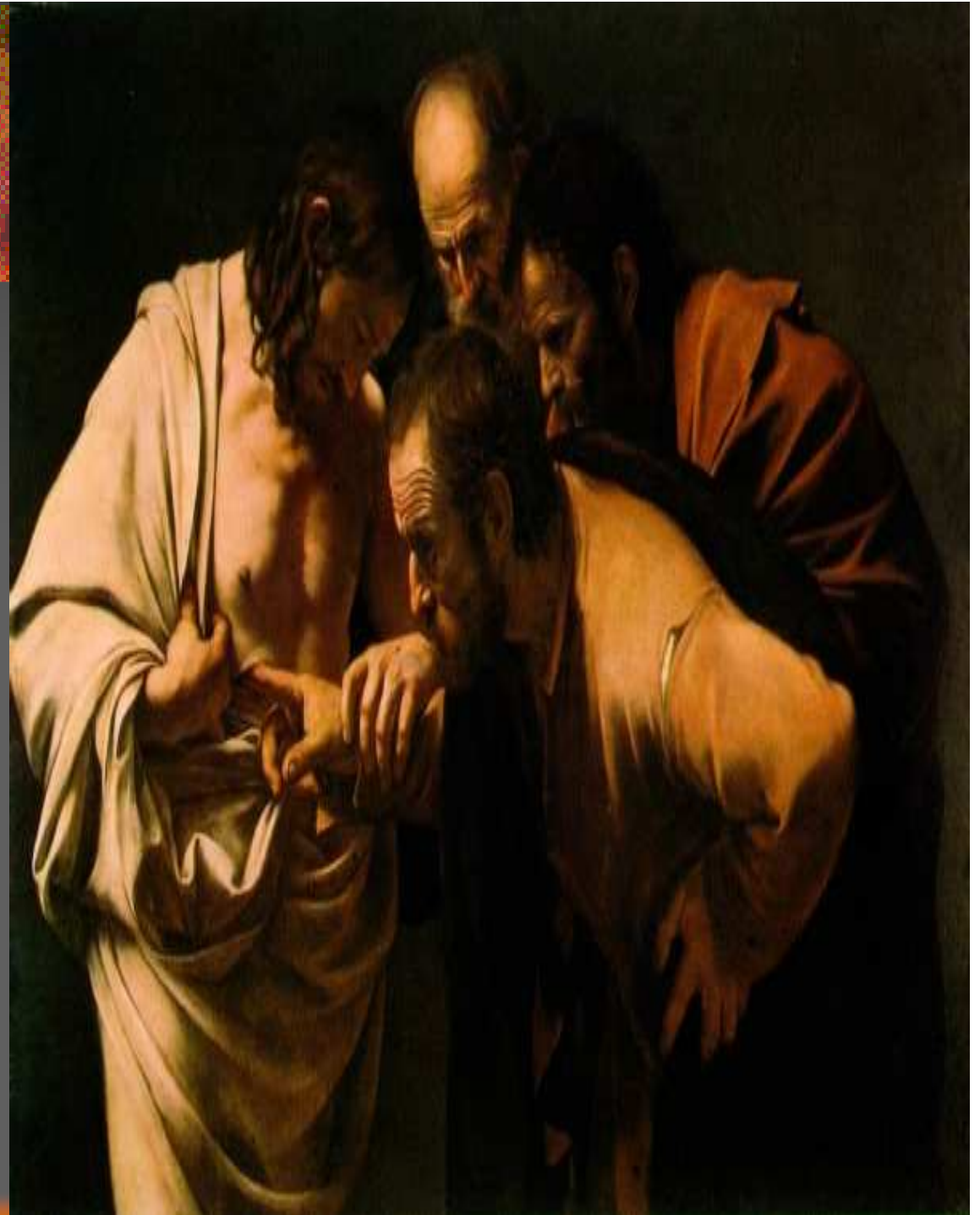


# Rene Descartes

1596-1650

*Caravaggio,  
"Doubting Thomas"*



# Overview of Rene Descartes' Meditations



- I. Background.
- II. Summary.
- III. Meditation I.
- IV. Meditation II.
- V. Meditation III.
- VI. Meditation IV.
- VII. Meditation V.
- VIII. Meditation VI

# Rene Descartes (1596-1650):

*When our own ideas are absolutely clear & distinct, free from all contradiction, then we are certain we possess the truth.*

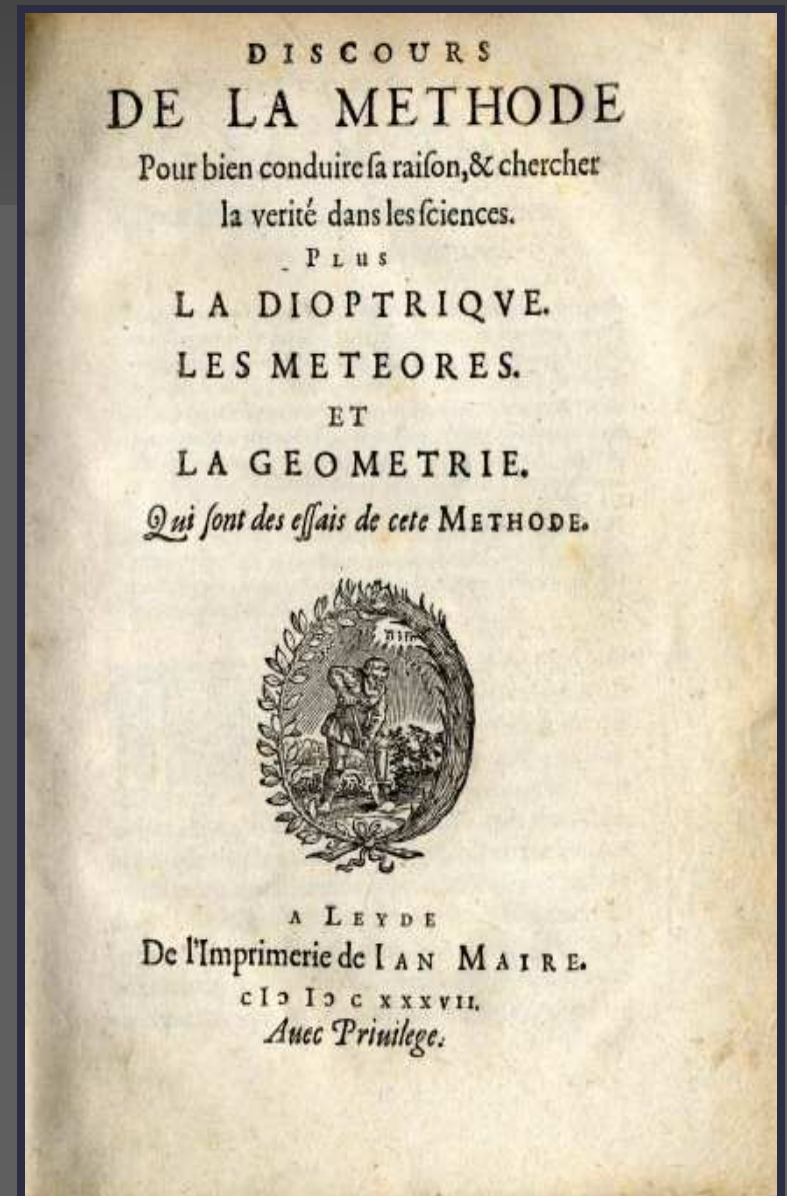
RENATI  
DES-CARTES,  
MEDITATIONES  
DE PRIMA  
PHILOSOPHIA  
IN QVA DEI EXISTENTIA  
ET ANIMÆ IMMORTALITAS  
DEMONSTRATVR.



PARISIIS,  
Apud MICHAELEM SOLY, viâ Iacobea, sub  
signo Phœnicis.  
M. DC. XLI.  
*Cum Privilegio, & Approbatione Doctorum.*

# I. Background:

- 1596-1650, born at La Haye, a small town in Touraine, France.
- Educated at a Jesuit college of La Fleche. He was dissatisfied with the course of instruction because it chiefly consisted of the transmission of the received opinions.
- 1637 he published *Discourse on Method*.
- 1640 he grievously experienced the death of his 5 yr. old illegitimate daughter Francine.



# I. Background:

- Educated at a Jesuit college of La Fleche. He was dissatisfied with the course of instruction because it chiefly consisted of the transmission of received opinions.
- 1619 in a series of dreams Descartes was convinced that he was favored by God, destined to be a philosopher. These dreams motivated him to invent a method of formal reasoning that would unite both mathematics and the physical sciences.



# I. Background:

- 1641 he published *Meditations on The First Philosophy* with six sets of objections from various distinguished persons (including Hobbes and Gassendi), & *Descartes' Replies to the Objections*.

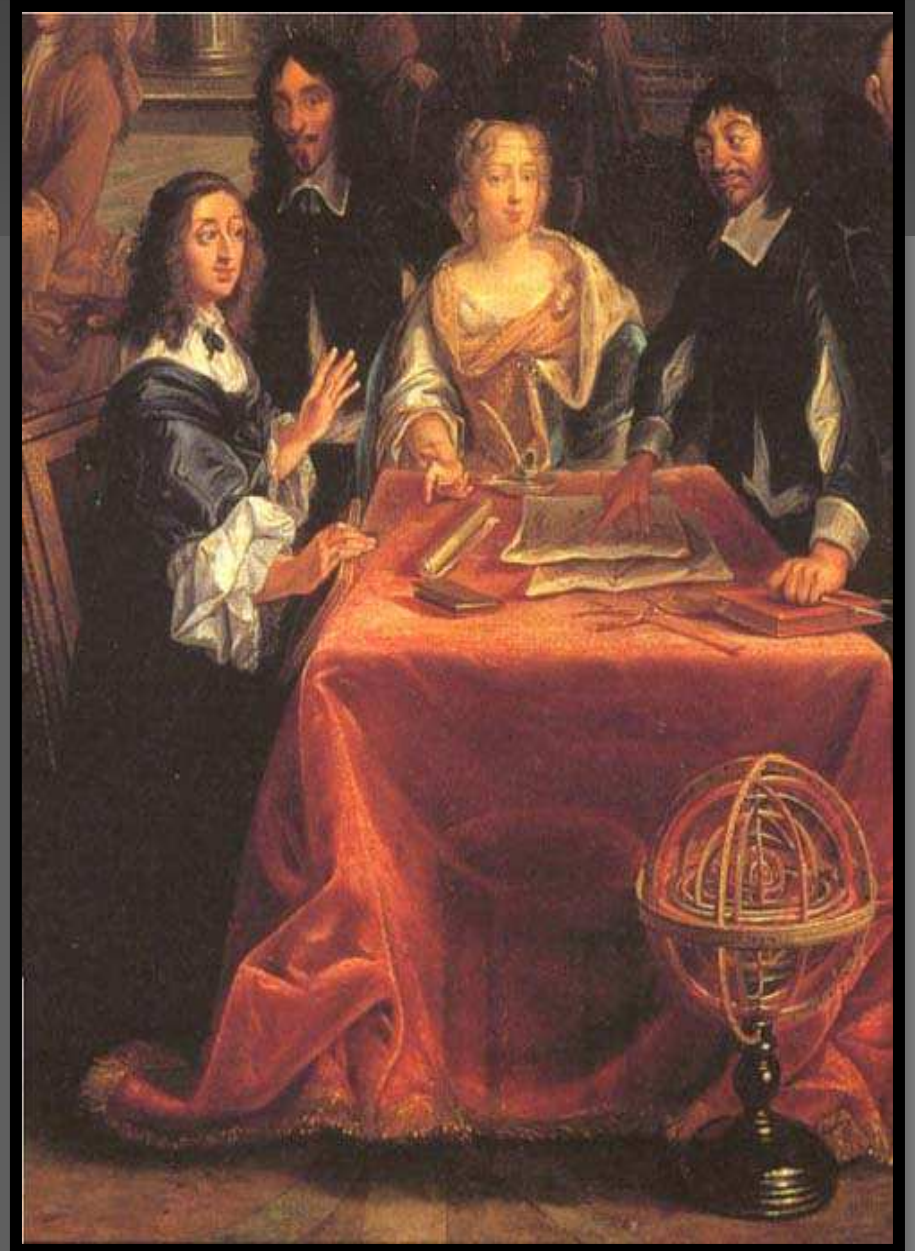
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PARISIIS,  
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signo Phœnicis.  
M. DC. XLI.  
Cum Privilegio, & Approbatione Doctorum.

# I. Background:

- 1644 Descartes published *Principles of Philosophy*.
- 1649 he became (with much hesitation) an instructor to Queen “King” Christina of Sweden.
- 1649 He published *The Passions of the Soul*.
- Feb. 11<sup>th</sup>, 1650 he died of pneumonia as a result of the Swedish climate and demands made upon him by the Queen.



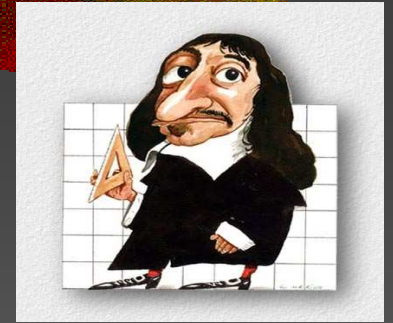
# Outline:

- I. Search for Intellectual Certainty
- II. Descartes' Goal, Method, & Plan
- III. Method:
  - Example from mathematics
  - Intuition and Deduction
  - Rules of Method
- III. Methodic Doubt
  - Reversal doubt
  - Cogito and the self
- V. The Existence of God
- VI. The Existence of Things
- VII. Mind and Body
- VIII. Other Models





# I. The Search for Intellectual Certainty:



1. *Jesuit college of La Fleche.* Descartes with problem of intellectual certainty. Attending one of the most celebrated schools in Europe, yet he “found myself embarrassed with ... many doubts and errors.”
2. *Ancient literature* stimulated the mind but could not guide behavior.
3. Though he honored theology and seemed to remain a pious Catholic to the end, he *did not find in theology a method by which these truths could be arrived at solely through the power of reason.*
4. In philosophy, “*no single thing is to be found in it which is not subject of dispute, and in consequence which is not dubious.*”
5. In practical life by means of traveling, “the great book of the world,” he met men of diverse temperaments and conditions” and collected various experiences.” Among men of the world, he hoped to discover more exact meaning in practical life. But, he found as much difference of opinion among practical people as among philosophers.

