates on the "Wax Argument" with which Descartes hopes to show definitively that we come to know things through the intellect rather than through the senses and that we know the mind better than anything else. His argument focuses on the process of change by which solid wax melts into a liquid puddle. The senses seem to tell us things about the world, and Descartes admits that what we know about the solid piece of wax we know through the senses. The senses can similarly inform us about the melted wax, but they cannot tell us that the melted wax and the solid wax are one and the same. Nor, Descartes argues, can the imagination. Only the intellect can organize and make sense of what we perceive. The senses only perceive a disconnected jumble of information: the intellect is what helps us to understand it.

This argument is another move against the Aristotelian theory of knowledge, according to which all knowledge comes from the senses. Descartes acknowledges that the senses inform us about the world, but asserts that the senses can only give us disorganized information. Without the intellect, we could make no sense of what we perceive. Descartes thus places himself firmly in the rationalist camp, as compared to empiricists such as Aristotle or Locke who argue for a sense-based theory of knowledge.

Descartes' next move is a little more questionable. He asserts that "I" cannot know with certainty that what "I" perceive is real (as per the doubts of the First Meditation), but that sensory perception, as a form of thought, confirms that "I" exist ("I" being the mind.) Every time "I" perceive "I" am thinking, and in thinking "I" am enacting the *cogito*. Every perception confirms the existence of "my" mind and only gives dubitable evidence for the existence of the world. Thus, Descartes concludes, the mind is better known than the body.

This argument is plausible if Descartes means that the existence of the mind is better known than the existence of the body, but it seems that he wants to say that the nature of the mind is better known than the nature of the body. That is, Descartes wants to say that "I" know not only that the mind exists, but also "I" know more about the mind than about the world outside the mind. This argument would only hold if every thought, perception,

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imagination, etc., told "me" something new about the mind. But, according to *thecogito*, all these thoughts tell "me" only one and the same thing: that "I" exist, and that "I" am a thing that thinks. Descartes is not as clear as we might like him to be as to what and how exactly each new thought makes the mind better known than the body.

Third Meditation, Part 1: clear and distinct perceptions and Descartes' theory of ideas

Summary

The Third Meditation, subtitled "The existence of God," opens with the Meditator reviewing what he has ascertained to date. He is still doubtful of the existence of bodily things, but is certain that he exists and that he is a thinking thing that doubts, understands, wills, imagines, and senses, among other things.

He is certain that he is a thinking thing and he clearly and distinctly perceives this fact. He could not be certain unless all clear and distinct perceptions can be certain. Therefore, he concludes, whatever he perceives clearly and distinctly must be true.

Before, he thought he was certain of all sorts of things that he has now cast into doubt. These things are all apprehended by the senses, and he must acknowledge now that he did not perceive the things themselves, but only the ideas, or thoughts, of those things, which appeared before his mind. He does not even now deny that he perceives ideas of material objects, but concedes that he was mistaken in inferring from these ideas that his perception could inform him about the things themselves. He also seems quite certain of arithmetic and geometry, though he cannot be absolutely certain since God might be deceiving him. To assure himself that he is not deceived, he must inquire into the nature of God.

Before he can do so, however, the Meditator resolves first to classify his thoughts into different kinds. First, there are simply ideas, which he says "are as it were the images of things...for example, when I think of a man, or a chimera, or the sky, or an angel, or God." Second, there are volitions, emotions, and judgments, where there is an idea, which is the object of a thought, and also a further thing, such as an affirmation or a fear, which is directed toward the object of that thought.

The Meditator reasons that he cannot be mistaken with regard to ideas on their own, nor with regard to volitions or emotions: he can only make mistakes with respect to judgments. The most common error in judgment is to judge that the ideas in one's mind conform to, or resemble, things outside the mind. Considering ideas in the mind only as modes of thought and not referring them to anything outside the mind should render him immune from doubt.

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It seems there are three sources for ideas: they can be innate; they can be adventitious, coming from outside of us, as with our sensory perceptions; or they can be invented by us, such as our ideas of mermaids or unicorns. The Meditator concedes that he cannot yet be certain which ideas come from where, or even if perhaps all of our ideas are innate, adventitious (not inherent but added extrinsically), or invented. For the moment, he is concerned with adventitious ideas, and why he thinks they come from outside. His will has no effect on adventitious ideas: he cannot prevent himself from feeling hot when it is hot simply through the will, for instance. He has thus come to assume that whatever outside source transmits these adventitious ideas transmits its own likeness rather than something else.

The Meditator then contrasts his natural assumption that adventitious ideas represent outside objects with his knowledge that he exists. He cannot doubt that he exists or that this fact follows from the fact that he doubts, because that truth is "revealed...by the natural light." Natural assumptions, on the other hand, are far less certain than the natural light, and have misled him in the past. Further, he has no reason to suppose that these ideas are adventitious at all. The will may have no effect on them, but they still may be produced from within him. And if they do come from without, there is no reason to think that they resemble the objects that they represent. For instance, the sun looks very small according to our senses, but astronomical reasoning suggests that it is in fact very large.

Analysis

Having ascertained that he exists and that he is a thinking thing, the Meditator tries to determine how he can know these things, and whether he might come to know other things as well by similar means. He concludes that his knowledge of the *cogito* and the *sum res cogitans* are clear and distinct perceptions. Thus, he concludes, all clear and distinct perceptions (which he sometimes refers to as "the natural light") must be certain.

The reasoning here might seem a little circular. On one hand, the *cogito* is certain because it is clearly and distinctly perceived. On the other hand, clear and distinct perceptions must be certain because they are the means by which the certainty of the *cogito* is achieved. There is also the difficulty raised with the case of geometry and arithmetic. These truths seem clear and distinct to us as well, but there is still the possibility that we are deceived with respect to them. And if God can deceive us of our clear and distinct perceptions, perhaps even the *cogito* can be cast back into doubt.

Descartes seems to want to escape the problems involved in clear and distinct perceptions by relying on God's existence to make them true. However, Descartes also seems to want to prove God's existence by claiming it as a clear and distinct perception. This further conundrum is famously called the "Cartesian Circle," and we will look at it more closely in the commentary to the Third Meditation, Part 3.

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The discussion of the theory of ideas is a preamble to Descartes' attempt to prove the existence of God. According to Descartes, ideas are the atoms of thought, and all thought is made up of composite ideas. Descartes' suggestion that ideas are "as it were the images of things" is not meant to reduce ideas to being simply visual representations. We can have ideas of God, of justice, of how to fix the kitchen sink, none of which are necessarily accompanied by an image—hence the "as it were" that qualifies "the images of things."

Some ideas are ideas in the strict sense only, while others are ideas in the strict sense as well as something else. That "something else" can be volition, emotion, or judgment. Descartes is particularly interested in judgments, since these are the things we can be wrong about, and he wishes to identify the source of error in order to identify the source of doubt. Most error in judgment has to do with identifying things in the material world, since that is where the mind tries to pass judgment regarding things outside of it. Thus, of innate, invented, and adventitious ideas, Descartes takes the greatest interest in adventitious (not inherent but added extrinsically) ideas. He realizes that often we assume we are perceiving things outside our mind without any degree of certainty or justification.

