

# Chapter 3

## Descartes, Second Meditation

### 3.1 Homework

#### Readings :

- Descartes, Meditation II
- Objections and Replies:
  - a) Fifth O and R: CSM II, 180-193, 243-9.
  - b) Second O and R: CSM II, 100 (last paragraph).
  - c) Sixth O and R: CSM II, 278 (first point), 285.
  - d) Third O and R: CSM II, 122-23.
  - e) Fourth O and R: CSM II, 150 (last paragraph), 171-2 (answer to the problem of awareness).
- BGD3 (Curley) – for the presentation on Friday – Peter and Andrew

#### Study Questions :

1. What are the main aims of this Meditation? Does Descartes achieve his goals?
2. Explain how, according to Descartes, the proposition "I think I exist" resists the argument of the evil genius.
3. Explain how Descartes is led to the conclusion that he is "a thinking thing".

4. Descartes spends some time discussing the nature of a piece of wax. Why does he do that? In other words, what is the role of this discussion in the overall argument of the Second Meditation? In order to answer to this question, you may want to find out first what is the conclusion that Descartes draws from the discussion of the piece of wax; and then see how the discussion can be logically related to this conclusion.

**Text Analysis :** "I am thinking thing" argument: pp.17-18, from "But I do not have a sufficient understanding of what this "I" is, that now necessarily exists" to "But what kind of thing? As I have just said – a thinking thing"

1. Give an analysis of the passage:
  - Describe the point the author intends to make
  - Describe the argument that the author is using to establish the point (give an outline)
2. Formulate 3 questions for further discussion about the passage – The questions might be of *any* of the following types:
  - a. Clarification request: if you think the author is not clear on one claim he makes: justify your request and propose different ways in which this claim could be interpreted
  - b. Argument request: if you think the text contains an unsupported claim: justify your request and propose a way (or a direction) for a possible argument.
  - c. Objection: if you think that one of the author's claim is false: give an argument for this!

## 3.2 Descartes: Second Meditations

### Aim of the Second Meditation :

1. look at the title!

The Nature of the Human Mind; and how it is better known than the body

→ *The question we should keep in mind while reading is: Does Descartes achieve his goal?*

2. “one firm and immovable point” – Archimedes

→ *Why would true knowledge of one single “certain and unshakeable” thing provide us with “hope for great things”?*

### I think, I exist – the Cogito :

- Descartes’ reasoning: The thinking self is what is left when the entire world has disappeared.
- Difficulties of interpretation
  1. Do we need to know what thought and existence is?
  2. Is the cogito a syllogism?
  3. Is it an inference?
  4. What kind of truth is to be attributed to the Cogito?

### What am I? – sum res cognitans :

Your job!

### Am I something else than a thinking thing? :

- The problem: Is the “I” that I discovered and know the whole story of myself? Could there be that I am more than that, that there be parts of myself of which I am not aware?

Distinction:

- what I am

- what I know I am

Are they necessary the same?

- Descartes' argument: I am nothing imaginable – nothing but the understanding can grasp the nature of the mind.  
—→What exactly is this argument? Is it convincing?
- One single self for the entire mental realm  
Unity of the self: argument?

**The Piece of Wax** – that I know the wax through the mind and not the senses

1. I do not know the piece of wax thanks to my senses
2. I know the piece of wax as a “body” : extension in time
3. I do know the piece of wax through an intuition of the mind only
4. Let's do it again: men in hats and coats

**Conclusion** – That I know the mind better than the body

Really?

What is his argument? Is it convincing?