

# Candidate 1 evidence

## *Section 1, Knowledge and Doubt*

Descartes' aim throughout his Meditations was to "establish a stable and lasting knowledge" upon which he can rebuild his perception of the world and prove sceptics wrong. To do so, in his first Meditation he used a method called "cartesian doubt", in order to separate himself from anything uncertain. There, he came up with the Dreaming argument, which undermined all knowledge received from physical experience as Descartes thought he could not distinguish between reality and dreaming, thus marking everything he experiences as unreliable. So, Descartes was left with the reason and reason alone. Even so, he found a way to doubt his own thoughts -- the Malicious demon argument -- an omni-potent evil genius, whose aim is nothing but to deceive Descartes. Thus, Descartes could no longer trust his reason and logic. However, he still found a way out of this penniless situation and lifted the hyperbolic doubt he placed upon himself -- using pure reason again. But can Descartes use it as an appropriate foundation for ALL knowledge?

In the Meditation 2, Descartes already purged all his previous knowledge thanks to the Malicious demon argument. He almost reached the dead end in his research, as he states that he can "neither get them out of my mind" nor see any way of resolving ultimate doubts from the MD argument. And when he seemed to almost admit his defeat, he came up with the Cogito.

At the beginning of Med 2, Descartes seems to be in a state of disrepair due to how effective his Malicious demon argument was. It was designed to bring everything into doubt, and did its job quite well. However, Descartes is desperate to find this first certitude as he is a foundationalist, who believes that one firm point is enough to do anything. He even draws a quote from Aristotle: "give me one firm point and a lever, and I could move the Earth". Thus, Descartes continued to search for his first certainty and arrived at the Cogito.

Despite the Malicious Demon deceiving him of everything, he must surely exist since even an omni-potent being cannot deceive him of his existence. This is because the demon, whilst providing a possibility of deception in every other aspect, cannot deceive Descartes of his existence since it is a necessary condition for him to be deceived. He sums up this by clearly stating: "I too undoubtedly exist if he is deceiving me" as it is a sufficient and necessary condition for deception that he exists. It is also important to note that deception is not the only necessary condition for existence - any form of thought as well means that you exist since even this thought is deception, you are still deceived and therefore undoubtedly exist. Whenever Descartes put forward the thought "I exist", he was finding that it is something intuitive that he cannot reject. Thus, Descartes arrives to Cogito - in its refined formulation, "I think therefore I am", cogito ergo sum. This argument is self-sustainable, self-sufficient, immune to the Malicious demon (at least at the first glance) and is really hard to argue with, since it needs one to deny their own existence. This argument was also considered indestructible due to the assumed necessity of a thinker for a thought to form.

Despite all that, Cogito and its way of reasoning went through a lot of critique. One of the key problems of Descartes' reasoning is that it is reasoning. To put it simple, in the Med 1 Descartes decided that he can no longer trust his

reasoning due to the possibility of an omni-potent evil genius to constantly deceive him. Later, through the exact reasoning he decided he could not trust, he arrives to the Cogito. Many philosophers (David Hume, for example) believe that the Malicious demon argument is too strong to break as it undermines even our logic, making it impossible to build any knowledge upon just pure reason - even though Cogito is a self-authenticating argument, it is also dependent on reason that Descartes could not trust a Meditation ago. Descartes responded to that criticism in his "Objections and Replies", where he belittled this argument by stating that his method cannot cast all logic into doubt, otherwise nothing could be certain at all. I consider this to be a weak response, since it looks like the Malicious demon can cast into doubt only those things that Descartes does not need for his investigation. In other words, why should there be any exceptions specifically for Descartes' aim? Wouldn't it be biased towards his viewpoint, considering that the whole purpose of Meditations is to prove sceptics wrong?

The second important critique to Descartes' reasoning in the Cogito is that it requires not only reason, but necessary language concepts such as "I", "to think" or "existence". If the Malicious demon can cast everything into doubt, then how can Descartes trust language or any of the concepts he used to believe? This critique is very connected to the previous one, as it also exploits the power of the Malicious demon argument. Descartes' response to that is rather interesting and more thoughtful than the previous one - if a person was to draw their full attention and focus to a certain concept and think about it, it means that they can at least grasp it on the surface level, what is enough to come up with Cogito. And while this is partially true, such argument has a major weakness in its subjectivity. With this claim, Cogito is no longer universal, as it turns out heavily dependent on the language concepts the person has. Some sceptics deny Descartes' Meditations as a whole, arguing that language in general cannot be trusted, therefore the Cogito was doomed since its birth. Here, Descartes does not really use his reason explaining why is it subjective -- it is a dodgy response, even though somewhat more coherent than the previous one.

The final critique of the Cogito was formulated by David Hume, who, due to being empiricist, believed that a person is no more than a bundle of perceptions and thoughts. He insisted that Descartes overstepped the boundary, referring to himself as to a "thinking thing" since he does not really have a proof of that. This argument is hard to refuse, but it can be argued that the Cogito is an intuitive argument, and in order to reject that he is a thinking thing, Descartes needed to deny his own existence. Here, it is clear that Descartes is somewhat reliant on his intuition, rather than reason.

In the conclusion it can be stated that even though Descartes' Cogito is very logical, reasonable and intuitively undeniable, Descartes fails to respond to any of the mentioned critiques using his reason and not being subjective - either that is for language concepts that he has no proof that a person is able to grasp, or for the power of the Malicious demon not extending to the things Descartes specifically needs.