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**Losing One's (Cartesian) Mind:
A Problem With Descartes's Proof**

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ABSTRACT

According to Descartes, the Meditations and Objections and Replies contain a logically sound proof that he has a Cartesian mind, along with a comprehensive explanation of that proof. A close look at these texts, however, reveals that things are not quite as sound and comprehensive as Descartes says they are. For the proof -- which is formally presented in the Sixth Meditation -- contains a dubious premise. When some of his objectors point this out, Descartes replies that the truth of the premise was firmly established in the Second Meditation. But this comes as a rather startling reply, since in the Second Meditation itself, and numerous other places, Descartes (quite correctly) *denies* that such a premise is ever established there. So, in spite of Descartes's attempt to locate a justification for it, the said premise remains unjustified and dubious.

In the pages that follow I try to present this criticism in more detail. In doing so I examine several parts of the Meditations. Descartes makes it fairly clear that the Sixth Meditation proof is not isolated from the rest of the Meditations, but rather is to a great extent motivated and driven by the material that precedes it. So, as well as examining the Sixth Meditation proof, I also examine the 'method of doubt' in the First Meditation, the *cogito ergo sum* and *sum res cogitans* passages in the Second Meditation, and the passages concerned with clear and distinct ideas and God in the Third, Fourth and Fifth Meditations. Once the import of these passages becomes clear, it becomes relatively easy to see the weakness in Descartes's proof that he has a Cartesian mind.

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1

CARTESIAN MINDS, CARTESIAN BODIES, AND SUBSTANCE DUALISM.

Scene:

A smoked-filled bar. Kevin, a Masters student, and Bevan, a first-year student, are seated in a corner booth, guzzling beer and talking philosophy. Copies of Descartes's Meditations and Objections and Replies lurk in Kevin's coat pocket.

1.1 The scope of this enquiry.

BEVAN: What's your thesis about?

KEVIN: I'm studying the argument Descartes gives in his Meditations on First Philosophy for the existence of his Cartesian mind. I'm afraid I don't find it very convincing.

BEVAN: I understand that Descartes discusses this issue in *several* of his works, not just the Meditations. Are you studying these other works too?

KEVIN: No. The way I see it, Descartes tries especially hard to do two things in the Meditations: (1) prove that he has a Cartesian mind (or, as he puts it, that his mind is distinct from his body); and (2) prove that God exists. That these two are his main goals is revealed very early on in the piece -- the subtitle of the Meditations reads, "in which are demonstrated the existence of God and the distinction between the human soul and the body".¹ So my feeling is that the Meditations is the place where Descartes gives the existence of his Cartesian mind (and God) his most careful attention. I mean, just listen to this extract from his Dedicatory Letter, which accompanied the copy of the Meditations that was presented to the Faculty of Theology in Paris:

¹ Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch, Vol. II (1984) -- hereafter, CSM II -- p. 12. Descartes also emphasizes that (1) and (2) are his main goals throughout the Dedicatory Letter (CSM II, pp. 3-6) and the Preface (CSM II, pp. 6-8).

What I have done [in the Meditations] is to take merely the principal and most important arguments and develop them in such a way that I would now venture to put them forward as very certain and evident demonstrations. I will add that these proofs are of such a kind that I reckon they leave no room for the possibility that the human mind will ever discover better ones. (CSM II, p. 4)

BEVAN: It sounds like Descartes is pretty confident he has sorted these matters out once and for all.

KEVIN: It does, doesn't it. In fact, prior to its publication Descartes went so far as to send copies of the Meditations out to various philosophers and theologians, asking these gentlemen to write back with any criticisms they had of it. Then, when he heard back from them, Descartes wrote replies to all the criticisms, and sent the whole lot off to be published alongside the Meditations, under the title Objections and Replies.

BEVAN: I presume he didn't think any of the criticisms were damaging.

KEVIN: No, not at all. Descartes doesn't concede an inch to his critics. In spite of this, however, the Objections and Replies is a useful companion to the Meditations, as it contains many explanations and clarifications of the issues that are presented there. So I haven't *quite* limited myself to the Meditations alone -- I've studied the Objections and Replies too. Actually, Descartes himself advises that the two should be studied together, in his Preface to the Meditations:

. . . I certainly do not promise to satisfy my [serious] readers straightaway on all points, and I am not so presumptuous as to believe that I am capable of foreseeing all the difficulties which anyone may find. So first of all, in the *Meditations*, I will set out the very thoughts which have enabled me, in my view, to arrive at a certain and evident knowledge of the truth, so that I can find out whether the same arguments which have convinced me will enable me to convince others. Next, I will reply to the objections of various men of outstanding intellect and scholarship who had these *Meditations* sent to them for scrutiny before they went to press. For the objections they raised were so many and so varied that I would venture to hope that it would be hard for anyone else to think of any point -- at least of any importance -- which these critics have not touched on. I therefore ask my readers not to pass judgement on the *Meditations* until they have been kind enough to read through all these objections and my replies to them. (CSM II, p. 8)

BEVAN: So you've been studying the Meditations and Objections and Replies, but none of Descartes's other works. Is that right?

