

## Descartes' Meditations

### What can I know for certain ?

I will doubt everything that can be doubted, in the hope that I will find some truth that cannot be doubted. (this is called Cartesian doubt)

Senses

*(I cannot trust my senses because they have let me down in the past)*



Do I know that I'm not dreaming?

*(No. Dreams feel very real at the time I am dreaming them. This experience could be a dream)*



What about mathematical truths? Surely  $2+2=4$  even if I'm asleep?  
*(No. God could be tricking me into believing  $2+2=4$  when in fact it equals something else)*



Perhaps there is an evil demon that is tricking me into believing that all of this is real. Can I know that there is no evil demon?

*(I cannot know for certain that there is not such an evil demon. I don't know if I have a body, or if other people exist etc. Perhaps I can know nothing with any certainty)*



**However, I must exist in order to doubt. I must exist in order to be deceived by the demon. I must exist in order to be even asking these questions.**

**“I think,  
Therefore I am”  
(this is known as the Cogito)**

**I am a mind, a “thinking thing” and this is absolutely certain**

## From “I am a thinking thing” to trusting his senses

### Part 1

1. From Descartes’ rule of cause and effect “an effect can only contain as much perfection as its cause”
2. In his mind, Descartes has a clear idea of God/perfection
3. If premise 1 is true then the idea of God/perfection must have a perfect cause
4. Descartes is imperfect and so cannot be the cause of this idea
5. The cause must be a perfect being

**Conclusion 1: A perfect being must, therefore, exist.**

6. God is defined as the perfect being

**Conclusion 2: Therefore God exists.**

## **Part 2**

7. A perfect being must be morally good

8. As a perfect being, God is morally good.

9. A morally good being would not deceive Descartes.

**Conclusion: Because Descartes is not being deceived, he can now:**

**a) trust his senses**

**b) know that he is not dreaming**

**c) rely on mathematical truths**

**d) be confident that he is not being tricked by an evil demon**

Although Descartes does make mistakes from time to time, these are *his* fault and not God's.

As long as a perception is “**clear and distinct**”, he can rely on it.