Third Meditation, Part 2: Descartes' theory of ideas(cont.)

Summary

The Meditator reasons that all ideas are mere modes of thought, and in that sense they are all equal: they all have the same amount of formal reality, that is, reality intrinsic to themselves. However, what they represent differs greatly, and so their objective reality—the reality of the things they represent—also differs greatly. Thus, the idea of God has more objective reality than the idea of a tree, which has in turn more objective reality than the idea of the color red. Nonetheless, all three of these ideas are just ideas, and all have the same degree of formal reality. (The commentary section below will explain in more detail what is meant by "formal" and "objective" reality and what it means to have more or less reality.)

The Meditator asserts that no effect can have a greater amount of reality than its cause. That is, everything that comes into being must be made to be by something that has an equal or greater amount of reality. For instance, a stone can be made by chipping off a larger piece of rock, since the larger rock has more reality, but a stone cannot be made out of a color, since a stone has more reality than a color. The Meditator also suggests that an idea can only be caused by something that has as much formal reality as the idea has objective reality. The idea of a stone, then, could be caused by a stone or a large rock but it could not be caused by a color. The Meditator grants that ideas can be caused by other ideas, but that there must ultimately be something more than an idea that is the cause of these ideas. The first cause of an idea must be something with at least as much formal reality as the idea has objective reality.

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If he can conceive of some idea with so much objective reality that it must come from some cause with more formal reality than he himself possesses, the Meditator reasons that he will then know that something outside his mind exists. His ideas of other people, animals, and angels can easily come from himself even if no such things exist. Similarly, corporeal things contain nothing so great that it could not originate in him. From the reasoning of the Wax Argument, he has concluded that he can only clearly and distinctly perceive properties like size, extension, shape, motion, duration, number, and substance when examining corporeal things. Most of these properties the Meditator himself also possesses. And even if, as a thinking thing, he may not have size, extension, shape, or motion, these properties are modes of the substance of body, and, as a thinking thing, he is a substance, and therefore has more reality than these modes. (Cartesian ontology, modes, and substances, will also be elucidated in the commentary.)

Sensible qualities like color, sound, smell, taste, heat, cold, and so on are only perceived in a confused and obscure way, and the Meditator is not even certain as to whether or not they are things or non-things. If they are things, they must have such a small degree of reality as to originate unproblematically from the Meditator himself.

Analysis

This section of text dives right into a number of distinctions made by the medieval Scholastic philosophers that would have been very current in Descartes' day. Their currency has since waned and these terms are no longer familiar to the ordinary reader, so what follows will be a brief tutorial on Cartesian ontology and distinctions within the theory of ideas.

For Descartes, as for most thinkers of his time, the fundamental building blocks of reality are called substances. Substances can exist independently and are indestructible. In Cartesian ontology, there are two kinds of substances: bodies and minds. Of substances that are minds, there are finite minds, such as people and angels, and there is the infinite mind, God. Thus, when the Meditator asserts the *sum res cogitans*, he is asserting that, as a substance, he is a mind rather than a body.

All substances also have affections, things that hold of the substances. Affections are not substances themselves because they cannot exist independently of the substances that they affect. Affections can be divided between attributes and modes, and attributes can be divided between primary attributes and omni-generic attributes. Primary attributes are those attributes that explain the essence of the substance they belong to. According to Descartes, the primary attribute of body is extension and the primary attribute of mind is thought. Thus, all bodies are necessarily extended in space and all things that are extended in space are necessarily bodies. Similarly with minds and thought: all thinking things are minds, and all minds think. Omni-generic attributes are attributes that can hold of any substance and do not define their essence. Examples are existence, duration, and number. Modes are

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modifications of primary attributes, ways in which something can have a certain primary attribute. For instance, squareness is a mode of extension since it is a way in which a body might be extended. Similarly with color, size, other shapes, motion, etc., for bodies; and imagining, willing, sensing, feeling, etc., for minds.

Now we move on to the distinction between formal and objective reality. For Descartes and the Scholastics, ideas are the link that connect mind and world because they have both formal and objective reality. To clarify the distinction once more, formal reality is the kind of reality things have in this world and objective reality is the reality of the objects represented by different ideas. Thus, an idea can have formal reality, being a mode of thought itself, and it can also have objective reality, representing something outside of itself.

When Descartes speaks of things as having more or less reality than other things, we can understand him as roughly dividing up reality along a scale where infinite substances (i.e., God) have the most reality, followed by finite substances, followed by modes. As we mentioned earlier, finite substances are bodies and minds, while modes are modifications of body and mind, like color, shape, size, imagination, idea, will, etc. This implies, among other things, that ideas have the formal reality of modes, since they are modifications of mind. So, for instance, the idea of a car would have the formal reality of a mode (since it is an idea) and the objective reality of a finite substance (since the idea is of a car, which is a body). On the other hand, the idea of the fear of cars would have the formal reality of a mode (since it is an idea) and the objective reality of a mode (since the idea is of a fear, and fear is also a mode of thought).

According to Descartes, something with a certain degree of objective reality must ultimately be caused by something with that degree of formal reality. So, for instance, the idea of a car (which has the objective reality of a finite substance) might be caused by the idea of a bicycle, which only has the formal reality of a mode, but that idea of a bicycle might then have been caused by a bicycle itself, which has the formal reality of a finite substance. If we trace the causal chain far enough back, we will find a cause with as much formal reality as the idea has objective reality. If the Meditator can locate an idea that has more objective reality than he has formal reality, he can conclude that there must exist something outside of himself which had to create the idea. Since he has the formal reality of a finite substance, the only thing that has more reality is infinite substance. Thus, he will try to prove that something besides himself exists by contemplating his idea of God.

Third Meditation, part 3: the existence of God and the Cartesian Circle

Summary

When considering God as "a substance that is infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, and which created both myself and everything else," the Meditator realizes that the idea of God must have far more objective reality than he has formal reality: God is an infinite substance whereas he is only a finite substance. Since the idea of God cannot have originated in himself, he concludes that God must be the cause of this idea and must therefore necessarily exist.

The Meditator counters the argument that he might conceive of an infinite being through negation, that is, through conceiving of it in contrast to his own finite being. Doubts and desires come from an understanding that we lack something, and we would not be aware of that lack unless we were aware of a more perfect being that has those things which we lack.

While he can doubt the existence of other things, he cannot doubt the existence of God, since he has such a clear and distinct perception of God's existence. The idea has infinite objective reality, and is therefore more likely to be true than any other idea.