KEVIN: Yes. According to Descartes, a comprehensive and convincing account of the existence of his Cartesian mind can be found in the Meditations and Objections and Replies alone. So I've been taking him at his word, and looking at just these two sets of writings.²

1.2 A Cartesian mind thinks.

BEVAN: What exactly is a Cartesian mind?

KEVIN: Throughout the Meditations and Objections and Replies, Descartes emphasizes three features of a Cartesian mind: (1) it *thinks*; (2) it is *not extended*; and (3) it is a *substance*. I'll run through these features separately for you, and flesh them out a little. Hopefully this will answer your question.

Before I start though, let me point out that Descartes never uses the phrase 'Cartesian mind' himself. Mostly he uses just 'mind'. That's a little

² My tone in this section suggests that Descartes only gives one proof of the existence of his Cartesian mind in the Meditations. In actual fact, I think he gives *two*. However, I am only going to discuss the proof that occurs *early on* in the Sixth Meditation (CSM II, p. 54), not the one that occurs *late* in the Sixth Meditation (CSM II, p. 59). It is the former proof that the preceding Meditations are most obviously related to, and that receives all the attention in the Objections and Replies. Consequently, I consider this to be the more important of the two.

The proof that occurs late in the Sixth Meditation is the following:

... there is a great difference between the mind and the body, inasmuch as the body is by its very nature always divisible, while the mind is utterly indivisible. For when I consider the mind, or myself in so far as I am merely a thinking thing, I am unable to distinguish any parts within myself; I understand myself to be something quite single and complete. Although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, I recognize that if a foot or arm or any other part of the body is cut off, nothing has thereby been taken away from the mind. As for the faculties of willing, of understanding, of sensory perception and so on, these cannot be termed parts of the mind, since it is one and the same mind that wills, and understands and has sensory perceptions. By contrast, there is no corporeal or extended thing that I can think of which in my thought I cannot easily divide into parts; and this very fact makes me understand that it is divisible. This one argument would be enough to show me that the mind is completely different from the body, even if I did not already know as much from other considerations. (CSM II, p. 59. "Other considerations" is a reference to the proof I am going to examine.)

Apart from a para-phrasing in the Synopsis, there is no further discussion of this proof. I too will refrain from discussing it, suffice to say that my criticism of Descartes's other proof can be leveled at this one also.

confusing though, since 'mind' means different things to different people. Some people think that to talk about minds is really to talk about *brains*, for example, and others think that to talk about minds is really to talk about *behaviour*. When *Descartes* talks about minds though, he's talking about something different again. So I'm going to use the phrase 'Cartesian mind' instead of 'mind', just so you don't forget that we're discussing *Descartes's* view of the 'mind' here, not yours or mine or anyone else's .

And one more thing. *Descartes* sometimes uses words *other* than 'mind' to refer to his Cartesian mind. Sometimes he uses 'soul', and sometimes 'I'. He makes it clear that these words are synonymous though, when he says things like,

. . . while the body can very easily perish, the mind < or the soul of man, for I make no distinction between them > is immortal by its very nature (Synopsis of the six following Meditations, CSM II, p. 10),

and,

. . . it is certain that I < that is, my soul, by which I am what I am > am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it. (Sixth Meditation, CSM II, p. 54)³

So don't worry if I quote you passages where *Descartes* is talking about his *soul*, or *himself*, and I say they are passages about his *Cartesian mind*. It's not that I'm trying to pull a fast one on you, but rather that *Descartes* is just using some synonyms.

Now then, the first feature that *Descartes* emphasizes about a Cartesian mind is that it *thinks*, as the following passages demonstrate:

. . . I conceive of myself as a thing that *thinks* and is not extended
. . . (Third Meditation, CSM II, p. 30, my emphasis)

3 Phrases within diamond brackets are found in the French version of the Meditations (published in 1647), but not the Latin version (published in 1642). Although Cottingham's translation (Cottingham translated the Meditations and Objections and Replies alone) is based on the Latin version, he frequently inserts phrases from the French version, phrases which he feels "offer useful glosses on, or additions to, the original" Latin version (CSM II, p. 2). Whenever such a phrase occurs in a passage I quote, I will -- as Cottingham does -- place it in diamond brackets.

. . . the idea I have of the human mind, in so far as it is a *thinking* thing, which is not extended in length, breadth or height and has no other bodily characteristics, is much more distinct than the idea of any corporeal thing. (Fourth Meditation, CSM II, p. 37, my emphasis)

. . . I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a *thinking*, non-extended thing . . . (Sixth Meditation, CSM II, p. 54, my emphasis)

. . . understanding, willing, doubting etc. are forms by which I recognize the substance which is called *mind*. (4th Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 157, Descartes's emphasis)

BEVAN: This last passage mentions 'understanding', 'willing' and 'doubting' rather than 'thinking'. Is it Descartes's view that thinking is composed of activities like those?