## I. The Search for Intellectual Certainty:

6. From his experience with the book of the world, Descartes decided “to believe nothing too certainly of which I had only been convinced by example and custom.”
7. He resolved to continue his search for certainty and on 10 November 1619, had three dreams, which unmistakably convinced him that he must *construct the system of true knowledge upon the powers of human reason alone*.
8. Descartes broke with the past to give philosophy a fresh start. His system of truth will be derived from his own rational powers; he will no longer rely on previous philosophers for his ideas, nor accept any idea as truly only because it was expressed by someone with authority. Aristotle’s reputation nor the authority of the church could suffice to produce the kind of certainty he sought.





## II. Descartes' Goal:

- Lay the foundations for acquiring certain knowledge of the world and to proceed to acquire that knowledge through a careful use of the method he prescribed.
- If we use reason carefully, following his method, then we will be able to attain certain knowledge of the truth.
- All aspects of nature may be investigated the same way, and that, ultimately, we may hope to achieve a unified understanding of the world.



## II. Descartes' Method:

■ Descartes placed a priority on epistemology and finding a method of acquiring knowledge.

- Skeptical of knowledge he had learned in his schooling.
- How can one distinguish true beliefs from false beliefs?
- How could the false beliefs Descartes acquired be discounted, and only true beliefs be accepted?
- Since Descartes was “especially pleased with mathematics, because of the certainty and self-evidence of its proofs,” and also that he “... was astonished that nothing more noble had been built on so firm and solid a foundation.”



## **Method: The Need for the Meditations:**

“Some years ago I was struck by the large number of falsehoods that I had accepted as true in my childhood, and by the highly doubtful nature of the whole edifice that I had subsequently based on them. I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last” (m. 18).

# The Method:

Descartes continues, “Once the foundations of a building are undermined, anything built on them collapses of its own accord; so I will go straight for the basic principles on which all my former beliefs rested” (m. 18).





# Descartes' Method:

## ■ Knowledge Requires Certainty:

- Since Descartes believed that real knowledge requires absolute certainty, namely, the kind of certainty we observe in mathematics.
- To achieve certainty of that sort, we need two things:
  - A solid foundation;
  - A way of building from the foundation to other truths.

## II. Descartes' Plan:



Descartes was determined to discover the basis of intellectual certainty in his own reason. He was well aware of his unique place in the history of philosophy:

“although all the truths which I class among my principles have been known from all time and by all men, there has been no one up to the present, who, so far as I know, has adopted them as principles of philosophy...as the sources from which they may be derived a knowledge of all things else which are in the world. This is why it here remains to me to prove that they are such.”



## II. Descartes' Plan:



His ideal was to arrive at a system of thought whose various principles were true and were related to each other in such a clear way that the mind could move easily from one true principle to another. But in order to achieve such an organically connected set of truths, Descartes felt that he must make these truths “conform to a rational scheme.” With such a scheme he could not only organize present knowledge but could “direct our reason in order to discover those truths of which are ignorant.” His first task therefore was to work out his “rational scheme,” his method.



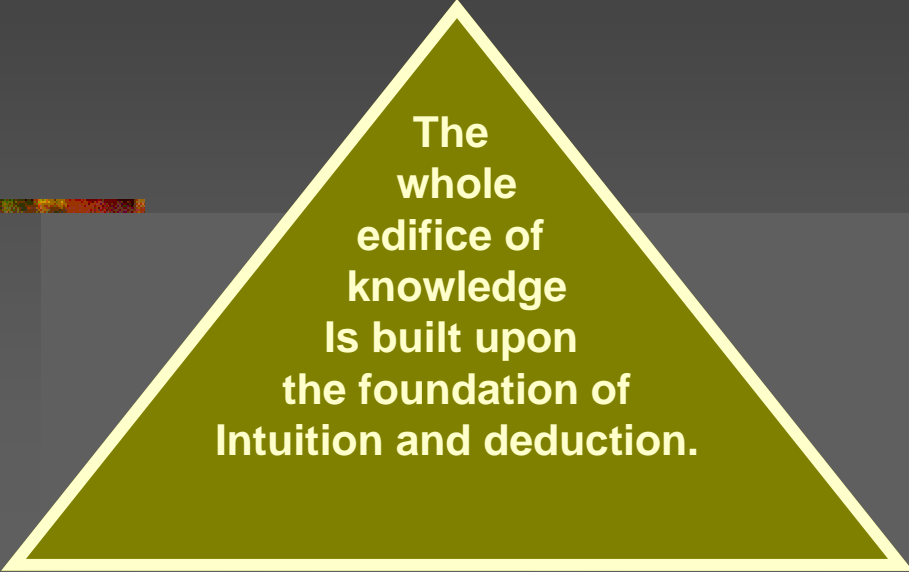
## III. Descartes' Method

- A. It consists of harnessing the powers of the mind with a special set of rules.
- B. Insisted on the *necessity* of a method that is systematic and orderly.
- C. Minds naturally possess two powers: intuition and deduction, “*mental powers by which we are able, entirely without fear of illusion, to arrive at the knowledge of things.*” But by themselves these powers can lead us astray unless they are carefully regulated. **Method consists, therefore, in those rules by which our powers of intuition and deduction are guided in an orderly way.**

# C. Induction & Deduction:

Descartes states:

“These two methods are the most certain routes to knowledge,” adding that any other approach should be “rejected as suspect of error and dangerous.”



The whole edifice of knowledge is built upon the foundation of Intuition and deduction.

**Intuition:** *“an intellectual activity or vision of such clarity that it leaves no doubt in the mind.”*

Whereas fluctuating testimony of our senses & imperfect creations of our imaginations leave us confused, intuition provides “the conception which an unclouded and attentive mind gives us so readily and distinctly that we are wholly freed from doubt about that which we understand.” Intuition gives us not only clear notions but also some truths about reality (e.g., I think, that I exist; sphere has a single surface truths that are basic, simple, & irreducible. It is by intuition that we grasp the connection between one truth & another.

**Deduction** is *“all necessary inference from facts that are known with certainty.”*

Deductions are similar to intuition because they both involve truth. By deduction we arrive at a truth by a process, a “continuous and uninterrupted action of the mind. By tying deduction so closely with intuition, which is a simple truth we grasp immediately and completely, deduction indicates the relation of truths to each other. Reasoning from a fact (not from a syllogistic premise) is at stake. So, remote conclusions are furnished only by deduction.



# What is an Intuition?

■ Consider Steve Daniel's definition of Intuition:

“Intuition: that which is clearly and distinctly perceived, as well as the act of immediately apprehending something that is clearly and distinctly perceived. Since nothing apprehended by the senses is known clearly and distinctly, no sensation is an intuition; and anything known intuitively (e.g., thinking) cannot be resolved into anything simpler. To the extent that any idea is apprehended clearly and distinctly, it is known as the object solely of the mind, and in that sense can be said to be innate. Intuitions can thus be both the activity of the mind in apprehending something clearly and distinctly (and might thus be called inner) and the objects apprehended in that way.” Dr. D.

## D. Rules of Method:

Descartes' method does not consist only of intuition and deduction, but also in the rules he formulated for their guidance.

Chief point of rules is to provide a clear and orderly procedure for the operation of the mind.

It was his conviction that "*method consists entirely in the order and disposition of the objects toward which our mental vision must be directed if we would find out any truth.*"

The mind must begin with a simple and absolutely clear truth and must move step by step without losing clarity and certainty along the way.

He offers 21 rules in *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (rule, 3, 4, 5, and 8 are most important and four precepts in *Discourse on Method* which he believed to be perfectly sufficient.

Rule III: When we propose to investigate a subject, "*our inquiries should be directed, not to what others have thought, not to what we ourselves conjecture, but to what we can clearly and perspicuously behold with certainty deduce.*"

Rule IV: This is a rule requiring that other rules be adhered to strictly, for "if a man observe them accurately, he shall never assume what is false as true, and will never spend his mental efforts to no purpose."

Rule V: We shall comply with the method exactly if we "*reduce involved and obscure propositions step by step to those that are simpler, and then starting with the intuitive apprehension of all those that are absolutely simple, attempt to ascend to the knowledge of all others by precisely similar steps.*"

Rule VIII: "*If in the matters to be examined we come to a step in the series of which our understanding is not sufficiently well able to have an intuitive cognition, we must stop short there.*"

These four precepts are perfectly sufficient, “provided I took the firm and unwavering resolution never in a single instance to fail in observing them.”

**1<sup>st</sup>: Only accept indubitable truth:**

“The first was never to accept anything for true which I did not clearly know to be such; ...to comprise nothing more in my judgment than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt.”

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Break down every difficulty into many parts as possible to find adequate solution:**

To divide each of the difficulties under examination into as many parts as possible, and as might be necessary for its adequate solution.

**3<sup>rd</sup>: Inductive method: Simple to the complex:**

To conduct my thoughts in such order that by commencing with objects the simplest and easiest to know, I might ascend by little and little, and as it were, step by step, to the knowledge of the more complex...

**4<sup>th</sup>: Completely thorough:**

“In every case to make enumerations so complete, and reviews so general, that I might be assured that nothing was omitted.”

## II. Descartes' Method: Looking for method like Math

D. Example of Mathematics: Best example of clear and precise thinking.

1. *“My method,”* he writes, *“contains everything which gives certainty to the rules of arithmetic.”*

2. Descartes wanted to make all of knowledge a *“universal mathematics.”*

## II. Descartes' Method: Looking for method like Math

3. Mathematical certainty is the result of a special way of thinking, and if he could discover this way, he would have a method for discovering true knowledge, “of whatever lay within the compass of my powers.”
4. Mathematics is not itself the method but merely exhibits the method. Specifically, he discovered that the mind is able to apprehend directly and clearly certain basic truths, that we are capable of knowing some ideas with absolute clarity and distinctness.
5. Mathematical reasoning showed him that we are able to discover what we do not know by progressing in an orderly way from what do know.

Descartes as convinced that his method contained “*primary rudiments of human reason*” and that with it he could elicit “*truths in every field whatsoever.*”



## ***Little emphasis on sense experience & experiment***

Compared with Bacon & Hobbes, Descartes puts very little emphasis in his method upon sense experience & experiment in achieving knowledge. How is that we know the essential qualities? For ex. Descartes asks: “At one time a piece of wax is hard, has a certain shape, color, size, and fragrance. But when we bring it close to the fire its fragrance vanishes, its shape & color are lost, and its size increases. What remains in the wax that permits us still to know it is wax?” “It cannot, “ says Descartes, “be anything that I observed by means of the senses, since everything in the field of taste, smell, sight, touch, & hearing is changed, & still the same wax nevertheless remains.” It is “nothing but my understanding alone which does conceive it...solely an inspection of the mind,’ which enables me to know the true qualities of the wax. “What I have said about the wax can be applied to all other things external to me.”

He relies for the most part upon the truths contained in the mind, “deriving them from [no] other source than certain germs of truth which exist naturally in our souls.”



## III. Methodic Doubt:

- Descartes used method of doubt in order have an absolutely certain starting point for building up our knowledge.
  - Since our rules say we should never accept anything about which we can entertain any doubt, Descartes now tries to doubt everything, saying that “because I wished to give myself entirely to the search after truth, I thought it was necessary for me... to reject as absolutely false everything concerning which I could imagine the least ground of doubt.”
    - Sweep away all former opinions, “so that they might later on be replaced, either by others which were better, or by the same, when I had made them conform to the uniformity of a rational scheme.”



## **First Meditation: Arguments for Doubting all His beliefs**

1. He first observes that the senses sometimes deceive, for example, objects at a distance appear to be quite small, and surely it is not prudent to trust someone (or something) that has deceived us even once. However, although this may apply to sensations derived under certain circumstances, doesn't it seem certain that "I am here, sitting by the fire, wearing a winter dressing gown, holding this piece of paper in my hands, and so on"? (AT VII 18: CSM II 13).



## First Meditation: Arguments for Doubting all His beliefs

Descartes' point is that even though the senses deceive us some of the time, what basis for doubt exists for the immediate belief that, for example, you are reading this article? But maybe the belief of reading this article or of sitting by the fireplace is not based on true sensations at all but on the false sensations found in dreams. If such sensations are just dreams, then it is not really the case that you are reading this article but in fact you are in bed asleep. Since there is no principled way of distinguishing waking life from dreams, any belief based on sensation has been shown to be doubtful. This includes not only the mundane beliefs about reading articles or sitting by the fire but even the beliefs of experimental science are doubtful, because the observations upon which they are based may not be true but mere dream images. Therefore, all beliefs based on sensation have been called into doubt, because it might all be a dream.



## **Grounds of Doubt: First Meditation:**

“I should abstain from the belief in things which are not entirely certain and indubitable no less carefully than from the belief in those which appear to me to be manifestly false.”



## II. The Goal of Meditations:

- Establish something that is lasting in science (which means human knowledge).
- He is interested in foundations of knowledge.





## III. Method:

- Method: It is a radical approach.
  - Look at all our beliefs.
  - Any belief I can doubt, I'm going to consider it false. What can't be doubted is true. Therefore, anything left is "certain."
  - Not only is it a radical approach in destroying "true" beliefs but also a strong approach in building beliefs.



**Consider the following statements by Rene Descartes:**

“Whatever I have up till now accepted as most true I have acquired either from the senses or through the senses. But from time to time I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once” (VII.18). ~ Descartes.





## Consider the following statements by Rene Descartes:

“So serious are the doubts into which I have been thrown as a result of yesterday’s meditation that I can neither put them out of my mind nor see any way of resolving them. It feels as if I have fallen unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool which tumbles me around so that I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim up to the top. Nevertheless... I will proceed... until I recognize something certain, or, if nothing else, until I at least recognize for certain that there is no certainty. Archimedes used to demand just one firm and immovable point in order to shift the entire earth; so I too can hope for great things if I manage to find just one thing, however slight, that is certain and unshakeable (VII:24).”