The Meditator then entertains the possibility that he may be supremely perfect, that all his deficiencies are potentialities within him, and that he is slowly improving toward perfection. If perfection is a potentiality within him, then it is plausible that the idea of God could be conceived in him without any outside cause. The Meditator rejects this possibility for three reasons: first, God is all actual and not at all potential; second, if he is constantly improving, he will never attain that perfection where there is no room for improvement; and third, potential being is not being at all: the idea of God must be caused by something with infinite actual being.

If the Meditator could exist without God, he would have come to be out of herself, or from his parents, or from some other being less perfect than God. If he derived his existence from himself, there is no reason that he should have doubts and desires. He also cannot escape this reasoning by supposing he has always existed and never had to come into being. There is no reason that he should continue to exist unless there is some force that preserves him, that creates him anew at every instant. As a thinking thing, he should be aware of that power of preservation though it came from within him.

If his parents or some other imperfect being created him, this creator must have endowed him with the idea of God. If this creator is a finite being, we must still ask with respect to it how it came to possess the idea of an infinite God. We can trace this chain back through

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countless creators, but we must ultimately conclude that the idea of God can originate only in God, and not in some finite being.

Having concluded that God must necessarily exist, the Meditator asks how he received the idea of God. The idea cannot be adventitious, coming from without, nor can it be invented by the Meditator. Thus, the idea must be innate, and the Meditator must have been created by God with this idea already in him. He clearly and distinctly perceives that God is no deceiver, since all deception relies on some defect or other, and a perfect God has no defects.

Analysis

Now that we have reached the end of the Third Meditation, we can more easily review the overall strategy that Descartes is pursuing. The Meditation begins with the Meditator certain only that he exists and that he is a thinking thing. He concludes that he comes to know these facts through clear and distinct perception, and reasons that it should follow that all his other clear and distinct perceptions are true. In order to confirm the truth of clear and distinct perceptions, however, he must prove the existence of a benevolent God. If God were a deceiver, he could be deceived even with respect to his clear and distinct perceptions.

However, the proof of the existence of God relies on the Meditator's having a clear and distinct perception of the idea of God. The proof seems to fall into what is now called the "Cartesian Circle." The Meditator seems committed to claiming both (a) that we can only be sure of our clear and distinct perceptions if God exists and (b) we can know that God exists because we clearly and distinctly perceive the idea of God. If both (a) and (b) are true, Descartes is guilty of circular reasoning.

There are number of ways in which we could attempt to release Descartes from this circle. One strategy, called the "Cartesian spiral," is to suggest that the clear and distinct perceptions going into the proof of God's existence are different from the ones that follow from it. For instance, my clear and distinct perception that $2 + 3 = 5$ can be doubted unless God confirms it, but my clear and distinct perception of the idea of God is somehow immune from doubt. In this reading, there are different kinds of clear and distinct perceptions, some of which are totally immune from doubt and some of which need God to confirm them. This reading is made plausible by the fact that my clear and distinct perception that $2 + 3 = 5$ is a judgment and therefore open to error, whereas my clear and distinct perception that God exists is simply an idea in the strict sense, with no judgment attached.

Another strategy is to re-evaluate the epistemological role that God is meant to play in the *Meditations*. According to this reading, God cannot possibly be intended by Descartes as confirmation of clear and distinct perceptions. If that were the case, it would be a lost cause to try to prove God's existence by means of the intellect, since we would not be able to prove anything by means of the intellect until we know that God exists. Rather than

seeing God as the confirmation of clear and distinct perceptions, we could read God as a buffer against doubt. We know clear and distinct perceptions independently of God, but God's existence also provides us with the certainty that we might not otherwise have. In this reading, (b) is true, but we would re-formulate (a) as saying that we can re-affirm our clear and distinct perceptions retrospectively once we are certain that God exists. The problem with this reading is that it totally re-structures the way we understand the *Meditations*: clear and distinct perceptions, and not God, become the ultimate foundation for knowledge.

We should note that, in spite of the revolutionary originality of much of the *Meditations*, Descartes' proofs of the existence of God are derivative of proofs that were popular among the Scholastic philosophers. This proof relies on causal reasoning, suggesting that there must be a cause of the idea of God that is as great as God himself. Though my idea of God might have come from my father, and my father's idea of God might have come from a priest, the suggestion is that at the end of that causal chain, there is a first cause, which is God. The proof of the first cause is usually used in pointing out that there must be some unmoved mover at the source of all change in this universe. However, this proof has since been discredited, since it relies on a faulty understanding of causation which assumes, among other things, that all causal chains must have a first term.

No "proof" of the existence of God is widely accepted today, and the search for such a proof is no longer a hot philosophical topic. While there is still disagreement over whether or not God exists and what God's nature is, it is generally agreed that God's existence cannot be proved through a feat of the intellect. (For example, Kierkegaard asserted that belief in God requires a "leap of faith" rather than a rigorous proof.)

Fourth Meditation, Part 1: God is no deceiver

Summary

The Fourth Meditation, subtitled "Truth and falsity," opens with the Meditator reflecting on the ground he has covered so far, observing that all his certain knowledge, and in particular the most certain knowledge that God exists, comes from the intellect, and not from the senses or the imagination. Now that he is certain of God's existence, a great deal more can follow. First, he knows that God would not deceive him, since the will to deceive is a sign of weakness or malice, and God's perfection would not allow it. Second, if God created him, God is responsible for his judgment, and so his faculty of judgment must be infallible so long as he uses it correctly.

This is all well and good, the Meditator reasons, but if God has endowed him with infallible judgment, how is it that he can be mistaken, as he undoubtedly is from time to time? The Meditator explains that he finds himself somewhere between God—a perfect,

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complete, and supreme being—and nothingness. He was created by a supreme and infinite being, and all created in him by that supreme being is infallible, but he was also created to be only a finite being. While he participates partly in the supreme being of God, he also participates partly in nothingness. When he is wrong, it is not the result of some faulty faculty created by God, but is rather the result of his non-being, his lack of perfection. Everything that God has created is perfect, but God has created the Meditator as a finite being whose finitude still leaves room for error.

But the Meditator remains unsatisfied. If God is a perfect creator, God should be able to create perfect beings. Surely, God could have willed it so that the Meditator would never err, and God always wills what is best. The Meditator reflects that God's motives and reasons are incomprehensible to finite beings such as himself. For this reason also, he rejects the search for final causes in physics: it would require a great deal of arrogance to try to read God's mind or understand God's motives. Rather than look at one isolated part of the universe, the Meditator suggests he might find perfection if he looks at God's creation as a whole. He may appear to be an imperfect being when considered on his own, but he may play a perfectly appropriate role in the wider context of a perfect universe.

