

René Descartes (March 31, 1596 – February 11, 1650): French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist, lived much of his adult life in the Dutch Republic.

Outline of the Six Meditations

1. All knowledge of the external world can be called into doubt
2. The human mind is known with greater certainty than the body
3. The existence of God
4. Why clear and distinct ideas are true (defense of a priori)
5. The nature of physical objects, another proof for God's existence
6. Recovering knowledge of the external world by way of God; the mind-body relationship

1. 1st Meditation. Skeptical Arguments

Descartes' objective: to ascertain what he knows and what is merely opinion.

- This would be impossible if he had to go on a case-by-case basis, so "...owing to the fact that the destruction of the foundations of necessity brings with it the downfall of the rest of the edifice, I shall only in the first place attack those principles upon which all my former opinions rested." (6) By "principles", Descartes means the most basic *sources* of our knowledge: the senses, reason (which includes math & logic), faith

The method of doubt: "I ought no less carefully to withhold my assent from matters which are not entirely certain and indubitable than from those which appear to me manifestly false." (6)

1.1. The Dreaming Argument

- D1. If Descartes knows that he is sitting by a fire, then he knows that he is not dreaming.
 D2. Descartes does not know that he is not dreaming.
 D3. Descartes does not know that he is sitting by a fire. (D1, D2)
 D4. If any human knows anything about the external world on the basis of their senses, then Descartes knows that he is sitting by a fire.
 D5. ∴ No human knows anything about the external world on the basis of her senses. (D3, D4)

1.2. Could God Refute the Skeptic?

1. God is perfectly good (omnibenevolent), all-powerful (omnipotent), and all-knowing (omniscient).
2. If God is omnibenevolent, all-powerful, and all-knowing, then he does not deceive me.
3. If God does not deceive me, then all of my beliefs are true.
4. ∴ All of my beliefs are true.

Descartes: It is possible to doubt Premise 1.

1.3. The Evil Demon Argument

- ED1. It is always compatible with my beliefs that an omni-**malevolent**, omnipotent, and omniscient "evil genius/demon" exists.
 ED2. If the evil demon is omni-malevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient and I believe that p , then the evil demon deceives me, i.e. p is false.
 ED3. It is always compatible with my beliefs that I believe that p and p is false. (ED1, ED2)
 ED4. If S knows that p , then p 's falsehood must be incompatible with S 's beliefs.
 ED5. ∴ There are no p such that S knows that p (ED3, ED4).

- This extends to mathematics, memory, and beliefs about God.

2. 2nd Meditation: The mind is more knowable than the body

2.1. The Cogito

- C1. Suppose that I am deceived.
 C2. Then:
 - a. Something x exists which is deceived.
 - b. I, the deceived, = x .
 C3. ∴ I exist.

2.2. The Wax Argument(s)2.2.1. *The classic formulation* (1-11 to 1-12)

- W1. If anybody knows anything about the external world, then Descartes knows that a wax is the same object before and after it is melted.
- W2. The senses cannot tell us that the wax is the same object before and after it is melted.
- W3. If the senses cannot tell us that the wax is the same object before and after it is melted, then the mind must tell us that the wax is the same object before and after it is melted.
- W4. \therefore If anybody knows anything about the external world, then it is known by the mind, not the senses. (W1-W3)
- W5. If the only way to know that p is to know that q , then q is known more clearly and distinctly than p .
- W6. The mind is known more clearly and distinctly than the external world. (W4, W5)

2.2.2. *The other formulation* (1-12)

- W7. If anybody knows anything about the external world through his senses, then Descartes sees that the wax exists.
- W8. If Descartes sees that the wax exists:
 a. Something x exists that sees the wax.
 b. Descartes = x .
- W9. If anybody knows anything about the external world through his senses, he knows that he, as a mind, exists. (W7, W8)
- W5. If the only way to know that p is to know that q , then q is known more clearly and distinctly than p .
- W6. The mind is known more clearly and distinctly than the external world. (W9, W5)

2.3. The Cogito's Scope*Two readings* (1-10)

1. *The Austere Reading*: "What of thinking? I find here that thought is an attribute that belongs to me; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am, I exist, that is certain. But how often? Just when I think; for it might possibly be the case if I ceased entirely to think, that I should likewise cease altogether to exist."
2. *The Non-Austere Reading*: "But what then am I? A thing which thinks. What is a thing which thinks? It is a thing which doubts, understands, [conceives], affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels."

Note that I exist *only insofar* as I am deceived. So, what does it require for me to be deceived? It must *seem* to me that p . Hence, the Non-Austere Reading seems to license too much: I only *seem* to doubt, understand, conceive, affirm, deny, etc. But the Evil Demon could be fooling me about these features of my mental life too.