

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Spring 2005  
Russell Marcus, Instructor  
email: [philosophy@thatmarcusfamily.org](mailto:philosophy@thatmarcusfamily.org)  
website: <http://philosophy.thatmarcusfamily.org>  
Office phone: (718) 997-5287

Lecture Notes, February 14

## I. Meditation II

In order to rebuild his beliefs, Descartes seeks a single starting point.  
Like Archimedes and the lever, pp 23-24.

## II. The Cogito

“I am, I exist” must be true whenever I am thinking.

We must be careful with the Cogito, pp 24-5.

It can not be:

- 1) Whatever thinks, exists.
  - 2) I think.
- So, I exist.

This representation, as a logical deduction, would require previous knowledge of the two premises.  
Also, it would require previous knowledge that the conclusion follows from the premises.  
But we eliminated logical knowledge on the basis of the deceiver doubt.

Thus, the Cogito must be more of a pure intuition.  
It establishes the existence of a thinker, as long as the thinker thinks, pp 25-6.

Descartes concludes that he is a thinking thing.  
What can he learn from these thoughts?  
These thoughts may not tell him anything true about the world outside of him.  
But even if the thoughts are false, they still appear to Descartes.  
Even if there is no table, we still seem to sense the table, in a privileged and indefeasible way.  
Note the distinction between sensing and seeming to sense.  
Ideas can not be false, considered only as images in our minds.  
We can get certainty about our beliefs, but only inside our minds, and not of the outside world.

## III. After the Cogito

Descartes has started to rebuild his knowledge, but he is stuck with just the Cogito.  
I am a thinking thing, a thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, imagines, and senses.  
He decides to take another approach.  
He starts by considering the physical objects he does not yet know exist.  
How did we think we knew about physical objects?

Obviously, through our senses.  
But Descartes realizes that this is an error.  
See p 34, the end of the Second Meditation.  
This is the conclusion of a discussion about a ball of wax.

#### IV. The story of the wax

Consider a ball of wax in two distinct states (p 30).  
First, when it is cold, hard, yellow, honey-flavored, and flower-scented.  
Then, bring it near a flame.  
The wax now becomes hot and liquid, and loses its color, taste (although it now will scald your tongue), and odor.

#### V. The philosophy of the New Science

See end of p 30.  
The wax is just a body which can take various manifestations, hot or cold, sweet or tasteless, etc., but is identified with none of these particular sensory qualities.  
This is the position of Boyle, Galileo, Newton, and Locke, as well as of Descartes.  
Berkeley disagrees in a strong way.  
This is a central question for us.  
What are physical objects, and how do we know about them.

#### VI. Descartes' argument concerning the wax

Read through the end of p 31.  
We seem to have images of the wax, in several incompatible states.  
The imagination is our capacity for sensory images.  
Distinguish this from another mental capacity, that of judging.  
(And we can distinguish these from other capacities of the mind, such as willing and refusing, and emotions, like happiness.)  
But we do not have an image of the essence of the wax, or of wax in general.

The argument:

- 1) Knowledge must be certain (firm and lasting).
  - 2) What we get from the senses is uncertain.
  - 3) So our senses do not give us knowledge.
  - 4) We do have knowledge about the wax.
- So, our knowledge of physical objects must come from the mind alone.