Analysis

In Descartes' denial that God could be a deceiver, he is employing a conception of power and existence that would have been familiar in his day, but which might strike us as rather odd today. Existence and the power to act are both conceived by Descartes to be positives. The more power and existence one has, the better one is. Evil and negative acts are not a result of some negative being that counterbalances positive being, but result rather from a lack of being. In being supremely good, God must also have infinite being and infinite power, since these are associated with goodness. An act of deception is an act of falsity, and falsity deals with what is not. Thus, by Descartes' reasoning, God cannot be a deceiver since he is supremely real and does not participate in any way in nothingness. People, on the other hand, are understood by Descartes to have finite being, and that their lack of infinite being implies that they also participate in nothingness. If there were a line, with God as absolute being on one end, and nothingness and evil on the other end, humans would be somewhere in the middle. Our ability to err comes to us insofar as we participate in nothingness rather than in God.

To better understand why Descartes has this conception of good and existence would require a better understanding of the history of ethics. Briefly: Descartes is inheriting an ancient Greek conception of virtue, where what is real, what is true, and what is good are all closely linked. Being good is simply a matter of participating in what is real, and being evil is linked with unreality. The Greek philosophical world was one with a teleology, in which there was reason and purpose in the very workings of the world; being good was seen to be simply a matter of approximating this reality. Descartes is still entrenched in the ancient

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worldview that he inherited from the Scholastics. This worldview has changed since, as we find in later philosophers like Kant. According to Kant, reason and purpose are things that we apply to the world. Thus, goodness is an idea that our reason imposes upon a morally neutral universe. It is Kant's worldview that we now understand, and it is often difficult to understand a worldview where goodness and existence are considered one and the same.

The Meditator also questions why a supremely good God would not create us with infinite being. In sum, we are given a variant on the answer, "The Lord works in mysterious ways." The Meditator suggests that God's motives are beyond our meager comprehension. While on our own, we may be seen as imperfect, we are only a small part of a much larger creation. We might think of a steering wheel on its own as rather useless and imperfect, but when we see it in the larger context of a car, we understand that it is perfectly designed to suit its purpose.

Fourth Meditation, Part 2: Will, intellect, and the possibility of error

Summary

The Meditator next looks at the source of his errors. They depend simultaneously upon the intellect (the faculty of knowledge) and the will (the faculty of choice, or freedom of the will). The intellect, however, only allows us to perceive ideas, not to make judgments on them, and so in this strict sense, it cannot be the source of error. In contrast to the intellect, which he knows is limited, the Meditator reflects that he could not conceive of his will as being any greater or more perfect. In all his other mental faculties—memory, imagination, understanding, etc.—the Meditator realizes that God is endowed to a much greater degree than he is. But in freedom of choice, or the will, the Meditator realizes he is unlimited, and in this respect more than any other he resembles her creator. God's will may be greater in that it is accompanied by a greater knowledge and power and that it ranges over everything, but when considering the will in the strict sense, the Meditator concludes that his will is just as great as God's. Exercising the will consists simply in affirming or denying, pursuing or avoiding. The feeling of indifference is not a weakness in will but rather a lack of knowledge of what is the true or right course to pursue. Thus, God's will is only superior to our own in that God has supreme knowledge and can always will what is good.

Since the will is perfect and unlimited, it cannot be the source of error. Similarly, since his understanding, or intellect, was created by God, it can never be wrong either. The Meditator concludes that error results not from imperfections in either of these faculties, but from the fact that the will has a far wider scope than the understanding. As a result, the will often passes judgments on matters that are not fully understood and toward which it is

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indifferent. For instance, the Meditator has such a clear and distinct perception that he exists that he cannot help but judge (will) that this is true. However, he is as yet uncertain about his relationship to the corporeal body that he normally assumes is his. Since he does not have a proper understanding of the relationship between mind and body, he is indifferent as to whether he should assent or deny that the mind and the body are identical and is liable to make a false judgment. In all matters of the intellect except for clear and distinct perceptions, there is some level of conjecture and uncertainty, and so the will is liable to make a false judgment. The correct use of the will in cases of uncertainty is simply to refrain from judgment. When "I" affirm or deny in cases of uncertainty, "I" will either be in error or "I" will arrive at the truth purely by chance.

The Meditator concludes that he cannot complain that God has created him imperfectly. It is only natural that he has a finite intellect, and the will is indivisible, so it cannot be anything less than complete. He cannot complain about the imperfections in him that lead to false judgment, since he is only a small part of God's larger creation, and his role in that creation is perfect even if he may seem imperfect when considered alone. He concludes he can also avoid error completely by suspending judgment in cases where he is uncertain, and only passing judgments on clear and distinct perceptions.

Analysis

This section draws an important distinction between the intellect and the will. The intellect is the faculty that not only understands and thinks, but also senses and imagines. All these are value-neutral acts in themselves. The will is responsible for affirming and denying, and it is in the will that value and the possibility for error manifest themselves. For instance, my visual perception of a tree is created in the intellect, but it is the will that either affirms that it is indeed a tree, or suspends judgment because I might be dreaming. Thus, even if I am just hallucinating and there is no tree, my intellect is not mistaken in reporting this perception to me, but my will would be mistaken in judging that it is indeed a tree.

The intellect is finite and limited because there are varying degrees at which perceptions and understanding can function. For instance, some of us can only do simple arithmetic, while some of us can calculate differential equations in a snap, while none of us can understand all the mysteries of the universe. The will, on the other hand, is not finite because its efficacy is not a matter of degree. Because I have a free will, I can affirm or deny any proposition put to me by my intellect. The fact that we do not always affirm or deny, the Meditator asserts, is not due to a weakness in the will, but due to a weakness in the intellect. Often, the intellect does not understand a matter well enough to allow the will to make an informed judgment and so the will suspends judgment instead.

The source of error, then, lies in this disparity between the scope of the will and the scope of the intellect. The will is unlimited and can affirm or deny any proposition, while the intellect is limited and can only clearly and distinctly perceive a small number of propositions.

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Most of what the intellect perceives is confused and obscure, like our sensory perceptions. The only time that we can be certain that we are judging correctly is in cases of clear and distinct perception. The question then arises of how we can know which perceptions are clear and distinct. Descartes' answer is that clear and distinct perceptions are those that the will cannot help but affirm. For instance, the Meditator finds it impossible to deny that he exists, since his every thought confirms his existence. On the other hand, he can doubt what he sees, as the Dream Argument (in the First Meditation) shows. Therefore, visual perceptions are not clear and distinct.

The objection could then be raised as to what we are to make of a fool who cannot help but affirm that $2 + 2 = 22$. How can we know that our inability to deny *thecogito* or mathematical truths is not a result of a weakness of our own? The answer to this question is not at all clear, and it is hard to give a better answer than that the fool who thinks that $2 + 2 = 22$ ought to think harder before affirming his judgment.

We should also note that Descartes is a proponent of free will. The Meditator asserts that only the will, of all human mental faculties, is on an equal footing with God's, because it is unlimited. The will is free to affirm or deny whatever it wishes. In fact, free will is the source of error: if God had not blessed us with free will, we would not blithely pass judgments on our confused and obscure perceptions and we would never make mistakes.