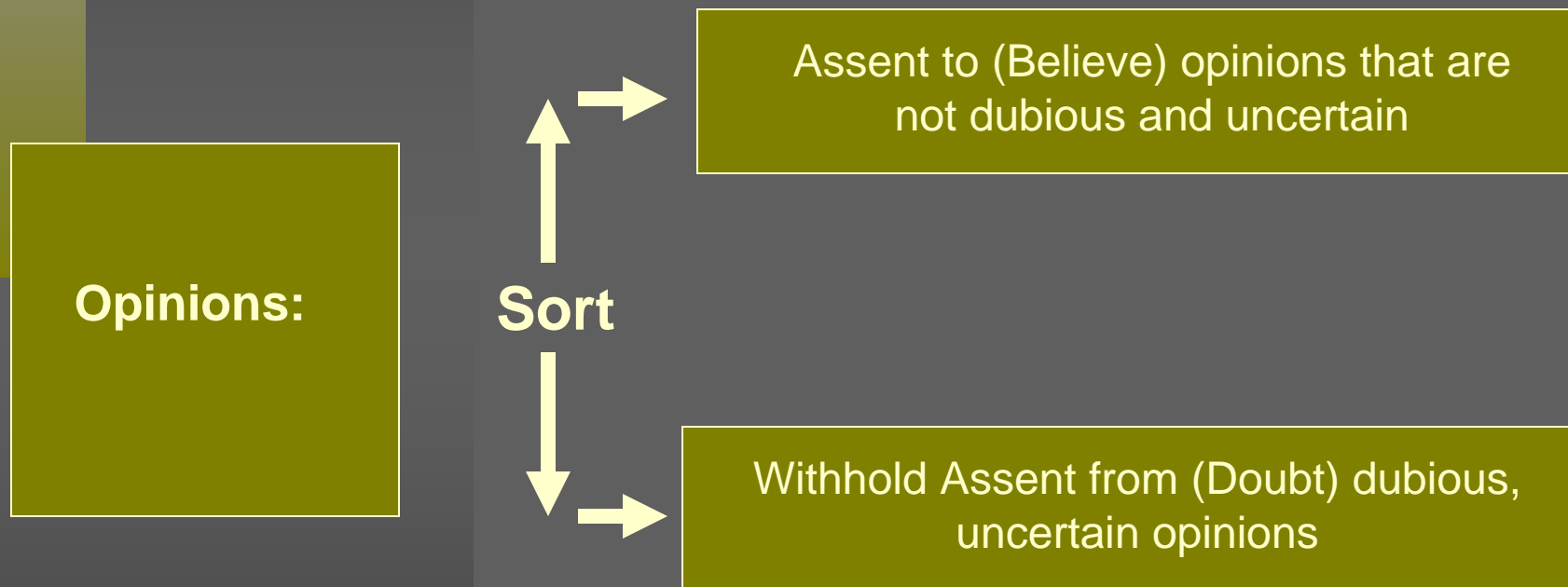


## III. Method:

### Questions:

1. If you are to doubt everything in order to know something, does he ever doubt his own method?
2. Does he even doubt basic mathematical, geometric truths or is he only concerned with “truths” we care about?
3. Are there are certain high probable truths that appear productive? Should we really throw them out?
4. Should we doubt our most basic beliefs?

# First Meditation: Withholding Policy Method:





# He also goes one step further...

- by considering false any belief that falls prey to even the slightest doubt. Thus, by the end of the *First Meditation*, Descartes finds himself in a whirlpool of false beliefs.
- Notwithstanding, the doubts and the supposed falsehood of all his beliefs are for the sake of his method for:
  - He does not believe he is dreaming;
  - Not being deceived by an evil demon;

His doubt is merely hyperbolic or methodological for his plan is to clear the mind of preconceived opinions that might obscure the truth.

The goal then is to find something that cannot be doubted even though an evil demon is deceiving him and even though he is dreaming. This first indubitable truth will then serve as an intuitively grasped metaphysical “axiom” from which absolutely certain knowledge can be deduced.

# V. The Order of Systematic Attack:

Class 1: Senses → Non-sensory.

Class 2: The Dreamer Argument:

- How do I know that I'm not just dreaming?
- The fact that we dream gives us reason to doubt that the external world exist at all.
- Does the dreamer argument undermine the existence of the eternal world at all?


Class 3: The Demon Argument.

- Does the demon argument cast doubt on tautologies, basic mathematics, physics, medicine, fundamental convictions of knowledge).
- The demon could be tricking us (even  $2+3=5$ ).



# Outline of Meditations:

- Meditation 1: Methodic Doubt
- Meditation 2: Cogito
- Meditation 3: God
- Meditation 4: True and False
- Meditation 5: Essence Corporeal Reality and existence of God
- Meditation 6: Existence of Corporeal Reality and Mind/Body Relation



Objectors (2, 3, and 4 are the most philosophical; 1, 5, 6, & 7 are mostly theological).

Father Mersenne circulates Descartes to the following for replies:

- Arnauld (4<sup>th</sup> Set of Objections)
- Jean Pierre Bourdin (7<sup>th</sup> Set of Objections)
- Caterus (1<sup>st</sup> Set of Objections)
- Pierre Gassendi (5<sup>th</sup> Set of Objections)
- Hobbes (3<sup>rd</sup> Set of Objections)
- Father Mersenne (largely compiled by Mersenne; 2<sup>nd</sup> Set of Objections).



## Meditation 1 Outline: Methodic Doubt:

- A. Three Areas of Doubt: Sensory Experience, Dream Argument; and Malevolent Demon (seemingly certain):
- B. Recognize my own imperfection, thus my deception regarding what is “seemingly certain”
- C. Resolution to withhold assent to what is (possibly) false





# 1. Doubting Sense Perception:

- Sometimes our senses can deceive us. For example, objects sometimes look different from a distance than they do close up. But generally, we take our senses to be reliable indicators of what the world around us is like.
- However, since our beliefs based on sense perception can deceive us, we have reason to “doubt.” If there is an alternative explanation, then we have grounds for doubt.



**Consider the following statements by Rene Descartes:**

**“Whatever I have up till now accepted as most true I have acquired either from the senses or through the senses. But from time to time I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once” (VII.18). ~ Descartes.**



## 2. Dreaming:

- Another ground of doubt for our beliefs about the world is that we could be dreaming for sometimes when we are asleep, we think we are awake.
  - You think you are awake right now? But can you prove that you are?
  - How do you know that this is not just one of occasions when you really are asleep, but think you are awake?
- There are not “conclusive indications” by which sleep and wakefulness can be distinguished. So, you have an alternative<sup>43</sup> explanation, a ground of doubt, for the experience you are having.



**Methodic Doubt: By this means Descartes shows how uncertain our knowledge is, even of what seems most obvious to us:**

- How do I know if I'm dreaming/awake?

- What can be clearer than "*I'm walking my collie down the street.*" But when I am asleep, I dream the same thing. Thus, there is no "*Conclusive indications by which waking life can be distinguished from sleep.*"



## 2. Dreaming:

- No inspection of the contents of your experienced will help you decide if you are awake or asleep. Thus, you must set aside your belief, for example, that there is a professor in front of you. Likewise, you must set aside all beliefs based on sense experience until you can be certain that they are true.
- These include not only beliefs about the particular objects around you, but also more general beliefs about the world, including scientific beliefs, as well as the very general belief that there is a world at all.



## 3. Doubting a Priori Beliefs:

- The kind of beliefs we have wondered above are sometimes called a posteriori—that is, acquired ‘posterior to’ or after you begin to have, experience. Still, we have many beliefs that we believe independently of our experience. These beliefs are called a priori—that is, knowable, ‘prior to’ experience. Thus, their truth can be determined independently of experience.
  - Consider  $1+1=2$ . You can tell whether that is true without conducting an experiment. Simply by having an understanding of addition and the concept of 1, you can see that, indeed, one plus one equals 2.
  - Consider a triangle has three sides. Simply by knowing the definition of triangle, you can tell that proposition to be true.
- Descartes believes we have a priori beliefs but he thinks they come from innate ideas.



## 4. The Evil Deceiver:

- Can we be sure that such beliefs are true, that, for instance,  $1 + 1 = 2$ ? Is there an alternative explanation for why we believe this, other than it is true?
- There could be an extremely powerful deceiver who brings about that whenever you think  $1+1=2$ , you are wrong. Can you be certain that there is no such deceiver?
- Another way of thinking about this is simply to suppose that your brain was wired up incorrectly, so that whenever you think of a false thought, such as  $1 + 1 = 3$ , you have feeling of certainty that it is true, and whenever you think a true thought,  $1 + 1 = 2$ , you have a feeling of certainty that it is false.
- Now, how do you know that this is not the case? Could an evil deceiver have scrambled your brains, so that you are constantly confused? Can you be certain that this has not happened to you?



## 4. The Evil Deceiver:

- Descartes believes that he cannot be certain of even his seemingly most certain beliefs such as the truths of mathematics, for he has found an alternative explanation of why he believes them, which he is unable to rule out.
- Descartes' ground of doubt for a priori beliefs, namely, the evil deceiver, is sufficient to cast doubt on all his beliefs.
- Why did not he not just start off using the evil deceiver as a ground of doubt? The answer: Descartes suspects that, in fact, some of the beliefs he has set aside are true, while others are not.
- Even if there is not an evil deceiver-and he will show us that there is not, there are still good reasons for doubting some of our beliefs, such as those based on sense perception. Thus, it is important to be aware of all of the reasons for doubting each set of beliefs.



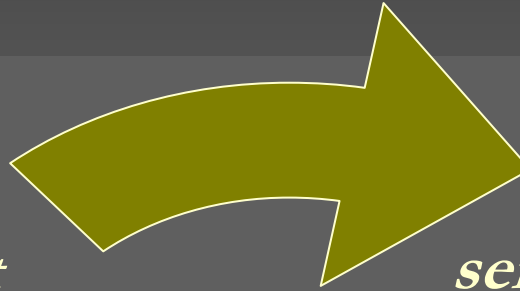
## 4. Evil Demon:

Because of the evil demon, we can't even trust the laws of logic such as the law of non-contradiction.



# Downward Spiral of Methodical Doubt:

*Dream  
argument  
cast doubt  
on collective  
sense of reality*



*Doubt of  
sense perceptions  
cast doubt  
on individual  
Sense perceptions*



*Evil Demon  
argument*

*cast doubt on your thought process*





## Consider the following statements by Rene Descartes:

“So serious are the doubts into which I have been thrown as a result of yesterday’s meditation that I can neither put them out of my mind nor see any way of resolving them. It feels as if I have fallen unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool which tumbles me around so that I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim up to the top. Nevertheless... I will proceed... until I recognize something certain, or, if nothing else, until I at least recognize for certain that there is no certainty. Archimedes used to demand just one firm and immovable point in order to shift the entire earth; so I too can hope for great things if I manage to find just one thing, however slight, that is certain and unshakeable (VII:24).”



## **Meditation 2 Outline: Cogito: The Nature of the Human Mind**

- A. Cogito ergo sum: discovery of a certain and unshakeable truth**
- B. What am I?**
  - 1. rational animal? No: uncertainty regarding meaning of "rational" & "animal"**
  - 2. Am I a bodied soul? No: indistinct apprehension of my bodily existence**
  - 3. I am (finite) substance: mind: principal attribute of mind: thinking; modes of thinking: doubting, understanding, affirming, denying, willing, refusing, imagining, sensing**

## Meditation 2 Outline: Cogito: The Nature of the Human Mind

C. Intuition of the piece of wax: what can be clearly and distinctly grasped?

1. Nothing by sensing the wax: a flux of changing impressions
2. The wax remains singular, the appearances change fluidly
3. Is this through the imagination? No, the wax "takes on an even greater variety of dimensions than I could ever grasp with the imagination" (22)
4. The wax remains singular in all the innumerable representations
5. Is the wax perceived by the mind alone? – apprehending the unchanging substance underlying variegated appearances is an inspection on the part of the mind alone

*"what I thought I had seen with my eyes, I actually grasped solely with the faculty of judgment, which is in my mind" (22)*



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Meditation: A Closer Look

- Descartes is in a predicament when he begins 2<sup>nd</sup> Meditation for he seems unable to be certain of any of his beliefs. Thus, he has put them aside.

“I, suppose, then, that all things that I see are false; I persuade myself that nothing has ever existed of all that my fallacious memory represents to me. I consider that I possess no senses; I imagine that body, figure, extension, movement, and place are but the fictions of my mind. What, then, can be esteemed as true? Perhaps nothing at all, unless that there is nothing in the world that is certain. What, then, can be esteemed as true? Perhaps nothing at all, unless that there is nothing in the world that is certain.”

- He can not longer believe there is a world around him; he must simply suspend of all his beliefs.
- But is there not one thing he can be absolutely certain of-that is, for which there is no alternative explanation?

# Descartes' Reasoning:

- Descartes thinks that there is one thing of which he can be absolutely certain, namely, that he exists.
  - For even if there is an evil deceiver, the most powerful ground of doubt Descartes can find, the deceiver cannot be an alternative explanation for Descartes' belief that he exists.
  - Descartes' reason for believing that he exists is that he is thinking, whether that thinking consists of being deceived by the deceiver or not. In order to be thinking, he must exist.



# Descartes' Reasoning:

- Therefore, Descartes cannot be deceived in believing that he exists, for even if he is being deceived, he exists.
  - The prerequisite for his having this thought that he is deceived is that he exists; there is no alternative explanation, no ground for doubting that he exists.
  - Thus, he knows clearly and indubitably that he exists.
  - This line of reasoning is sometimes referred to as the cogito.



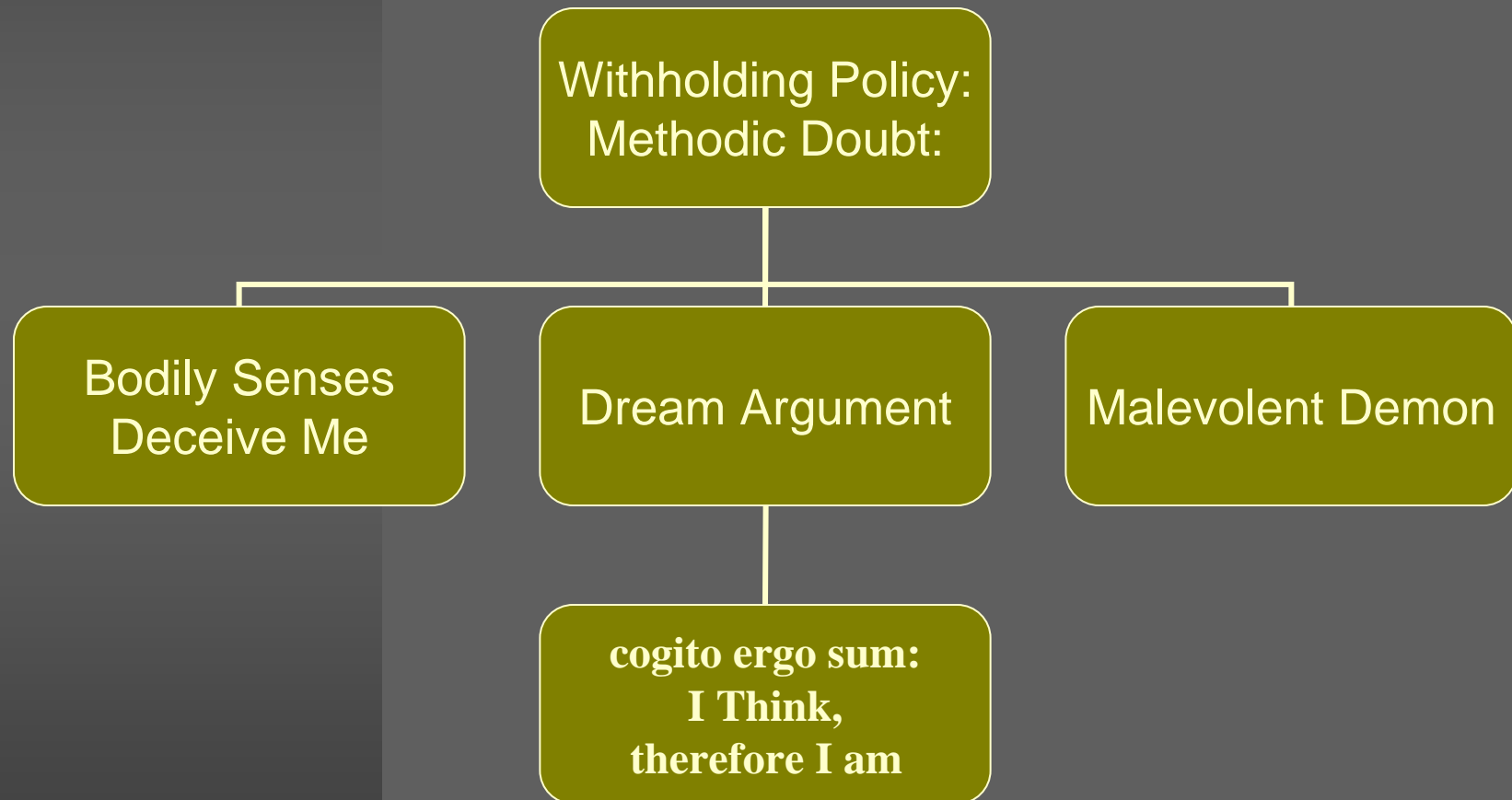




# What Descartes Establishes:

- Descartes' Starting Point is the Cogito:
  - He has found an indubitable belief to serve as a starting point, a foundation for a new system of knowledge.
  - All Descartes knows is that while he is thinking, or engaged in some mental activity, he exists.

