

René Descartes
Second Meditation

Cogito Ergo Sum

After doubting everything, the first piece of certain knowledge Descartes finds is that he exists.

How does Descartes reach this conclusion? Why is this conclusion certain, even though everything up to this point has been uncertain? What test does “I am; I exist” pass that nothing else passed?

Has Descartes shown yet that other things that think—like Tyke or Mikio—also exist?

Sum Res Cogitans

After determining that he exists, Descartes determines that his *essence* is to think (that what he is ultimately, or that his *sine qua non*—that without which he is not himself—is a thinking thing).

Descartes’ reasoning here is that he can doubt everything about himself except that he exists and that he thinks. Therefore, he can (for all he knows yet) have no body, no senses, nothing except his power to think. Therefore, thinking is the only thing he cannot lose and yet remain himself.

Has Descartes shown that he doesn’t have a body? Why?

Has Descartes shown that his brain is unnecessary for him to think? To act? To see and hear the world, if there is a world? Why?

How can Descartes have sensations (or more precisely, sense impressions) even if there is no external world? What does he know at this point about the external world? What does he know at this point about his sense impressions?

The Wax Argument

The last significant conclusion of this meditation is that perception is a power not of the senses or the imagination, but of the intellect, and that this is accomplished through the intellectual power of judgment.

Why does Descartes conclude that he does not perceive the wax—the wax itself—by means of his senses alone?

Why does Descartes conclude that he does not perceive the wax by means of his imagination?

Why does Descartes conclude that he does not perceive the men crossing the square outside by means of his senses?

Keeping in mind Descartes' conclusions about the wax and the people in the square outside, what does he now know about himself?

At this point, does Descartes know that the wax exists? Or the people in the square outside? All in all, what does Descartes know at the end of the Second Meditation?