The problem of free will and determinism is a common one in philosophy, and it is important that we explain the compatibilist position of Descartes. The problem runs something like this: "if we are a part of nature and subject to nature's deterministic laws, how is it that we can have free will?" Descartes' answer is that we do not have the "freedom of indifference," that we could have acted differently. All his conception of free will requires is that we have "freedom from external constraint," that we don't feel we are being forced into behaving as we do. We behave under the idea of freedom, and that is enough to ensure that our judgments are made freely.

Fifth Meditation: "The essence of material things, and the existence of God considered a second time"

Summary

The Fifth Meditation opens with the Meditator turning his attention toward material objects. Rather than inquire into the things themselves, he inquires into her ideas regarding material things. He concludes that he can distinctly imagine extension, size, shape, position, and local motion, which is associated with duration.

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The Meditator also considers that there are abstract geometrical objects which do not exist in the material world, do not depend on her mind, yet are not nothing. For instance, there are no triangles in the world, yet they have some kind of being. Even if no triangle has ever existed anywhere outside the mind of the Meditator, triangles still have a determinate essence which is independent of the Meditator's mind. The Meditator also denies that he has come to know the nature of triangles through the senses. After all, he can think up all sorts of shapes that he has never seen and derive their properties as clearly and distinctly as he does with those of the triangle. These properties must all be true since the Meditator clearly and distinctly perceives them. Besides, he notes, even before he began to doubt, he always regarded mathematical and geometrical objects as more certain than the objects of the senses.

The Meditator has reasoned that a triangle must have all the properties he ascribes to it, because the triangle exists as an idea in his mind and he clearly and distinctly perceives all these properties. He then reasons by analogy that God exists as an idea in his mind and he clearly and distinctly perceives all of his qualities. One of these qualities is existence, so it follows from his clear and distinct perception that God must exist. If existence is the essence of God, then God would not be God if he did not exist, just as a triangle would not be a triangle if it were not three-sided. At the very least, then, the existence of God must be as certain as the properties of mathematical and geometrical objects since he can prove them in the same way.

Clear and distinct perceptions are always convincing, according to the Meditator. Some perceptions may be evident, like the fact that a triangle has three sides, and some may take more thought, like the Pythagorean theorem that states that the sum of the squares of the legs of a right triangle is equal to the square of the hypotenuse. But once the Pythagorean theorem is proved, it is just as certain as any other clear and distinct perception. Similarly with God: his existence would immediately be perceived clearly and distinctly if it weren't for the confusions caused by the senses and preconceived opinions. Now that God's existence has been established, it is as certain as any other clear and distinct perception.

The Meditator asserts that God is the guarantor of his clear and distinct perceptions. He admits that he cannot constantly fix his mental vision on any particular perception, so that there might be times when he is not clearly and distinctly perceiving a certain truth. At such times, doubt could creep in, if not for God. Because he knows that God is not deceiving him and has endowed him with a faultless understanding and a will than cannot but assent to clear and distinct perceptions, he knows that what he clearly and distinctly perceived in the past is and remains true even if he is not currently directing his mental vision toward it. Those judgments about which he is mistaken are not clearly and distinctly perceived by the intellect. And even if he is dreaming, as was suggested in the First Meditation, he cannot be mistaken with respect to a clear and distinct perception.

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Analysis

"Essence" is one of those philosophical terms that's currency has waned a bit since the seventeenth century. The essence of a thing is the property or set of properties that the thing cannot do without. For instance, Aristotle defines rationality as an essential characteristic of a human being. A person could lose a leg and still be human, but a person could not cease to be rational and remain human.

Descartes' discussion of essence is intended as a strong reaction against Aristotelian empiricism. According to Aristotle, we learn the essence of, say, a triangle, by examining instances of triangular-shaped objects in the world and extracting the essence of triangles from these worldly instances. Descartes turns this formulation on its head, saying that we learn the essence of a triangle solely through the intellect, and only afterward do we look at the real world and see if there are instances of triangles. In Descartes' formulation, whatever properties of a thing that we clearly and distinctly perceive must be essential. Thus, bodies are essentially extended, since extension is clearly and distinctly perceived by the intellect prior to any empirical investigation. The essence of body will be further discussed in the Sixth Meditation.

Descartes provides strong reasons to support his move against Aristotle. If essences are extracted from the real world, how is it that we understand perfect triangles when there are none? And more importantly, how do we understand abstract shapes that we have derived mathematically but have never encountered in the real world? In Aristotle's defense, however, we could point out that while Descartes has given us a better understanding of the essences of mathematical objects, he has left us completely in the dark as to how we can know the essence of material things. Is it possible to apply the intellect to understanding the essence of, say, gold, without ever encountering gold in the world?

Descartes then turns his discussion of essence toward a second proof of God's existence. This proof is weaker than the one found in the Third Meditation, and we might wonder why he adds it. Is he not certain that his earlier proof is satisfactory? And if so, what holes does this new proof patch up? Most importantly, it reinforces the connection between God and clear and distinct perceptions. Clear and distinct perceptions are made certain because God exists, and God's existence, as an essential property, is clearly and distinctly perceived. Of course, this reinforced connection only reinforces the conundrum of the Cartesian Circle. This problem is discussed in the commentary to the Third Meditation, Part 3.

The proof of God's existence found here is a version of a proof that was popular among the Scholastic philosophers. Our idea of God is the idea of a perfect being, and one of the attributes of a perfect being would be existence, since it is more perfect to exist than not to exist. In Descartes' formulation, existence is not just an attribute, but an essential property of God's, so that God cannot be conceived of without existence. This proof, however, rests on the faulty assumption, first pointed out by Kant, that existence is a predicate or a property,

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like "being red" or "being tall." In fact, "exists" is a very different kind of predicate than "is red" or "is tall." The predicate "exists" does not modify an object so much as it modifies the world. If I say "the red car exists," the property of redness is something that modifies the car. On the other hand, "exists" does not modify the car so much as it says that the world is such that the car is in it. In that sense, "exists" is not a property of the car's.

Sixth Meditation, Part 1: Cartesian body

Summary

The Sixth and final Meditation is entitled "The existence of material things, and the real distinction between mind and body," and it opens with the Meditator considering the existence of material things. The Meditator accepts the strong possibility that material objects exist since they are the subject-matter of pure mathematics, the truths of which he perceives clearly and distinctly. He then produces two arguments for the existence of material things, one based on the faculty of the imagination, the other based on the senses.

He first distinguishes between imagination and pure understanding. In the case of a triangle, he can perceive that a triangle is three-sided and derive all sorts of other properties using the understanding alone. He can also perceive these properties with the imagination, by picturing the triangle in his mind's eye. However, the weaknesses of the imagination become clear when he considers a thousand-sided figure. It is very difficult to picture it in his mind's eye, and more difficult still to differentiate that mental image from the mental image of a 999-sided figure. The pure understanding, however, dealing only in mathematical relations, can perceive all the properties of a thousand-sided figure just as easily as it can a triangle.