# First & Second Meditation:





# Meditation 2: Cogito:

- **The Cogito: “I think therefore I am.” The thinker can be wrong about everything else-but the thinker still exists.**
  - 1. I think.
  - 2. Whatever thinks exists.
  - 3. I exist.
- **Putting the cogito as the apex of knowledge presents a problem: Why not put God’s existence here?**
- **Problems:**
  - Why can’t I doubt our ability to reason from these claims? We are we using reason. But didn’t Descartes say that we can’t trust our reason.
  - We can say things that are true within certain contexts-even though they don’t exist (e.g., orcs in Lord of the Rings).
  - This argument is a strong assumption.
  - One of the best objectors was Gassendi (pg. 68) in the fifth objections.



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# **Meditation 2: Problems with Cogito**

## **Problems:**

- 1. Why can't I doubt our ability to reason from these claims? We are we using reason. But didn't Descartes say that we can't trust our reason.**
- 2. We can say things that are true within certain contexts-even though they don't exist (e.g., orcs in Lord of the Rings).**
- 3. This argument is a strong assumption.**
- 4. One of the best objectors was Gassendi (pg. 68) in the fifth objections.**



## **2<sup>nd</sup> Meditation: Main Point: It Establishes Certainty: “I think, therefore I am.”**

In the *Second Meditation*, Descartes tries to establish absolute certainty in his famous reasoning: *Cogito, ergo sum* or “I think, therefore I am.”

All sensory beliefs had been found doubtful in 1st meditation. Thus, all such beliefs are now considered false. This includes the belief that I have a body endowed with sense organs. However, does the supposed falsehood of this belief mean that I do not exist?

No, for if I convinced myself that my beliefs are false, then surely there must be an “I” that was convinced. even if I am being deceived by an evil demon, I must exist in order to be deceived at all. So “I must finally conclude that the proposition, ‘I am,’ ‘I exist,’ is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind” (AT VII 25: CSM II 16-17).

This just means that the mere fact that I am thinking, regardless of whether or not what I am thinking is true or false, implies that there must be something engaged in that activity, namely an “I.” Hence, “I exist” is an indubitable and, therefore, absolutely certain belief that serves as an axiom from which other, absolutely certain truths can be deduced.



## **2<sup>nd</sup> Meditation : He discards traditional Scholastic – Aristotelian concept of what it means to be Human.**

- The *Second Meditation* continues with Descartes asking, “What am I?” After discarding the traditional Scholastic-Aristotelian concept of a human being as a rational animal due to the inherent difficulties of defining “rational” and “animal,” he finally concludes that he is a thinking thing, a mind: “A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sense perceptions” (AT VII 28: CSM II 19).



# Wax Example:

- Wax is not available to the senses;
- What is the wax; the idea of it.
- I have to know what wax is intuitively.
- Like water, H<sub>2</sub>O, when I think of these things, I think of them only in intellectual terms (e.g., red, a certain wave length; water is H<sub>2</sub>O).
- A body is a point (Cartesian geometry).
- However, we still don't know if wax is available, but there is, then we can know:
- Pure mathematical geometry.





# The Wax Passage:

- Transparency of the Mental: the mind is better known than the body.
- "I think the wax is yellow."
- This thought may contain the view that the wax is yellow.
- But the mind is better than the body; it is the intellect but not the senses.
- What can he say is his clear and distinct ideas of the wax? The wax has primary qualities (changeability of shape).
- But we don't get this secure till Meditation 5



## Wax Example in Second Meditation: Mind is better known than the body.

- A. The central point of wax example is that the mind is better known than the body.
- B. Descartes pauses from his methodological doubt to examine a particular piece of wax fresh from the honeycomb:

*It has not yet quite lost the taste of the honey; it retains some of the scent of flowers from which it was gathered; its color shape and size are plain to see; it is hard, cold and can be handled without difficulty; if you rap it with your knuckle it makes a sound. (AT VII 30: CSM II 20)*

- C. Issue: Senses perceive certain qualities of the wax like its hardness, smell, and so forth. But, as it is moved closer to the fire, all of these sensible qualities change. “Look: the residual taste is eliminated, the smell goes away, the color changes, the shape is lost, the size increases, it becomes liquid and hot” (AT VII 30: CSM II 20). However, despite these changes in what the senses perceive of the wax, it is still judged to be the same wax now as before. To warrant this judgment, something that does not change must have been perceived in the wax.

**Wax Example Establishes Three Points (SPI): sensation involves judgment, what is perceived by mind alone, and immaterial material things better source of knowledge.**

The mind judges  
The wax to be wax  
no matter how it has  
changed:  
3 points  
are established:

S

P

I

All sensation  
involves  
some sort of judgment,  
which is a mental mode.

“every sensation is,  
in some sense, a mental mode,  
and “the more attributes  
[that is, modes] we  
discover in the same thing or  
substance, the clearer is our  
knowledge of that substance”

What is unchangeable in  
wax is its extension:  
Length, breadth,  
& depth are not  
perceivable by senses,  
but by mind alone.

Shape & size are  
modes of extension:  
They can change while the  
extension  
constituting wax  
remains the same.

Immaterial mental things  
are better source of  
knowledge than extended  
things; don't rely on sense  
images as source for, or  
an aid, to knowledge.



## Consider this important statement:

But as I reach this conclusion I am amazed at how <weak and> prone to error my mind is. For although I am thinking about these matters within myself, silently and without speaking, nonetheless the actual words bring me up short, and I am almost tricked by ordinary ways of talking. We say that we see the wax itself, if it is there before us, not that we judge it to be there from its colour or shape; and this might lead me to conclude without more ado that knowledge of the wax comes from what the eye sees, and not from the scrutiny of the mind alone. But then if I look out of the window and see men crossing the square, as I just happen to have done, I normally say that I see the men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax. Yet do I see anymore than hats and coats which could conceal automatons? I judge that they are men. And so something which I thought I was seeing with my eyes is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgment which is in my mind.



**Consider this important statement: Descartes continues (M. 32).**

However, one who wants to achieve knowledge above the ordinary level should feel ashamed at having taken ordinary ways of talking as a basis for doubt. So let us proceed, and consider on which occasion my perception of the nature of the wax was more perfect and evident. Was it when I first looked at it, and believed I knew it by my external senses, or at least by what they call the 'common sense-that is, the power of imagination? Or is my knowledge more perfect now, after a more carefully investigation of the wax and of the means by which it is known? Any doubt on this issue would clearly be foolish; for what distinctness was there in my earlier perception? Was there anything in it which an animal could not possess? But when I distinguish the wax from its outward forms-take the clothes off, as it were, and consider it naked-then although my judgement may still contain errors, at least my perception now requires a human mind.



# Criticisms of the Cogito:

- Does the Cogito really establish anything?
  - It is not really an argument at all. If it were an argument, then it would have as its premise: “I am thinking,” and from the premise alone, it would derive its conclusion, “I exist.” But another premise is needed to make such a line of reasoning valid: “Thinking things exist.” Yet, Descartes cannot know that thinking things exist, given that he has doubted everything.

## Descartes' Belief-Set:

*Believe only that which  
can't be doubted*

*Beliefs which can be  
doubted*

I think, therefore I exist.

I think, i.e., I doubt, will, imagine,  
perceive, etc.

Intellect priority the true nature of  
bodies, if they exist is perceived by  
the intellect, not the senses.

Mind priority: (knowledge of the  
mind is more easily acquired than  
knowledge of the bodies)

God exists

God is not a deceiver

Clearly & distinctly perceived  
propositions are true, etc.

A good God exists

All propositions of ...

Sensory Experience

I have a body

I have a vapory soul

Physics

Astronomy

Medicine

Arithmetic

Geometry



## Third Meditation: Descartes writes [34-35]:

“I will shut my eyes, stop my ears, and withdraw all my senses. I will eliminate from my thoughts all images of bodily things, or rather, since this is hardly possible, I will regard all such images as vacuous, false, and worthless. I will converse with myself and scrutinize myself more deeply and in this way I will attempt to achieve, little by little, a more intimate knowledge of myself. I am a thing that thinks: that is, a thing that doubts, affirms, understands a few things, is ignorant of many things, is willing, is unwilling, and also which imagines and has sensory perceptions; for as I have noted before, even though the objects of my sensory experience and imagination may have no existence outside me, nonetheless the modes of thing which I refer to as cases of sensory perception and imagination, in so far as they are simply modes of thing, do exist within me,-of that I am certain.”





## **Third Meditation: Descartes writes [35]:**

In this brief list I have gone through everything I truly know, or last everything I have so far discovered that I know. Now I will cast around more carefully to see whether there may be other things within me which I have not yet noticed. I am certain that I am a thinking thing. Do I not therefore also know what is required for my being certain about anything? In this first item of knowledge there is simply a clear and distinct perception of what I am asserting; this would not be enough to make me certain of the truth of the matter if it could ever turn out that something which I perceived with such clarity and distinctness was false. So I now seem to be able to lay it down as a general rule that whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true.



## Meditation 3 Outline:

**Meditation Three:** Descartes proves God's existence and that He is not a deceiver, thereby allowing us to be sure that we are not deceived when we perceive things clearly and distinctly.

- A. Summary of things of which I am certain and those which I still must doubt.
- B. Preliminary Discussion of Ideas;
- C. The argument for the existence of God from the fact that I have an idea of Him;
- D. Objections to the argument and replies.



## **Meditation 3: SUMMARY OF INTRODUCTION:**

**Meditation Three:** Descartes proves God's existence and that He is not a deceiver, thereby allowing us to be sure that we are not deceived when we perceive things clearly and distinctly.

- A. Summary of things of which I am certain and those which I still must doubt.
1. I am certain that I exist as a thinking thing.
  2. I must still doubt both my senses and my intuitions concerning mathematical knowledge since God may have constituted me so as to be deceived even about those things I seem most certain.
  3. Therefore, in order to become certain of anything else I must inquire into the existence of God and see whether He can be regarded as a deceiver.

## Descartes' Belief -Set:

*Believe only that which  
can't be doubted*

*I think, therefore I exist.*

*I think, i.e., I doubt, will, imagine,  
perceive, etc.*

*Intellect priority the true nature of  
bodies, if they exist is perceived by the  
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*Mind priority: (knowledge of the mind is  
more easily acquired than knowledge of  
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*God exists*

*God is not a deceiver*

*Clearly & distinctly perceived  
propositions are true, etc.*

*Beliefs which can be  
doubted*

*A good God exists*

*All propositions of ...*

*Sensor Experience*

*I have a body*

*I have a vapory soul*

*Physics*

*Astronomy*

*Medicine*

*Arithmetic*

*Geometry*



# Criterion of Certainty:

- At the beginning of Meditation III Descartes come to a criterion of certainty:
- By examining the truths which he discovered in the course of his second meditation, he decides that all of them have in common the proper ties of being **clear** and **distinct**.  
Therefore:

"So, I now seem to be able to lay it down as a general rule that whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true."

He notes an objection to this claim, which is that he had previously accepted as evident things which turned out to be doubtful.

For example he saw the earth, the sky and the stars with the senses-clearly and distinctly. He argues that what he in fact saw were the ideas of such things, and that he assumed without good reason that there were things in the external world which caused such ideas. This reflection again adds to the store of things which Descartes knows for certain, for now there are all of those ideas which clearly and distinctly **appear** before the mind. The only becomes whether anything corresponds to and causes them.

# Criterion of Certainty: Clear and Distinct Ideas before the Mind:

- At the beginning of Meditation III Descartes examines the truths which he discovered in the course of his second meditation. He decides that all of them have in common the proper ties of being **clear** and **distinct**. Thus, he claims "So, I now seem to be able to lay it down as a general rule that whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true." He notes an objection to this claim, which is that he had previously accepted as evident things which turned out to be doubtful. For example he apprehended the earth, the sky and the stars with the senses, and saw these clearly and distinctly. He argues that what he in fact saw were the ideas of such things, and that he assumed without good reason that there were things in the external world which caused such ideas. This reflection again adds to the store of things which Descartes knows for certain, for now there are all of those ideas which clearly and distinctly **appear** before the mind. The only question is whether anything corresponds to and causes them.



# Third Meditation: What does “clear and distinct” idea & “natural light” mean?

- “clear” is what I experience or that I what I immediately experience (e.g., theoretical “circle” in contrast to a square circle).
- “distinct” is that which I’m able to differentiate something from something else.
- “Natural light” is that which we intuitively grasp (e.g., our own existence) or we see the connections between some and other intuitions (it is not inference: “you can’t say, then this”); natural light: It is that which means....; you can’t use imply or inferential reason because it is not under demon objection;
- Natural light provides natural insight into “what you mean”; not logical.<sup>79</sup>



# Third Meditation: What does “Natural Light” mean?

- Appearing in the first time in Meditation 3, “Natural light” is that which we intuitively grasp (e.g., our own existence) or we see the connections between some and other intuitions (it is not inference: “you can’t say, then this”); natural light: It is that which means....; you can’t use imply or inferential reason because it is not under demon objection.
- Natural light is a “kind of inner illuminator.”
- Natural light provides natural insight into “what you mean”; not logical.

