

- 1) In a time of social, political, and scientific *crisis*, Descartes wants to find a *foundation* for the new (mathematical and mechanistic) *sciences*.
- 2) Descartes thinks that ideas have *representational content*, that is, an idea is an internal picture that "claims" that what it represents as existing really does exist.
- 3) To find his foundation, D uses a method of *hyperbolic doubt*: anything that can be doubted in the slightest will be rejected until he reaches a *point of absolute certainty*, what *cannot be doubted*.
 - a. The *dream hypothesis* renders doubtful that claim of representational content; it renders doubtful the existence of those things that ideas represent as existing in the world.
 - b. In this way, the dream hypothesis can *eliminate* sensory knowledge and knowledge of composite objects (i.e., physics, astronomy, medicine), *but basic mathematics survives*.
 - c. But the *evil genius* (a deceiving God) will make him doubt even basic mathematics.
- 4) The *cogito* is Descartes's point of *absolute certainty*.
 - a. Even if the representational content of thought does not correspond to anything in the world, you cannot doubt your existence while you are thinking.
 - b. So "*I am, I exist*" is necessarily true whenever it is uttered.
 - c. Another way to put it: you cannot doubt the existence of doubting while you are doubting.
- 5) Continuing his investigations, D distinguishes mind and body as separate *substances*.
 - a. D finds he cannot doubt that he is a thinking thing, a *res cogitans*.
 - i. The same I who doubts also understands and wills, so thought is the *attribute* of mental *substance*.
 - ii. No matter how thought is modified, it is still essentially thought; so doubting, willing, understanding, etc. are *modes* of thought.
 - b. Via the *wax example*, he finds that *extension is the attribute of bodily substance* since it underlies all the modes of differing shape, touch, smell, taste, and sound.
 - i. Further, since he "perceives" or understands extension by *thought* not by sensation, then he *knows the mind better than he knows body*.
 - ii. That's because even if he is fooled as to the existence of the wax, while he is understanding extension as its essence he must necessarily exist as a thinking thing.
- 6) But what good is the cogito as a foundation for the sciences if the representational content of its non-cogito thoughts (what those thoughts represent) might not exist? This is the *threat of solipsism*.
- 7) Descartes must *prove the existence of a non-deceiving God* to expand the point of certainty beyond the cogito.
 - a. Descartes relies on his readers to accept that there is a *hierarchy of reality* (or "Great Chain of Being"), with *God as perfect, infinite, substance* at top.
 - b. As previously established, some of Descartes's thoughts are "*ideas*" which *represent* things.
 - i. *Formal reality* is reality of existence (of things or of ideas as psychological events); *objective reality* is the reality of the representational content of an idea. Just as you can rank order things by their formal reality, you can rank-order ideas by the reality of what they represent.
 - ii. *There must be as much formal reality in a cause as in its effect*. That is, causation can go horizontally or downward on the hierarchy of reality, but not upward. A more perfect thing can cause a less perfect one, but a less perfect thing cannot cause a more perfect thing.
 - iii. Descartes believes that *things cause ideas*, so there must be as much formal reality in the thing as cause of an idea as there is objective reality of the idea of the thing. This is a difficult assumption to grant Descartes, but it is a key to his argument.
 - c. *Surveying his ideas*,
 - i. Descartes finds *he could have been the cause of almost all of them*: thus, still under the spell of the evil genius, the real world existence of things corresponding to the representational content of those ideas, the thing the idea represents, is doubtful; the thing might not exist.
 - ii. *But there is an idea of a perfect, non-deceiving God*.
 1. This *idea could not have been produced by Descartes*: the cause of an idea must have as much formal reality as there is objective reality of the idea. That is, a less perfect thing cannot create the idea of a more perfect thing.
 2. So, *Descartes is not alone in the world*: the threat of *solipsism* created by the evil genius hypothesis has been removed.
 3. As God must be a non-deceiver, whatever Descartes *perceives clearly and distinctly as existing he can trust really does exist*. This provides him an escape from the cogito, an expansion of the zone of truth, and a foundation for the sciences.