The imagination cannot be an essential property of his mind, since the Meditator could still exist even if he could not imagine. Therefore, the imagination must rely on something other than the mind for its existence. The Meditator conjectures that the imagination is connected with the body, and thus allows the mind to picture corporeal objects. In understanding, the mind turns inward upon itself, and in imagining, the mind turns outward toward the body. The Meditator admits that this is only a strong conjecture, and not a definitive proof of the existence of body.

The Meditator then turns to reflect on what he perceives by means of the senses. He perceives he has a body that exists in a world, and that this body can experience pleasure, pain, emotion, hunger, etc., and can perceive other bodies with extension, shape, movement, hardness, heat, color, smell, taste, etc. He thinks it not unreasonable to suppose that these perceptions all come from some outside source. They come to him involuntarily, and they are so much more vivid than the perceptions he consciously creates in his own mind. It

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would be odd to suggest that he can involuntarily create perceptions so much more vivid than the ones he creates voluntarily. And if they come from without, it is only natural to suppose that the source of these sensory ideas in some way resemble the ideas themselves. From this point of view, it is very easy to convince oneself that all knowledge comes from without via the senses.

Analysis

What Descartes understands by "body" is somewhat counter-intuitive and is closely linked to his physics, which is not made readily apparent in the *Meditations*. This section of commentary will depart a bit from the text it comments on in order to clarify some concepts of Cartesian physics.

The entirety of Cartesian physics rests on the claim that extension is the primary attribute of body, and that nothing more is needed to explain or understand body. "Extension" means extended in space, and so a body is anything that occupies space. We should recall that Descartes was also a great mathematician, and invented both analytic geometry and the coordinate system that now bears his name. Descartes' physics is highly mathematical, and we should understand bodies as anything that could be graphed in coordinate space.

For Descartes, there is no real distinction between physics and geometry and between bodies and empty space. Geometry is simply the mathematical formalization of extended substances, and if body is nothing more than extension, then the distinction between geometry and physics dissolves. Similarly, space is extended, even if it is empty, so empty space is body just as material objects would be. It follows from this reasoning that bodies are impenetrable: two bodies cannot occupy the same space. If two bodies occupied the same space, they would have the same extension and so would be the same body, since body is nothing more than extension.

The main problem with Descartes' physics is that he does not explain what causes things to move. If body is simply extension, then where do force and energy come from? Three answers present themselves. First, God could be conceived of as the force that moves everything about, but this answer seems a bit contrived. Second, we could conceive of God as re-creating the world at every instant, so that change is in fact an illusion. Things don't change, they are perpetually destroyed and re-created. Third, we could conceive of God building natural laws into the universe that do the moving for him.

Descartes' arguments for the existence of body as essentially extended can then follow one of two strategies. The one he pursues in the *Meditations* is to show that he can demonstrate the existence of body through reason. He claims to perceive clearly and distinctly that the primary attribute of body is extension. His arguments from the imagination and the senses are supposed to show that his intellectual faculties seem to be linked to something outside of the mind. While his argument from the imagination only leaves the existence of

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body as a reasonably good guess, his argument from the senses will ultimately leave him satisfied.

Alternatively, the strategy he follows in his writings on physics is simply to show that we can conceive of body as existing and of being essentially extended and build up an entire physical explanation of the universe. If this explanation is satisfying and complete, there should be no reason to question the assumption that body exists and is essentially extended.

Sixth Meditation, Part 2: Mind-body dualism

Summary

The Meditator muses that he has been puzzled as to why his mind seems particularly attached to one particular body, which he calls his own. Why does he feel pain and tickling in this body but not in any body external to it? And why should a tugging in the stomach of that body suggest to his mind that he should eat, since there is no obvious connection between the tugging and the decision to eat? He concludes that he is inclined by nature to assume the things he does about his body and about the world external to it, since he accepts these assumptions prior to developing any arguments regarding them.

Having questioned these assumptions in the First Meditation, he finds that there is plenty of reason to doubt that material things are the way he is naturally inclined to assume they are. However, he believes he is now well enough equipped that he needn't doubt their existence entirely. First, he clearly and distinctly perceives that he is, in essence, only a thinking thing. Body is essentially extended and mind is non-extended, so he can conclude that he really is distinct from his body and could exist without it.

The Meditator reasons that imagination and sensory perception are modes of thought. He could conceive of himself without imagination or sensory perception, so they are not essential to him, but imagination and sensory perception could not exist without a mind to contain them. Similarly, there are modes of extension that cannot exist without a body to contain them.

Sensory perception is a passive faculty, and, as the Meditator has asserted before, there must be some active cause that creates sensory perceptions and this cause must reside outside of him. Either it could be other bodies with as much formal reality as the sensory perceptions have objective reality or it could be God or some other being capable of creating these perceptions. The Meditator is naturally inclined to suppose that sensory perceptions are created by things which resemble those perceptions, and he would be deceived if the perceptions were caused by some other means. Since God is no deceiver, God would not have misled the Meditator into thinking there are material objects if there were not, so the Meditator concludes that material objects must exist. His perception of most properties of

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material objects is confused and obscure, so his perception of them might not be perfect, but he can at least be certain of those properties that he perceives clearly and distinctly.

The Meditator next considers those ideas about body that he perceives only confusedly and obscurely, hoping that his knowledge that God is not a deceiver will help him further. First, he reasons that he must have a body, as nature teaches that to him more vividly than anything. Further, mind and body are intermingled to form one unit. If the mind were in the body like a sailor in a ship, he would be able to perceive pains and hungers by purely intellectual understanding. Instead, he feels these sensations sharply and directly as if his mind itself were suffering. The confused modes of thinking that arise with respect to these sensations result precisely because the mind and body are intermingled and the mind cannot survey the matter disinterestedly.

Analysis

This section concludes the Meditator's argument by means of the senses for the existence of body. Sensory perceptions must either be created by the Meditator himself, by someone or something else, or by God. The Meditator can rule himself out since he is not aware of creating these perceptions, and they come upon him so forcefully and involuntarily that it would be inconceivable that he could be the creative force behind them. This is proof enough that sensory perceptions have some outside cause. He is naturally inclined to think his sensory perceptions are caused by things that resemble those perceptions. Since God is not a deceiver, he must not be fooling him in giving him this natural inclination. Therefore, he concludes, bodies must be something like what they seem to be. This conclusion will be refined by the distinction between primary and secondary qualities discussed in the next section.

The discussion of sensory perceptions as being "caused" by some outside source marks an important turning point in the history of Western philosophy. The mind is sharply distinguished from the world of bodies around it. The Meditator argues that mind and body have nothing in common, so they must be two totally distinct substances. We could point out that Clark Kent and Superman are very dissimilar and are yet the same thing, and so argue by analogy that mind and body might be two very different ways of looking at the same thing. However, even the primary attributes of mind and body are different. Body is essentially extended, whereas mind is non-extended and essentially thinking. Since the two are totally different, the Meditator concludes that he is only mind, and not body. This is a step beyond what is stated by the *sum res cogitans* in the Second Meditation, as there the Meditator asserts that he only knows that he is a thinking thing. Now he knows that he is only a thinking thing.