Consider the following comment from Katherine Wilson’s *Descartes* <sup>80</sup>  
*Meditations*:





## Third Meditation: What does “Natural Light” mean?

“The natural light seems to reveal intellectual truths when we turn our attention to them and concentrate on them in the same way that a torch reveals objects that were there all along but invisible in a dark room when it is turned on and aim. It is the natural light that is said to have revealed to the Mediator in *Meditation Two*, that, from the fact he is doubting, it follows that he exists. The natural light also revealed in *Meditation 3* that:

- (a) causes have as much or more reality than effects;
- (b) ideas of non-things must arise from the Meditator’s own nature;
- (c) creation and preservation are not really distinct actions;
- (d) since all fraud and deception proceed from some defect, God is not a deceiver.

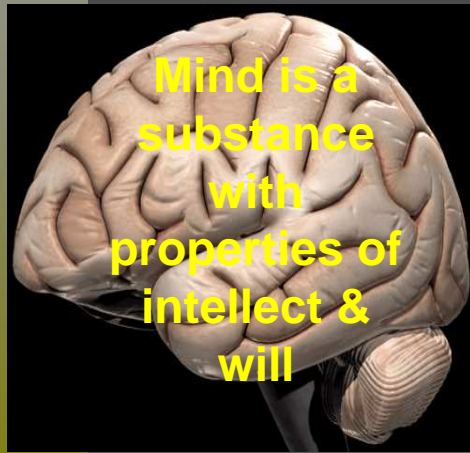
The natural light was described as the most trustworthy faculty the Meditator possessed. Without natural light, the argument of *Meditation Three* would not be able to *move*.”



## **B. Outline to Preliminary Discussion of Ideas:**

1. I have ideas that are like images of things. The most common cause of error is the judgment that these ideas are similar to things that exist outside of me.
2. There are three possible types of ideas: innate, those that originate in myself, and those that originate from something outside of me.
3. Even though some ideas of apparent external objects come to me against my will, I cannot regard them as corresponding to external things. This is because:
  - a. I may have some faculty which produces these ideas.
  - b. Even if they come from outside me, I have no guarantee that they are similar to their causes.
4. Therefore, the principle upon which I have judged my ideas to be similar to external objects seems to be mistaken.

# Third Meditation: 3 Types of Ideas (Fall): Fabricated, Adventitious, & Innate:



Ideas are modes or ways of thinking;  
Modes are not Substances.  
3 types of ideas:

Self-invented ideas

Caused by something outside of me

Placed in me by God

## Fabricated Ideas:

Mere inventions of The mind; the mind can control them so they can be examined & set aside at will & their internal Content can be changed.

## Adventitious Ideas:

Produced by something external to the mind. Unlike fabrications, they can't be examined, set aside, or be manipulated by the mind (e.g., sensory idea of heat if next to a fire).

## Innate ideas:

Placed in mind by God at creation, they can be examined & set aside at will, but internal content can't be manipulated (e.g., triangle; idea of mind, & God).



# **1st Causal Argument for God's existence from the fact that I have an idea of Him**

1. Besides its formal reality, which accounts for its mere existence as an idea, every idea also has objective reality according to the reality of the thing which it represents, or its object.
2. There must be as much reality in the cause as there is in the effect. This applies to objective reality as well as formal reality.
3. I need not assume a cause greater than myself for any of my ideas of corporeal substance nor of other people or angels.
4. I have an idea of a perfect God, and this idea has more objective reality than any idea of a finite substance.
5. The idea of God could not have originated in me, since I am a finite substance.

*Therefore, God must exist as the only possible cause of the objective reality found in my idea of Him.*



# Objective & Formal Reality: Meditation III:

- In terms of perfection or reality, a cause is greater than or equal to its effect. (How could x cause y unless x possessed y?)
- Types of perfection/reality
  - If a cause has *eminent reality*: cause > effect
  - If a cause has *formal reality*: cause = effect
  - Formal reality: what x actually is
  - Objective reality: how x appears to us



# Objective and Formal Reality:

- Objective reality (object): It is the object of my thought (e.g., “I have an idea of a unicorn; they have certain objective character but they have no formal reality).
- Formal reality (mental act: when I’m perceiving): It is a psychological activity or operation. All ideas are alike in that they are ideas; their form is the same.
- Descartes makes this distinction.
- For example, you know of yourself in view of God.
- Cartesian circle is not a circle at all; is it concave or convex; it is a matter of perspective. Every act of perception is an act and an object.
- In order to think limited, you have some concept of unlimited. In order to know what a dent is, then you have to some concept of door.
- You can’t ever have a clear and distinct idea of what is sensible.



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  - In order to think limited, you have some concept of unlimited. In order to know what a dent is, then you have to some concept of door.



# Objective vs. Formal Reality:

When Descartes speaks of things as having more or less reality than other things, he roughly divides 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.





# Formal and Objective Reality:

- Everything has reality (formal)
  - God, angels, people, all extended matters.
  - I am more real than a book because I have objective reality.
  - Objective reality is something possessed by things that have objects; they are intentional. They are ideas about something.
  - A tooth fairy idea has a formal reality because it has an idea; but because it is not an objective reality.
  - This column has formal reality but no objective reality.
  - But those that have intentional objects have objective reality.

# Example: Cup of Coffee:



1. An idea of a cup of coffee has objective reality whereas the cup of coffee itself has formal reality.
2. The idea of a cup of coffee must be caused by something which is at least as perfect or real as the actual cup of coffee. Why? A cause is greater than or equal to its effect.
3. Though the cup of coffee is not transferred to the idea of a cup of coffee, that does not mean that the actual cup of coffee is less real than the idea of a cup of coffee.
4. So the idea of a cup of coffee is a mode of my thought. But for the idea of a hot cup of coffee to have objective reality, it must come from something with at least as much formal reality as the actual cup of hot coffee.
5. Even if the actual cup of coffee does not cause the idea of a hot cup of coffee, whatever causes the idea of hot cup of coffee must have as much, that is, be formally equivalent to) or have more reality than the idea of a cup of a hot coffee.
6. Thus, my mind must be more real than the ideas it creates. Where would the idea come from otherwise?

# More Reality

The reason why are infinite substances are more real than finite ones and finite substances are more real than modes & accidents is because of the “Great Chain of Being” which asserts that existence is a perfection. Thus, the greater amount of being, the greater amount of goodness.



<p><b>Substances:</b> Substance is that which exist independently, thus they have more formal reality.</p>	<p><b>Infinite Substances (God)</b></p> <p><b>Finite Substances (Descartes is a thinking substance)</b></p>
<p><b>Mode:</b> which are properties which depend upon substance for their existence.</p>	<p><b>Motion; Extension; Movement; Perception; Imagination.</b></p>
<p><b>Accidents:</b> which are properties which depend on substance for their existence.</p>	<p><b>Color such as blue, green; Sweetness; Heaviness; Warmth.</b></p>

# Less Reality

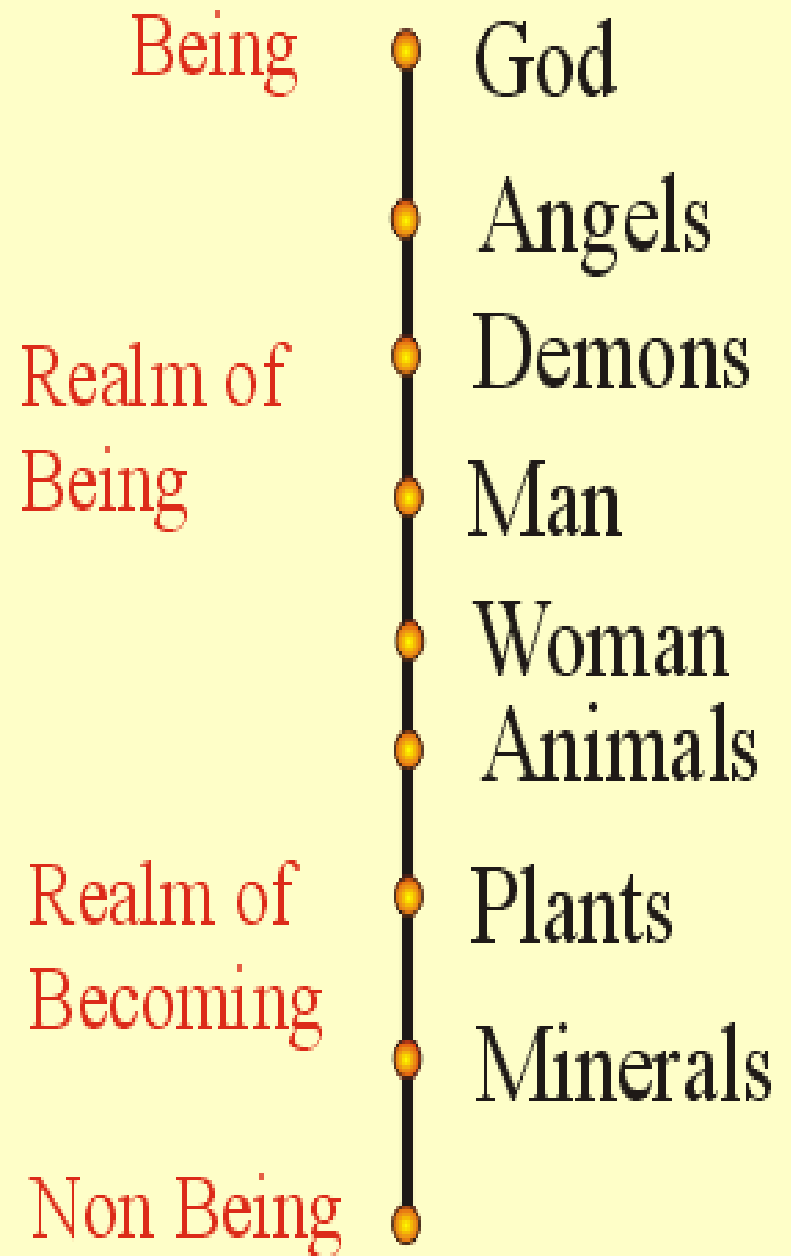


# What is the Great Chain of Being?


- Various species of substances have more formal reality than other species on the Chain of being makes considerable sense. And the idea of objective reality means that the ideas of those species represent the descending levels of formal reality of the Chain. Thus one idea will be more objectively real than another insofar as it represents a species of being higher on the Chain of Being than that other idea.

# Scholastic Great Chain of Being:

1. Various species of substances have more formal reality than other species.



# Hierarchy of Being:



Infinite Substance  
is God who has  
the most reality.

Finite Substances  
are bodies and  
minds.

Modes are  
modifications of  
body & minds  
(e.g., color, shape,  
size, imagination,  
ideas, will).

God

Angels

Humans

Animals

Plants

Minerals

Earth

Items towards the top end of the scale were considered more perfect than items towards the bottom. The characteristics of the things on each level explained their assignment to lower or higher ranks; i.e., humans are more perfect than animals because they have reason, but less perfect than angels, because they are sinful.



## **2<sup>nd</sup> Causal Argument for God's existence from my own existence:**

My own existence could be derived from myself, my parents, a being less perfect than God, or God:

1. My existence not derived from myself; otherwise (a) I would lack no perfection (1) Yet I am imperfect (b) I depend on God to preserve me in every moment of my existence;
2. My existence not derived from my parents;  
(a) otherwise an infinite regress and thus no explanation; (b) what caused me is also a thinking thing
3. My existence not derived from a being less perfect than God  
(a) No explanation for the idea of God as perfect, unitary, simple being in me;
4. My existence must be derived from God;



# Another look at first Cosmological Argument for God's Existence:

- My mind must be more real/perfect than the ideas it creates. Where would the idea come from otherwise?
- An idea contains objective reality but what *ultimately* causes the idea has formal reality. Otherwise there will be an infinite regress of objective reality (idea A causes idea B causes idea C etc *ad infinitum*).
- Therefore there must be some formal reality capable of causing objective reality. That is there must exist some formal reality that is greater than or equal to objective reality.
- If the objective reality (what I think) of an idea is too great to be contained in my formal reality (what I am), it must have some other source.
- I am finite. (my formal reality is finite). I have an idea of the infinite. (My idea of the infinite has objective reality). The infinite (the formal reality of the infinite) causes (the objective reality contained in) my idea of the infinite. Why? I do not have enough formal reality to cause the objective reality of the infinite – I am not infinite.
- God is infinite...



# The Cartesian Circle:

I am sure God  
exists, so...

I am sure  
my clear and  
distinct perceptions  
are truth, so...



# The Problem of the Cartesian Circle:

M. Arnauld raises the problem of the so-called “Cartesian Circle” when he states:

“I have no further author worry, namely how the author avoids reasoning in a circle when he says that we are sure that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true only because God exists.

But we can be sure that God exists only because we clearly and distinctly perceive this. Hence, before we can be sure that God exists, we ought to be able to be sure that whatever we perceive clearly and evidently is true (VII: 214).”



## Descartes Response to Arnauld regarding the “Cartesian Circle”:

Descartes argues in response to Arnauld:

1. Where knowledge of first principles is concerned, one can recognize them as self-evidently true by “simple intuition of the mind” (VII: 140). It is the “natural light” that has this capability. Thus, knowledge of the existence of God is not necessary for us to have confidence in the natural light. Said another way, metaphysical principles known by the natural light are used to infer God’s existence.

# Cartesian Circle:

- I know God exists because I know anything I CDP.
- I know anything I CDP because I know God exists.
  - best strategy of saving him from circular reasoning is to argue on his behalf is that his knowledge of God's existence does not depend upon clear and distinct perception but (he doesn't mention that his perception is clear and distinct). It is true without being clear and distinct.
    - Innate Idea of God's existence;
    - Natural Light (correspondence with Arnauld).



# Cartesian Circle:

According to Dr. Stephen Daniel, the circle is avoided simply by recognizing that the apprehension of the infinite (God's existence) is contained in the intuition of one's own existence as finite.

Peter Kreeft claims that Pascal cuts the Cartesian knot by stating that to rely on reason is an act of faith, not of reason. Therefore, reason presupposes faith.

One critique of Pascal's argument stating that to rely on faith rather than reason is to ignore Descartes' emphasis on intuition (which does not require an appeal to faith).



# Third Meditation: Only Ideas Called “Judgments can be true or false.

- A. In the *Third Meditation*, Descartes argues that only those ideas called “judgments” can be true or false. Why?
1. it is only in making a judgment that the resemblance, conformity or correspondence of the idea to things themselves is affirmed or denied. Thus, if one affirms that an idea corresponds to a thing itself when it really does not, then an error has occurred.
- B. In *Fourth Meditation* judgment is described as a faculty of the mind resulting from the interaction of the faculties of intellect and will.
1. Descartes observes that the intellect is finite in that humans do not know everything, and so their understanding of things is limited. But the will or faculty of choice is seemingly infinite in that it can be applied to just about anything whatsoever.
  2. The finitude of the intellect along with this seeming infinitude of the will is the source of human error. For errors arise when the will exceeds the understanding such that something laying beyond the limits of the understanding is voluntarily affirmed or denied.

**Said differently, people make mistakes when they choose to pass judgment on things they do not fully understand. So the will should be restrained within the bounds of what the mind understands in order to avoid error.**



## Third Meditation: Only Ideas Called “Judgments can be true or false.”

Descartes contends that judgments should only be made about things that are clearly & distinctly understood. Why?

1. Their truth is guaranteed by God’s non-deceiving nature.
2. If one only makes judgments about what is clearly and distinctly understood and *abstains from making judgments about things that are not*, then error would be avoided altogether. In fact, it would be impossible to go wrong if this rule were unwaveringly followed.



**Immanuel Kant**  
Zeichnung im Schattenschnittmaler von Putzich um 1798  
Archiv für Kunst und Geschichte

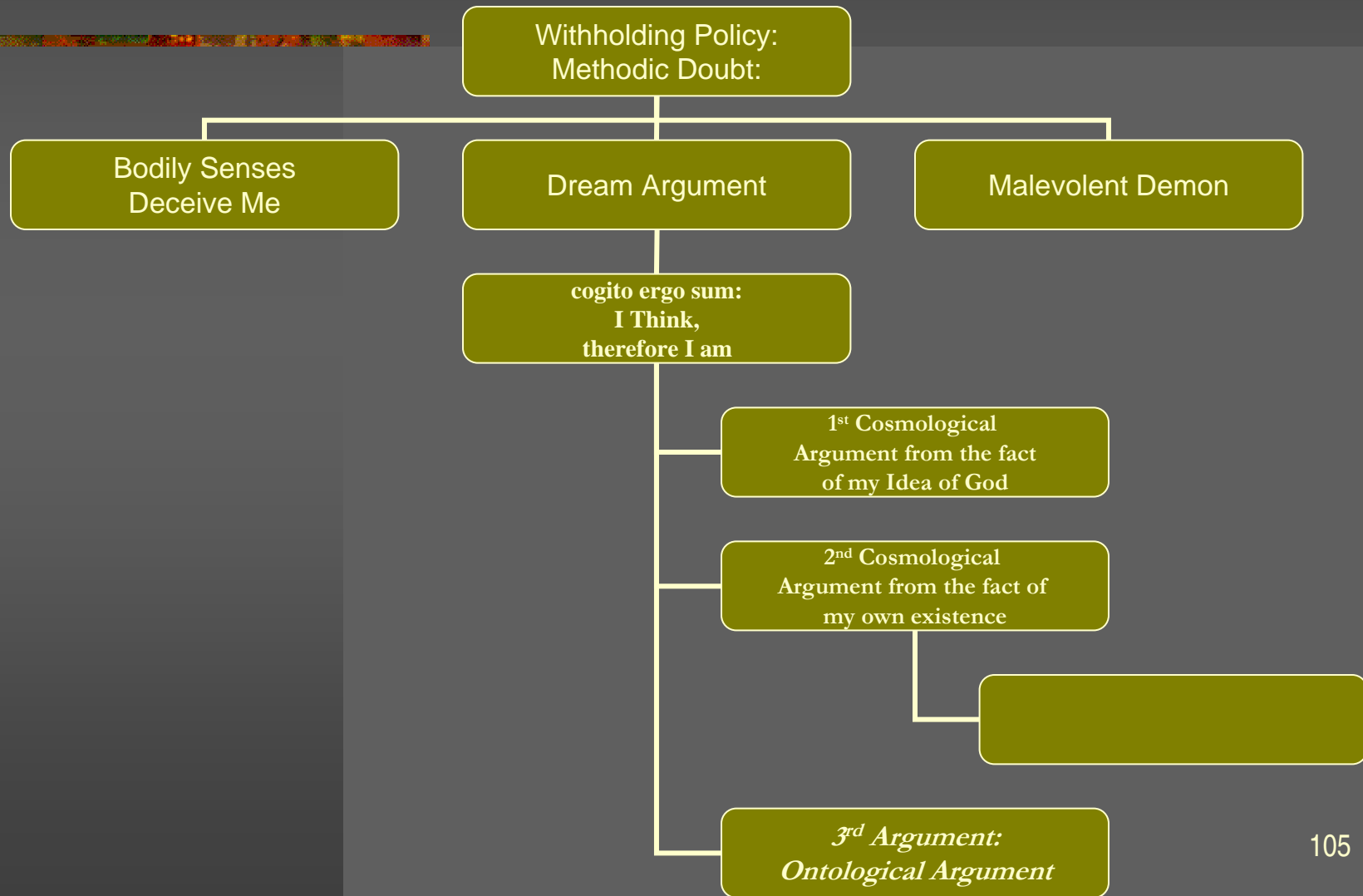
*RESTRAIN THE  
WILL FROM  
MAKING DUBIOUS  
JUDGMENTS*



*Only make judgments that are clear and distinct. If you don't, then you will make mistakes when you choose to pass judgment on things what you do not fully understand. So the will should be restrained within the bounds of what the mind understands in order to avoid error.*



# First & Second Meditation:



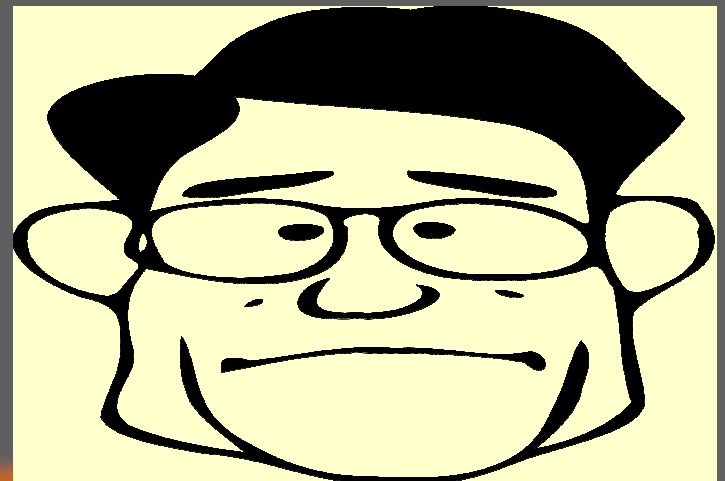
## **The Mind for Descartes:**

**What I am is an immaterial thinking thing, a substance,  
with the faculties of the mind & will**



**Intellectual  
Perception &  
volition belongs  
to the nature of  
the mind alone**

**Imagination &  
Sensation are faculties  
of the mind but in a  
weaker sense since  
they require a body to  
function properly.**





# Descartes: Mind-Body Problem:

- Descartes notion: substance is understood two different ways: it exists independently of something else (substance is not dependent); This book is a substance (minds)
  - Thinking and will
- Substance is that which inheres (red color of a book; it subsists) in another (colors, attributes, and modes).
  - Modes: doubting; volition
  - (Subsistence is that which exists in another)



# Another look: What are intuitions?

Intuitions: Those things that are perceived or known “indubitably”; they are the building-blocks of thinking.

- Thinking is an intuition

- You can't un-imagine object X; you have to have these intuitions first;
- These intuitions don't go away.
- Extension is simply the taking up a space.

**The Mind is a Substance: A substance is a thing requiring nothing else in order to exist. The mind is a substance and its ideas are its modes or ways of thinking.**



Ideas or modes of thinking.

**Strictly speaking, substance only applies to God-whose existence is his essence. But we can apply “substance” in a qualified sense for minds require nothing except God’s concurrence in order to exist.**

in the *Sixth Meditation*, Descartes claims that the mind or “I” is a non-extended thing. Now, since extension is the nature of body, is a necessary feature of body, it follows that the mind is by its nature not a body but an immaterial thing. Therefore, what I am is an immaterial thinking thing with the faculties of intellect and will.



## **Recall Dr. Daniel's Definition:**

**“Intuition: that which is clearly and distinctly perceived, as well as the act of immediately apprehending something that is clearly and distinctly perceived. Since nothing apprehended by the senses is known clearly and distinctly, no sensation is an intuition; and anything known intuitively (e.g., thinking) cannot be resolved into anything simpler. To the extent that any idea is apprehended clearly and distinctly, it is known as the object solely of the mind, and in that sense can be said to be innate. Intuitions can thus be both the activity of the mind in apprehending something clearly and distinctly (and might thus be called inner) and the objects apprehended in that way.” Dr. D.**



## Descartes' Knowledge-set at end of Meditation Three:

*Beliefs which can be doubted*

*Believe only that which can't be doubted*

*What is false*

A good God exists

All propositions of ...

Sensory Experience

I have a body

I have a vapory soul

Physics

Astronomy

Medicine

Arithmetic

Geometry

I think, therefore I exist.

I think, i.e., I doubt, will, imagine, perceive, etc.

Intellect priority the true nature of bodies, if they exist is perceived by the intellect, not the senses.

Mind priority: (knowledge of the mind is more easily acquired than knowledge of the bodies).

God exists.

God is not a deceiver.

Clearly & distinctly perceived propositions are true, etc.

A Malevolent Demon exists and deceives me.

My knowledge potential is limited.



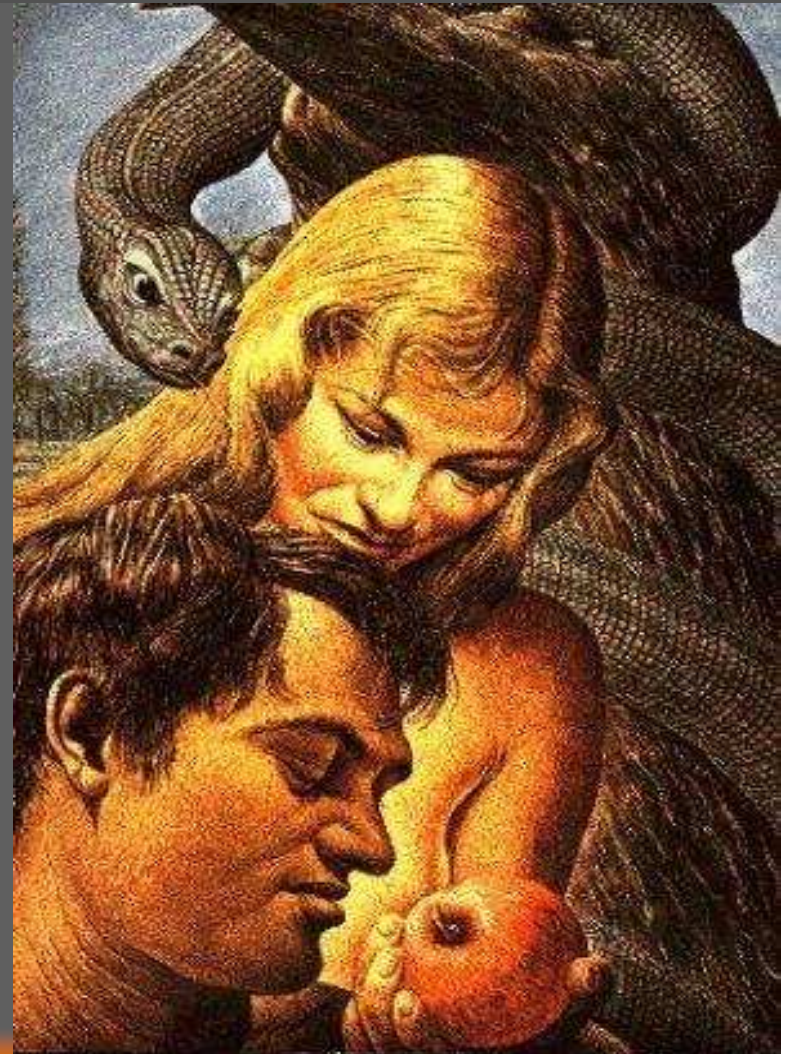
## ***Meditation 4* Outline: Explains the Possibility of Error:**

- A. I know that God is not a deceiver and that God also created me along with all my capacities. I also know that I am often in error.
- B. This error cannot be due to the correct operation of any faculty which God has created in me, for this would make God a deceiver. I must inquire, therefore, into how it is possible that I can err even though I am the product of a benevolent God.
  - 1. Error is due to the concurrent operation of the will and the intellect.
    - a. No error is found in the intellect.
    - b. Error consists in the will, in its judgments, going beyond what the intellect clearly and distinctly perceives to be the case.
    - c. God cannot be blamed for giving us a free or unlimited will which it is possible for us to abuse and thereby fall into error.
- C. Therefore, the way to avoid error is to refrain from judgment until our intellect sees the truth clearly and distinctly.