This sharp distinction between mind and body is called "mind-body dualism" and has had tremendous impact on Western philosophy ever since. If sensory experience is in the

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mind and the bodies that cause our sensations are in the world, the question arises as to how the two can causally interact. What is the connection between mind and world? This has been a great concern in particular for the rationalist philosophers that followed Descartes—Malebranche, Spinoza, and Leibniz being the most important—as well as for philosophy of mind in general ever since. When the mind and the world are held as totally distinct, the mind becomes conceived of as being trapped within the body, unable to know about the world except through a causal interface at the sensory surfaces. As mentioned in the commentary to the Second Meditation, Part 2, the causal interface generated by mind-body dualism has only begun to be questioned in the past hundred years.

Sixth Meditation, Part 3: Primary and secondary qualities

Summary

Though the Meditator can reach conclusions about his own body and also conclude that there are other bodies which are the source of his many sensory perceptions, there are certain claims about material things he is not justified in making. For instance, he cannot claim that the heat, color, and taste that he perceives resides in that object in the same way as it is present to his senses. Nature, as the combination of mind and body, teaches us to seek out pleasure and avoid pain, among other things, but it does not teach us to draw any conclusions about material objects based solely on sensory perception. Correct judgment in such matters depends on the intellect alone and not the senses. It would be unreasonable to infer from the sensation of heat or pain in approaching a flame that the heat or the pain reside in the flame itself. The fact of the matter is that the senses are meant only to inform us as to what is beneficial and what is harmful, and in that respect they are perfectly clear and distinct. Our mistake comes in expecting them also to inform us of the true nature or essence of the things we are perceiving, when they can only give us very obscure information in this regard.

But we often make mistakes even with regard to what is harmful to us. For instance, a sick person may crave food or water even if food or water will only make him sicker. To begin answering this objection, the Meditator notes that while body is divisible, mind is indivisible. While we can break extended things into smaller parts, the mind can in no such way be divided up. There are different faculties of the mind: the imagination, the senses, the will, the intellect, etc., but these are not different parts of the mind. When the mind imagines, it is the whole mind that imagines, and not some part of it. Since the mind is totally indivisible and bodies can be easily divided, it is clear that the mind and body are two very distinct things. Further, there is only a small part of the body that can affect the

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mind. In Descartes' day, it was thought that the pineal gland was the seat of the "common" sense, which sends all sensory perceptions to the mind. Thus, the Meditator concludes, only the pineal gland can send messages from the body to the mind. A sensation in another part of the body must then be transmitted through the body to the pineal gland. Further, these transmissions must take place by means of nervous signals that have a limited range of expression. All these facts combine to suggest that sometimes the body is incapable of sending the right message to the mind.

The Meditator concludes that, on the whole, he can be quite certain of things that he had cast into doubt in the First Meditation. The senses are normally quite adequate in helping us get around in the world, and when in doubt, we can double-check our sensory perceptions with our intellect or our memory. The Meditator also notes that our memory can dispel the doubt presented in the Dream Argument. Any waking experience can be connected through memory to all other waking experiences, whereas in dreams, things happen in a disconnected and somewhat random manner. Since God is not a deceiver, the Meditator is safe from erroneous judgment as long as he applies her mind carefully.

Analysis

Descartes draws an important distinction between properties such as heat, color, and taste on the one hand, and size, shape, and texture on the other hand: the latter are primary qualities while the former are secondary qualities. The Meditator can be certain with regard to the primary qualities of a body since he can clearly and distinctly perceive them. They are all geometric qualities and relate to the extension of a body in space, which connects with its essence. On the other hand, the Meditator can often be misled regarding secondary qualities because they are non-geometric and can only be perceived obscurely and confusedly.

Here it might be useful to draw a distinction between sensory and intellectual perception. Sensory perception is perception using the imagination, while intellectual perception uses the understanding. In discussing a thousand-sided figure in the Sixth Meditation, Part 1, we concluded that the imagination can only give us a confused and obscure visual representation of geometrical figures whereas the intellect could clearly and distinctly perceive the figure no matter how many sides it has. Similarly, the intellect can grasp the primary qualities of body as they all relate to extension. However, there is no clear way that we can divorce secondary qualities from the imagination. I cannot easily think of the color red without thinking of the visual appearance of red.

There are two major conflicting interpretations of how Descartes views the ontology of secondary qualities. One is called sensationalism, and suggests that secondary qualities exist exclusively in the mind and not in any way in bodies. Secondary qualities do not represent anything in the corporeal world, according to this interpretation, though they may be caused by things in the world. Sensationalism seems then to imply that when one perceives red,

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the mind is, in some sense, red. This claim sounds very odd and it is not entirely clear how we are to make sense of it.

The other interpretation is called physicalism, and suggests that secondary qualities exist both in bodies and in the mind, but in very different ways. Colors, for instance, manifest themselves in bodies as surface textures which reflect light. We might feel uncomfortable calling a surface texture a color, but the thrust of the physicalist argument is not that secondary qualities are present in the bodies themselves. Rather, the physicalist argument suggests that these surface textures are what cause color sensations to be present in the mind.

We should note that sensationist and physicalist agree that secondary qualities do not reside in material objects, but that they also agree that secondary qualities are caused by objects. The debate is over what precisely we are to call the color, taste, sound, etc. The sensationist wants to say that "red" is a sensation and the physicalist wants to say that "red" is a surface texture.

We have already explained how we can use the imagination to have a sensory perception of a primary quality and the intellect to have an intellectual perception of the primary quality. Further, we know how we can use the imagination to have a sensory perception of a secondary quality. The question remains, however, as to what an intellectual perception of a secondary quality would consist in. A physicalist would suggest that the intellectual perception consists in perceiving the surface texture of objects. This kind of perception can only give us an indirect and confused understanding of the secondary qualities themselves since surface texture is the cause of secondary qualities, but not the secondary qualities themselves. A sensationist would suggest that we could understand a sensation as being a mode of the mind, though it is less clear how a sensationist would account for the confused and obscure nature of secondary qualities.

Descartes concludes by giving a rather interesting account as to why our senses can go wrong. Our intellect and our will are meant to judge what is true and false, and they are well equipped for this task. Our senses, however, are only meant to help us get by in the world, and thus are not equipped for accurate judgment. The senses can give us good clues as to what the world is like, but we should not use them as a tool for pursuing the truth about the nature of body. That is a task best left to the intellect.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. *In the First Meditation, does the Meditator want to suggest the possibility of a universal dream or the universal possibility of dreaming? In other words, is he suggesting that all life might be one big dream or simply that we could be dreaming at any given moment for all we know?*

There is no definite answer to this question, and it is debated among interpreters. Perhaps the interpretation more consistent with Descartes' wider project is the universal possibility of dreaming. We could see this idea, this measure of doubt, as meant to question the Aristotelian reliance on the senses without doing away with knowledge and the world altogether. If he were suggesting the possibility of a universal dream, the Meditator would be sweeping away a great deal more than just Aristotelian epistemology. Also, the Painter's Analogy which follows the Dream Argument seems to rely on the fact that there are things in this world that we can derive images from, which would suggest to us that the Meditator has not yet fully abandoned the notion of a material world.