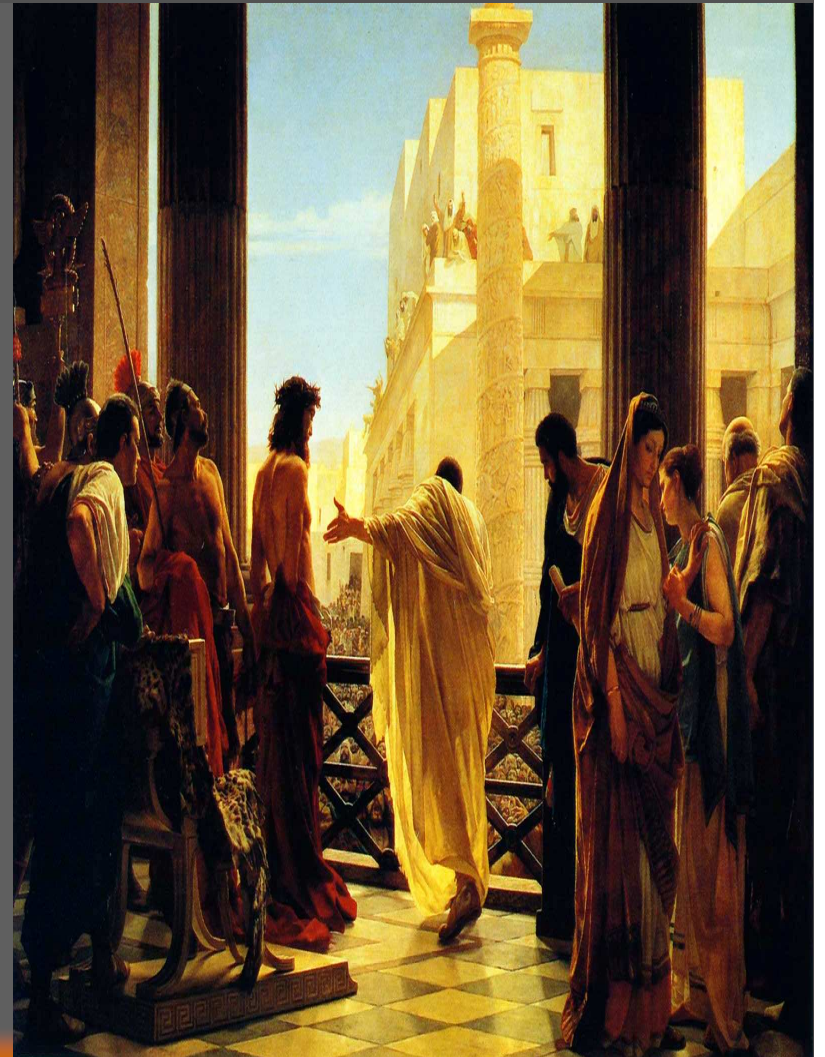
## Fourth Meditation: God is not a Deceiver:

- A. God is not a deceiver.
- B. At the beginning of the *Fourth Meditation*, Descartes claims that the will to deceive is “*undoubtedly evidence of malice or weakness*” so as to be an imperfection.



## Fourth Meditation: God is not a Deceiver:

- c. Since God has all perfections and no imperfections, it follows that God cannot be a deceiver.
  - 1. For to conceive of God with the will to deceive would be to conceive him to be both having no imperfections and having one imperfection, which is impossible; it would be like trying to conceive of a mountain without a valley.





## **Fourth Meditation: God is not a Deceiver:**

**D. Therefore, in addition to God's existence, provides the absolutely certain foundation Descartes was seeking from the outset of the *Meditations*. It is absolutely certain because both conclusions (namely that God exists and that God cannot be a deceiver) have themselves been demonstrated from immediately grasped and absolutely certain intuitive truths.**



**Since God cannot be a deceiver, then  
God cannot be the cause of human error:**

- E. Since God cannot err, Humans are the cause of their own errors when they do not use their faculty of judgment correctly.
- F. God could not create an evil demon who is bent on our demise.





## God guarantees the truth of all clear and distinct ideas:

- G God's non-deceiving nature also guarantees the truth of all clear and distinct ideas:
1. Otherwise, God would be a deceiver, if there were a clear and distinct idea that was false, since the mind cannot help but believe them to be true.
  2. Thus, clear and distinct ideas must be true on pain of contradiction.
  3. This also implies that knowledge of God's existence is required for having any absolutely certain knowledge. Thus, atheists, who are ignorant of God's existence, cannot have absolutely certain knowledge of any kind, including scientific knowledge.



## **This takes us back to Cartesian Circle:**

- 1. If all clear ideas (that is, what I experience or that I what I immediately experience (e.g., theoretical “circle” in contrast to a square circle) and distinct ideas (that is, which I’m able to differentiate something from something else) are ultimately guaranteed by God’s existence, then he seems to go in a circle in view of the notion that he needs God’s existence for the absolute certainty of the earlier truths and yet he needs the absolute certainty of these earlier truths. Moreover, the truths are clear and distinct before one knows that they flow from an infinite perfect God.**



## **This takes us back to Cartesian Circle:**

2. Descartes' response is found in the *Second Replies*. He contends that God's veridical guarantee only pertains to the recollection of arguments and not the immediate awareness of an argument's clarity and distinctness currently under consideration. Thus, those truths reached before the demonstration of God's existence are clear and distinct when they are being attended to but cannot be relied upon as absolutely certain when those arguments are recalled later on. But once God's existence has been demonstrated, the recollection of the clear and distinct perception of the premises is sufficient for absolutely certain and, therefore, perfect knowledge of its conclusion (see also the *Fifth Meditation* at AT VII 69-70: CSM II XXX).



# Additional comments on God:

- The Meditator characterized God in *Meditation Three* as being, “a substance that is infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, and which created both myself and everything else (if anything else there be) that exists (VII: 45).
- It is interesting to note that his idea of God did not seem incorporate goodness, etc; he has offered no considerations to help us establish God’s overall goodness.
- The Meditator will come to understand in what way God can be said to be good and the nature of God’s perfections only as he continues to advance in knowledge.
- Descartes will take up God’s perfections in *Meditation Four*.





## Meditation 4: The Possession of Free Will

- Like God, we possess free will.
- It is possible for Descartes to maintain that the mind is free even though the body, being a machine, is subject to the laws of nature, because mind and body, are different kinds of substance.
- While we are most free when we make the most rational choice. As a result, we become more like God as we acquire more knowledge.



## **Meditation 4: The Possession of Free Will**

As we acquire more knowledge, we become more and more independent on our bodies, on sensation, for knowledge, and we become increasingly self-determining through the knowledge we gain about the world. To be free is to have power, to be active (which is to be thinking or reasoning), to be independent of external causes acting upon us.

Still we are connected to the material world through our bodies and sensation helps us to navigate in the world by telling us what is happening in our bodies and what relation they are in to other material objects.

But sensation is not essential to existence as a mind.



## Descartes' Knowledge-set at end of Meditation Four:

*Beliefs which can be doubted*

*Believe only that which can't be doubted*

*What is false*

A good God exists

All propositions of ...

Sensory Experience

I have a body

I have a vapory soul

Physics

Astronomy

Medicine

Arithmetic

Geometry

I think, therefore I exist.

I think, i.e., I doubt, will, imagine, perceive, etc.

Intellect priority the true nature of bodies, if they exist is perceived by the intellect, not the senses.

Mind priority: (knowledge of the mind is more easily acquired than knowledge of the bodies).

God exists.

God is not a deceiver.

Clearly & distinctly perceived propositions are true, etc.

Restrain the will!

Various metaphysical principles!

A malevolent demon exists and deceives me.

My knowledge potential is limited.

God is a mere idea.



# Meditation 5 Outline:

- A. What properties we can know to belong to essence of material things;
- B. Classical Ontological Argument;
- C. Objections to Ontological Argument
- D. Role of God making Knowledge Possible:



## **A. Considers what properties we can know to belong to the essence of material things**

- A. When I examine ideas of corporeal objects that are distinct and not confused, I find that these are properties concerned with extension & duration: length, breadth, depth, size, shape, position, & movement.
1. When I discover particular things about these properties, it seems as if I am recalling something I already knew, something already within me.
  2. Although they seem to be already in me, I am not the source of these ideas: they have their own immutable natures which would be the same whether or not I existed, or whether there exists any object that corresponds to these ideas.
  3. Neither do these ideas come to me through the senses: I can form an idea that it is impossible to imagine or sense (such as the thousand sided figure mentioned in Meditation 6) & demonstrate many necessary truths concerning its nature.



## B. A closer look at Ontological Argument

1. The ontological argument follows a more straightforwardly geometrical line of reasoning.
2. Descartes argues that God's existence is deducible from the idea of his nature just as the fact that the sum of the interior angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles is deducible from the idea of the nature of a triangle.
3. Thus, the idea of a supremely perfect being or God without existence is unintelligible. This means that existence is contained in the essence of an infinite substance, and therefore God must exist by his very nature. Indeed, any attempt to conceive of God as not existing would be like trying to conceive of a mountain without a valley – it just cannot be done.
  - A. The point is that this property is contained in the nature of a triangle, and so it is inseparable from that nature. Accordingly, the nature of a triangle without this property is unintelligible. Similarly, it is apparent that the idea of God is that of a supremely perfect being, that is, a being with all perfections to the highest degree.
  - B. Actual existence is a perfection, at least insofar as most would agree that it is better to actually exist than not. Now, if the idea of God did not contain actual existence, then it would lack a perfection. Accordingly, it would no longer be the idea of a supremely perfect being but the idea of something with an imperfection, namely non-existence, and, therefore, it would no longer be the idea of God.



## C. 3 Objections to Ontological Argument:

1. In all other cases we separate existence from essence.  
Reply - It is impossible to conceive a perfect being as lacking a perfection, existence.
2. Granted that we cannot think of God except as existing, still our thought does not make him exist.  
Reply - It is the necessity of God's existence that imposes the necessity on our thought, not the other way around.
3. We need not assume that God has all perfections, including existence.  
Reply - It is impossible in conceiving a supreme being to avoid attributing all perfections to Him.



## C. Why offer another argument?

- Perhaps the first argument in Meditation 3 relied too much on metaphysical scholastic notion of chain of being and so he wanted to offer a clear, simple argument.





## **D. The Role of God in making Knowledge Possible:**

- 1. Even though we naturally take those things we perceive clearly & distinctly to be true, if I were ignorant of God I could still find reason to doubt these things once my attention was not fixed firmly on their demonstration.**
- 2. In particular I might think that I was constituted so as to be deceived about things that I believe I see quite evidently.**
- 3. Once we are aware of God's existence and that he cannot have made us so as to be deceived about what we see clearly and distinctly, we cannot be deceived as long as we assent only to what we see clearly and distinctly. It does not matter if we are in fact dreaming; what our intellect tells us is wholly true.**
- 4. Thus, the truth and certainty of every science depends upon the knowledge of God.**



## Descartes' Knowledge-set at end of Meditation Five:

*Beliefs which can be doubted*

*Believe only that which can't be doubted*

*What is false*

There are corporeal things external to me.

I have a body.

I have a vapory soul.

Sensory experience

Physics

Astronomy

Medicine

I think, therefore I exist.

I exist.

I think

God exists

God is not a deceiver

God's essence involves existence.

Clearly and distinctly perceived propositions are true.

Restrain the will!

Various metaphysical principles!

Arithmetic

Geometry

A Malevolent Demon exists and deceives me.

My knowledge potential is limited.

God is a mere idea.



## Descartes' Knowledge-set in Meditation Six:

*Beliefs which can be doubted*

*Believe only that which can't be doubted*

*What is false*

Sensory Experience.

Physics.

Astronomy.

Medicine.

I think, therefore I exist.

I exist.

I think.

God exists.

God is not a deceiver.

God's essence involves existence.

Clearly and distinctly perceived propositions are true.

Restrain the will!

Various metaphysical principles!

There are corporeal things external to me.

I have a body.

Arithmetic.

Geometry.

A Malevolent Demon exists and deceives me.

My knowledge potential is limited.

God is a mere idea.

I have a vapory soul.

My mind cannot possibly survive the death of my body.

Sensations resemble their causes.



# Outline of Meditation 6: Corporeal Reality and Mind/Body Relation:

- A. Imagination versus Pure Intellect
- B. Review of things whose belief is founded on sensation
- C. Assessment of the cause for doubt about things whose belief is founded on sensation
- D. Conclusion regarding what I can believe



# **Meditation 6: The Problem of Existence of Material Things:**

Introduction to the problem of the existence of material things.

- a. I know that material objects exist insofar as they are objects of pure mathematics, since I clearly and distinctly perceive the mathematical primary properties of corporeal objects.
- b. It also seems that my imagination gives me evidence of the existence of external objects. Therefore, we must investigate this faculty.

# A. Imagination vs. Pure Intellect



Pure Intellect depends on  
Only on Innate Ideas

Effort is not required for  
thought

Thought is essential to me.

In thought the mind turns  
towards its own ideas.

Imagination depends on something  
distinct from me

When I imagine something, I intuit that thing as present to my mind. Therefore, imagination is distinct from thought because I can think of things without intuiting them as present. For example, I can think of a chiligon (1,000 sided figure) even though I can't form an image of it

Effort is required for imagination

Imagination is not essential to me;

In imagination the mind turns toward the body.

Imagination seems to require the existence of the body, but this is only a probability.



## **B. The Evidence for the existence of corporeal things from the senses:**

- A Summary of old beliefs that I got from the senses: all of my impressions of the secondary properties of objects.
- B. Reasons for thinking that these showed the existence of objects.
  1. These ideas appeared against my will.
  2. They are more vivid than those ideas I imagine.
  3. All of the ideas that I form through imagination are composed out of components that come from the senses. Nothing is in the imagination that was not first in the senses.
  4. I sense pain and pleasure in my body, but not in objects external to me.



## But what about error in perceiving our own bodies?

- Despite the connection God has established between motions in the brain and sensation in the mind, errors do occur in our perceptions of our own bodies. Like all machines, the body is subject to breakdown or malfunction. Sometimes the motions sent along the nerves go awry. So, suppose the cord stretching between your foot and your brain gets pulled at the halfway point. A motion will be sent along the cord, just as if the motion had been initiated at your foot, and the resultant motion in the brain will also be the same. But since that motion is correlated with exactly one sensation, the pain-in-the foot sensation, that sensation will be produced.





## **B. The Evidence for the existence of corporeal things from the senses:**

C. Reasons for doubting that these things show that material objects exist:

1. The senses often show things to me about objects that I know cannot be true. For example, a tower in the distance seems round when in fact it is square.
2. People sometimes feel pain in limbs that have been amputated, so the feeling of pain in our body gives no evidence for its existence.
3. It may be possible that I am dreaming.
4. I may be constituted by nature so as to be deceived about things I think I see clearly.
5. There may be some unknown faculty in me that produces these ideas in me even against my will.



# But what about error in perceiving our own bodies?

## Phantom limb phenomenon:

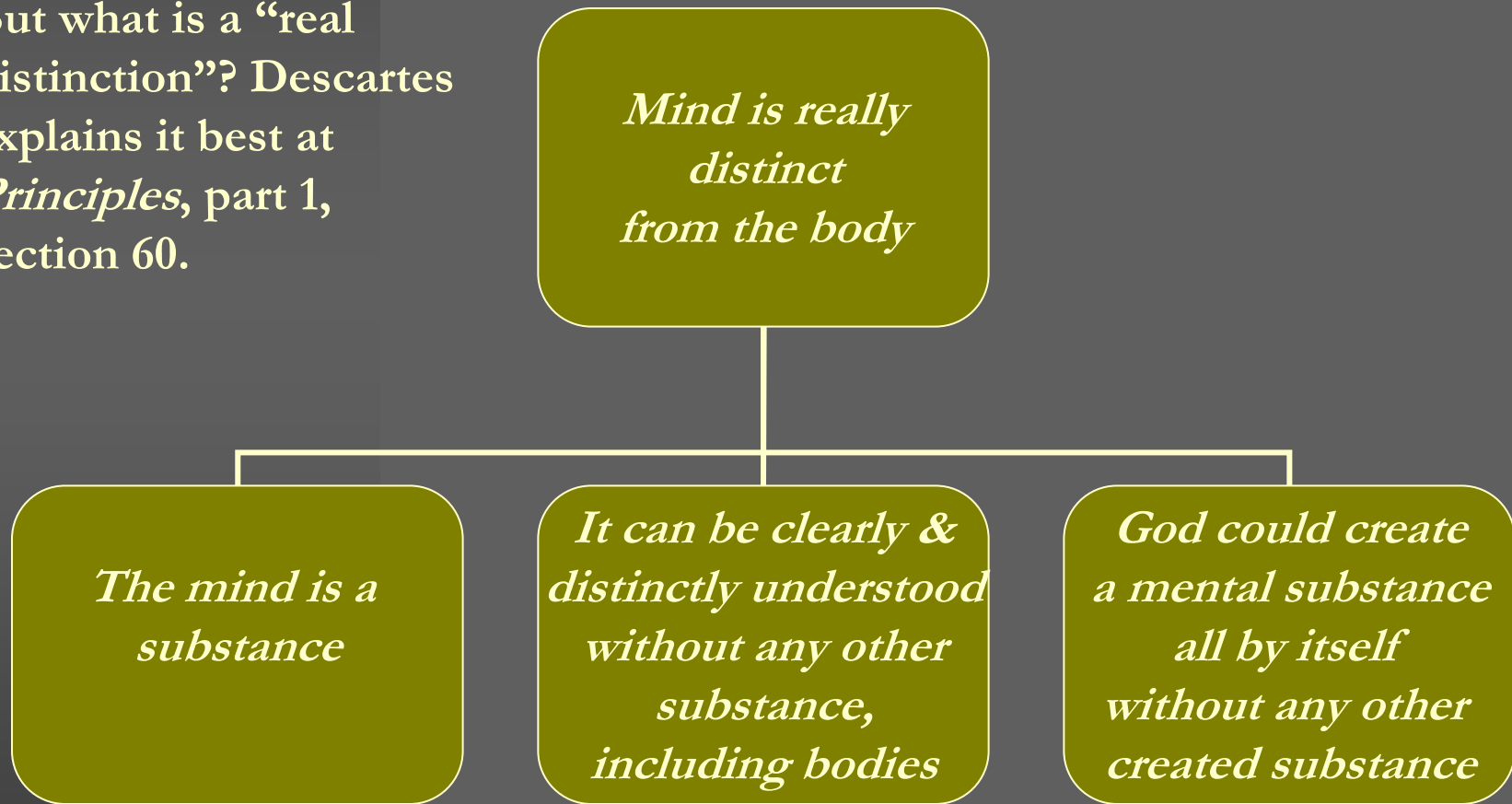
This explains how people who have lost a limb may continue to have sensations of pain in that limb. The nerve cords that had originally ended in limb still exist, hence, motions will sometimes be sent up the remaining parts of the cord to the brain, just as if they had been initiated in the original limb.

## What we can know: seek pleasure, avoid pain:

It is not surprising that we may sometimes make errors in perceiving our own bodies, since we know sensation to be fallible. Still, Descartes thinks that we are more often right in those perceptions than not. Moreover, he contends that one thing we can be certain of with respect to sensation is that in general we should seek pleasure and avoid pain, as God has set up our sensations so that pleasurable sensations indicate what to seek out for survival, and painful sensations show us what to avoid.

# Mind is really distinct from body: It is possible for minds or souls to exist without bodies

But what is a “real distinction”? Descartes explains it best at *Principles*, part 1, section 60.





# Two Arguments for Mind-Body Distinction in Meditation 6:

The first argument is that he has a clear and distinct understanding of the mind as a thinking, non-extended thing and of the body as an extended, non-thinking thing. So these respective ideas are clearly and distinctly understood to be opposite from one another and, therefore, each can be understood all by itself without the other.

## Two Arguments:

1. Clear and distinct understanding of mind as a thinking-non-extended thing & body as an extended, non-thinking thing: (a) argument from knowledge; (b) argument from extension.
2. Two Nature Argument:  
Mind and body cannot have the same nature, for if this were true, then the same thing would be both divisible and not divisible, which is impossible



# First Argument for Distinction of Mind and Body in *Meditation 6*.

A. The argument from knowledge:

1. If I clearly and distinctly understand one thing as distinct from another it is so.
2. I am certain that I exist as a thinking thing, while I am not certain of the existence of my body.
3. Therefore, I am a thinking thing and nothing else. My mind is distinct from my body.



# First Argument for Distinction of Mind and Body in *Meditation 6*.

B. The argument from extension:

1. I am a thing that thinks and not an extended thing.
2. I have a distinct idea of body as an extended thing.
3. Therefore, my mind is distinct from my body.



# First Argument for Mind-Body Distinction in *Meditation 6*.

Clear and distinct understanding of the mind as a thinking, non-extended thing

The body is an extended-non thinking thing.

1. Descartes' claim that these perceptions are clear and distinct indicates that the mind cannot help but believe them true, and so they must be true for otherwise God would be a deceiver, which is impossible. So the premises of this argument are firmly rooted in his foundation for absolutely certain knowledge.
2. Descartes also implies that he knows that God can create mind and body in the way that they are being clearly and distinctly understood. Therefore, the mind can exist without the body and vice versa.



## **2<sup>nd</sup> Argument for Mind-Body Distinction: Two-natures:**

1. The nature of body or extension is divisible into parts, while the nature of the mind is understood to be “something quite simple and complete” so as not to be composed of parts and is, therefore, indivisible.
2. Mind and body cannot have the same nature, for if this were true, then the same thing would be both divisible and not divisible, which is impossible.
3. Therefore, mind and body must have two completely different natures in order for each to be able to be understood all by itself without the other.





# Sense Impressions from Bodily Objects or God?

1. So, the body is an extended substance for we have clear and distinct experiences of changing our position and moving about, activities that imply a body.
2. We also receive sense impressions, of sight, doing, and touch, frequently even against our will, and these lead us to believe that they come from bodies other than our own.
3. They must be conveyed to me by material, corporeal objects. Otherwise, if they came from God then he could not “be defended from the accusation of deceit if these ideas were produced by causes other than corporeal objects.



## **Sense Impressions from Bodily Objects or God? Here's his argument:**

1. This substance must be either God or an external extended body.
2. God is no deceiver.
3. God created me and gave me a great inclination to believe that these ideas come from corporeal things.
4. If they do not come from external objects, then God must be a deceiver. But this is an absurdity.
5. Therefore, material objects exist.
6. These objects, however, may not be as they seem to us through the senses.



## **Do our senses tell us the truth about external objects?**

Having established the existence of external objects, Descartes now considers whether our senses tell us the truth about external objects.

Consider the following argument:



# **I should not doubt every sensation:**

- a. There is in me a passive faculty receptive of ideas of sensation
- b. I could not use this passive faculty without an active faculty capable of producing or bringing about these ideas of sensation
- c. This faculty must be in a substance: in me, in God, or in corporeal things
  - (1) it is not in me
    - (a) it presupposes no act of understanding
    - (b) ideas are produced without my consent
  - (2) it is not in God as he is no deceiver
  - (3) Thus, it is in body
- d. Therefore corporeal things really exist external to me
  - (1) I have a strong inclination to believe ideas arise from corporeal objects
    - (a) perception by senses often confused and indistinct
    - (b) what I clearly and distinctly perceive as in them really exists



# What is the relation of Mind and Body?

- A. I am intimately joined with my body in a \*‘‘substantial union’’. Feelings of pain and pleasure are confused modes of perception arising out of my union with the body.
- B. We have many ideas from sense, but our nature does not teach us to conclude anything from these unless there is an inquiry by the intellect.
- C. The mind, not the composite of mind and body, is capable of knowing truth.
- D. Therefore, the senses tell us only what is necessary for the welfare of the composite of mind and body.
- E. With respect to the essences of things the senses are confused.
- F. The poison objection: It would seem that in some cases our senses do not tell us what is best for the welfare of our body. For example, many poisons seem attractive to the senses, or an ill person may desire something injurious to her.

\*In his letter to Princess Elizabeth he suggests this union is in fact a primitive and unanalyzable notion.



# The Body is like a machine:

Corporeal things really exist external to me:

- (1) I have a strong inclination to believe ideas arise from corporeal objects
  - (a) perception by senses often confused and indistinct
  - (b) what I clearly and distinctly perceive as in them really exists.
- (2) The soul does not move the various parts of the body directly, but, having “its principal seat in the brain,” in the pineal gland, comes first of all in contract with the “vital spirits,” and through these the soul interacts with the body. Why pineal gland? He thought it was unique in the brain in being single and because he (falsely) believed that it did not occur in animals.
- (3) Thus, the human body is given a mechanical explanation and at the same time preserve the possibility of the soul’s influence, through the activity of the will, upon human behavior.

# Mind-Body Interaction:

Changes in the body such as the effect of the external objects on the sense organs are transmitted to the pineal gland by the spirits and can there affect the soul by causing sensations in it.



Mind  
(indivisible)  
& body  
(divisible) are  
distinct



Soul directly moves the pineal gland and affects the “animal spirits.”



“Animal spirits” is the hydraulic system of mechanical changes in the body.



# Consider:

1. Mind is affected only by the brain, so all signals from the body must travel up into the brain.
2. Signals travel to the brain from the periphery of our body by means of animal spirits, so the system is like a cord running to the brain which can be pulled at any point along its length. Thus we can get signals in the brain that do not originate in our senses, but which we perceive as doing so.
3. Therefore,
4. Even though this is the best possible arrangement to protect our body, it is possible to be deceived by a cause of a disturbance in our animal spirits within our body rather than outside it. Thus God cannot be blamed for this arrangement.





## Descartes' Difficulty with Interaction:

When Descartes defines “what I am” as a think which thinks,” he makes no mention of the body, for everything is included in thinking: a thing which doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, imagines, and feels.” Presumably the self could feel heat without a body. But here Descartes cannot accept his own dualism for he admits that “*nature also teaches me by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst, etc., that I am not lodged in my body as a pilot in a vessel, but that I am very closely united to it, and, so to speak, so intermingled with it that I seem to compose it with it one whole.*” By trying to locate the mind in the pineal gland, the technical problem of interaction remains, for if there is interaction, there would have to be contact, and so mind would have to be extended. On this problem, his rules of method did not lead him to any clear and distinct conclusion.



# Historical Solutions to Mind-body Problem:

1. Arnold Geulincx argued for Descartes' strict dualism, denying that there is any interaction between mind and body in view of being two separate substances. While affirming the idea that when I decide or will to move my finger, it actually moves, he contends that my will did not cause my arm to move. Instead, there are two parallel series of acts going on simultaneously, one physical and the other mental. When I will my finger to move, on that occasion God moves it, and thus, creates an action parallel to my thought. It very well could be that God willed this parallelism from beginning of time.



# Historical Solutions to the Mind-Body Problem:

2. Malebranche and Leibniz (who also believed in the real distinction of mind and body), devise metaphysical systems wherein mind and body do not causally interact despite appearances to the contrary.
3. Other philosophers considered the mind-body problem to be insurmountable, thereby denying their real distinction: they claim that everything is either extended (as is common nowadays) or mental (as George Berkeley argued in the 18th century).



# Confidence in our faculties in *Meditation 6.*

1. The senses are generally to be trusted since they belong to a standard signaling system.
2. Where a message is unclear or misleading, another sense can be brought to the aid of the first (e.g., touch can dispel optical illusion).
3. My memory must be fairly reliable, for I know that God has not made me a seriously defective epistemological project.
4. My intellect, when it does not jump to conclusions concerning what it does not perceive clearly and distinctly, is an admirable and trustworthy instrument.



## Descartes' Knowledge-set at end of Meditation Six:

*Beliefs which can be doubted*

*Believe only that which can't be doubted*

*What is false*

Various still-undecided empirical and mathematical propositions.

I think, therefore I exist.

I exist.

I think.

God exists.

God is not a deceiver.

God's essence involves existence.

Clear and distinct thoughts are true.

I have a body

Restrain the will!

There are corporeal things external to me.

Sensory experience is confused.

Sensory experience teaches us what is harmful and what is beneficial.

Various metaphysical principles

Clearly and distinctly perceived and previously propositions of arithmetic and geometry are true.

Propositions of physics, medicine, and astronomy can be known to be true if clearly and distinctly perceived.

A Malevolent Demon exists and deceives me.

My knowledge potential is limited.

God is a mere idea.

I have a vapory soul.

My mind cannot possibly survive the death of my body.

Sensations & perceptions resemble their causes.



## Review of where we started:

### ■ My senses sometimes mislead me:

- Not can I be sure that things exist for I cannot tell when I am imagining or really knowing, for “I have learned that [my] senses sometimes mislead me.

### ■ How do I know if I’m dreaming/awake:

- What can be clearer than “that I am here, seated by the fire... holding this paper in my hands...” But when I am asleep, I dream that I am sitting by the fire, and this makes me realize that “there are no conclusive indications by which waking life can be distinguished from sleep.”

### ■ Cannot be certain that God is supremely good:

- for “how can I be sure but that [God] has brought it about that there is no earth, no sky, no extended bodies... and that nevertheless I have impressions of these things....And ... that I am always mistaken when I add two and three....” We cannot be certain that God is supremely good, for “He may be an evil genius, not less powerful than deceitful,” so that all things I<sub>158</sub> experience “are nothing but illusions and dreams.”

## Descartes' Belief -Set:

*Believe only that which  
can't be doubted*

*Beliefs which can be  
doubted*

I think, therefore I exist.

I think, i.e., I doubt, will, imagine,  
perceive, etc.

Intellect priority the true nature of  
bodies, if they exist is perceived by  
the intellect, not the senses.

Mind priority: (knowledge of the  
mind is more easily acquired than  
knowledge of the bodies)

God exists

God is not a deceiver

Clearly & distinctly perceived  
propositions are true, etc.

A good God exists

All propositions of ...

Sensory Experience

I have a body

I have a vapory soul

Physics

Astronomy

Medicine

Arithmetic

Geometry



# Various Objections:

- Why dismantle “certainty” then turn around and seek “certainty”? Why not another method/approach? Today, epistemology deals with much more “softer” views.
- The kind of knowledge you are seeking for Descartes is unattainable.
  - He did believe he had clear and distinct ideas-though it may be misguided.





# Various Objections:

- If we can't be wrong about our thoughts...in a correspondence theory of truth; ideas are bearers of truth.
- What are thoughts for Descartes? It is the simply the essence of the mental. Are all thoughts ideas? Not sure.
- For Descartes you can't think.
- The essence of thinking is thought.



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