2. *What stops the doubt of the First Meditation? What kind of reasoning supports thecogito?*

This crucial question is infuriatingly difficult to answer. While the classic formulation of "I think, therefore I am" is easy to read as a syllogism, that reading is probably inaccurate. After all, it comes at a time when the Meditator has cast even rational thought into doubt. More likely, thecogito is meant as an intuition rather than an inference. Part of the puzzle lies in the fact that the Meditator calls thecogito a "clear and distinct perception," but then goes on to suggest that we can only be certain of our clear and distinct perceptions once we have established that God exists. If that is the case, then thecogito is not confirmed at all until a bit later in theMeditations.

3. *What does the Wax Argument show? What is it meant to show? Does it succeed?*

The Wax Argument is meant to show that the mind is better known than the body. It does so by suggesting that everything "I" know about bodies "I" know through intellectual perception rather than through the senses. Since every act of thought reinforces thecogito that also suggests that "I" am a thinking thing, every act of thought brings me closer to understanding my own mind. We might question how accurate this assessment is, however. Every act of thought may reinforce thecogito, but that doesn't mean it brings me closer to an understanding of my mind every time. It just reinforces the same one piece of knowledge—that I exist. But perhaps Descartes is not thinking of items of knowledge when he says

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that the mind is better known than the body. Perhaps he simply means that it is known more distinctly, and a constant reinforcement of the mind's existence might help to give the distinct knowledge.

4. *Explain and analyze the Cartesian Circle. Is Descartes guilty of circular reasoning?*
5. *Explain the distinction between formal and objective reality. What things have what kind of reality?*
6. *Analyze and evaluate the two proofs of God's existence. How are they different? Is one more convincing than the other? Why did Descartes think he needed two proofs? Do they do different work for him?*
7. *Explain the relationship between intellect and will, according to Descartes, and how it is possible that we err.*
8. *Does Descartes give a satisfactory account of human error, given a perfect and divine creator? Are Descartes' arguments convincing, or does it still seem unnecessary and less than perfect that God created us with flaws?*
9. *How do mind and body interact? How does the body affect the mind? And how does the mind affect the body?*
10. *Explain the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. How do we perceive them and what kind of knowledge do we have of them?*

**REVIEW AND RESOURCES****Quiz**

1. *Which of the following is NOT accepted as a rational doubt?*
 - A. The Meditator might be dreaming
 - B. The Meditator might be deceived by God
 - C. The Meditator might be mad
 - D. The Meditator might be deceived by an evil demon

2. *Which of the following is a version of the cogito?*
 - A. I think I walk, therefore I am
 - B. I think I walk, therefore I walk
 - C. I walk, therefore I am
 - D. I walk, therefore I walk

3. *Which of the following is the Meditator NOT sure of by the end of the Second Meditation?*
 - A. He exists
 - B. He is a thinking thing
 - C. God exists
 - D. He knows his mind better than he knows his body

4. *Which of the following is not used in an example in the Meditations?*
 - A. A piece of wax
 - B. A painting
 - C. A chimera
 - D. A fishing line

5. *What's the most certain kind of perception?*
 - A. Visual perception
 - B. Clear and distinct perception
 - C. Obscure and confused perception
 - D. Imagination

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6. *What kind of reality does a rock have?*
 - A. Finite formal reality
 - B. Finite objective reality
 - C. Modal objective reality
 - D. Modal formal reality
7. *What kind of reality does the idea of God have?*
 - A. Modal objective reality
 - B. Infinite formal reality
 - C. Infinite objective reality
 - D. Finite formal reality
8. *What kind of reality does the idea of dogs have?*
 - A. Infinite objective reality
 - B. Modal formal reality
 - C. Finite formal reality
 - D. Modal objective reality
9. *Which has the most objective reality?*
 - A. A turtle
 - B. The fear of God
 - C. The idea of a turtle
 - D. The idea of the idea of God
10. *Which has the most formal reality?*
 - A. A turtle
 - B. The fear of God
 - C. The color red
 - D. Temperature
11. *What kind of thing is the color red?*
 - A. A primary attribute
 - B. A substance
 - C. An omni-generic attribute
 - D. A mode

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12. *What kind of thing is duration?*
- A. A primary attribute
 - B. A substance
 - C. An omni-generic attribute
 - D. A mode
13. *What is the primary attribute of mind?*
- A. Thought
 - B. Understanding
 - C. Extension
 - D. The will
14. *Which of the following is NOT a substance?*
- A. Body
 - B. Color
 - C. God
 - D. Mind
15. *Which of the following is NOT a mode?*
- A. Redness
 - B. Imagination
 - C. A pebble
 - D. Sweetness
16. *Which of the following is NOT true?*
- A. Clear and distinct perceptions are true because God exists
 - B. God exists because I clearly and distinctly perceive it
 - C. Help! We're caught in circular reasoning!
 - D. Descartes never made a slip in his reasoning
17. *What faculties combined are responsible for human error?*
- A. The imagination and the senses
 - B. The will and the understanding
 - C. The imagination and the will
 - D. The understanding and the senses

18. *Why do we make mistakes?*
- A. God is deceiving us
 - B. We pass judgment on things we do not understand
 - C. Our understanding is flawed
 - D. Our will is not free
19. *Which is an essential property of God's?*
- A. Existence
 - B. Extension
 - C. Thought
 - D. Cookies
20. *Which of the following is a primary quality?*
- A. Size
 - B. Color
 - C. Taste
 - D. Heat
21. *Which of the following is a secondary quality?*
- A. Size
 - B. Shape
 - C. Sound
 - D. Width
22. *How does the body contact the mind?*
- A. Through the brain
 - B. Through the pineal gland
 - C. The two cannot reach one another
 - D. Through the nervous system
23. *What do all bodies have in common?*
- A. They have colors
 - B. They are perceptible
 - C. They can be imagined
 - D. They are extended

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24. *Which of the following is NOT body?*

- A. Empty space
- B. Geometrical space
- C. Liquid nitrogen
- D. None of the above

25. *What is the purpose of the senses?*

- A. To lead us toward the truth
- B. To help us get by in the world
- C. To deceive us
- D. To perceive secondary qualities

Answer Key:

1: C	8: B	15: C	22: B
2: A	9: B	16: D	23: D
3: C	10: A	17: B	24: D
4: D	11: D	18: B	25: B
5: B	12: C	19: A	
6: A	13: A	20: A	
7: C	14: B	21: C	

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