KEVIN: Yes, thinking is made up of those activities plus a few more. Descartes gives a slightly longer list in the Second Meditation, when he explains that a thing that thinks is a thing that

. . . doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions. (Second Meditation, CSM II, p. 19)

And this explanation is repeated almost word for word at the beginning of the Third Meditation.⁴

BEVAN: It seems to me that, in saying a Cartesian mind thinks, Descartes has told us of the *tasks* a Cartesian mind performs -- it performs the tasks of doubting, of understanding, of affirming, of denying etc. etc.

KEVIN: That's a nice way of putting it. And Descartes has decided to use 'thinking' as a catch-all phrase for these psychological tasks. So, what does a Cartesian mind do? Answer: a Cartesian mind *thinks*.

BEVAN: But how helpful is it to describe a thing in terms of the tasks it performs? Does that tell you much about the thing itself? I mean, the 'Is it an animal, mineral, or vegetable?' type of question still remains unanswered, doesn't it. For example, if I say I've got a 'guard', and describe it as 'a thing that protects me', I don't really indicate what my guard looks

4 CSM II, p. 24.

like, or what it's made of etc. I've indicated what it *does*, but no one as yet can say it is or it isn't a legal guardian, a big brother, a bodyguard, a guard dog, a gun, a guardian angel, God, or any number of other things. The description I've given of my guard isn't specific enough to indicate one particular thing. It only indicates a set of things -- those things that can protect me.

KEVIN: You're quite right. Saying of a Cartesian mind that it thinks leaves it very much up in the air what a Cartesian mind *is* exactly. It could turn out to be any one of a number of things. Perhaps it's a ghostly spirit. Perhaps it's a sophisticated artificial device, like a computer. Maybe it's a human body. Maybe it's an alien that's sending out *signals* to a human body (just as a T.V. transmitter sends out signals to a T.V.).

You're actually not alone in seeing how 'un-revealing' it is to describe something as 'a thing that thinks'. Gassendi, the author of the Fifth Set of Objections, has this to say in response to Descartes's claims that he is 'a thing that thinks':

In saying that you are simply 'a thing that thinks' you mention an operation of which all of us were already well aware; but you tell us nothing of the substance which performs this operation -- what kind of substance it is, and what it consists of, how it organizes itself to perform so many different functions in so many different ways, and other matters of this kind . . . (CSM II, pp. 185-186)⁵

Personally, I think you and Gassendi have a valid point. Being told that a Cartesian mind thinks is of course better than being told nothing, but it doesn't really get us to the point where we can say, 'Oh, *now* I know what a Cartesian mind is.' We need *more* information for that.⁶

1.3 A Cartesian mind is not extended.

KEVIN (cont.): Fortunately, Descartes does provide more information. Another thing he says is that a Cartesian mind is *not extended*. Consider the

⁵ See also Gassendi's comments on pp. 192-193 of CSM II, which are similar in nature.

⁶ The reason why I have spent time in this section discussing how 'un-revealing' it is to say of a thing that it thinks is to introduce an idea that will be taken up in more detail from Chapter 5 onwards -- namely, Descartes's claim that he thinks does *not* by itself entail that he is unextended too.

following passages:

. . . I conceive of myself as a thing that thinks and is *not extended*
 . . . (Third Meditation, CSM II, p. 30, my emphasis)

. . . the idea I have of the human mind, in so far as it is a thinking thing, *which is not extended in length, breadth or height and has no other bodily characteristics*, is much more distinct than the idea of any corporeal thing. (Fourth Meditation, CSM II, p. 37, my emphasis)

. . . I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, *non-extended* thing . . . (Sixth Meditation, CSM II, p. 54, my emphasis)

Even though the mind is united to the whole body, it does not follow that it is extended throughout the body, *since it is not in its nature to be extended*, but only to think. (Fifth Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 266, my emphasis)

BEVAN: What does it mean to be 'not extended'?

KEVIN: Well, I guess a good way of finding out what being *not* extended amounts to is to first find out what being *extended* amounts to. And on this point Descartes is fairly clear: to be extended is to be a "corporeal" thing,⁷ a "material" thing,⁸ a "body".⁹ Something that is extended has a "determinable shape",¹⁰ a "definable location",¹¹ and a "size".¹² It occupies space "in such a way as to exclude any other body".¹³ And it is a "sensory" thing¹⁴ -- it is "perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste

7 CSM II, p. 50ff.

8 CSM II, pp. 11 and 50.

9 CSM II, pp. 17 and 56.

10 CSM II, p. 17 (also pp. 14 and 30, where different phrasing is used to express the same idea).

11 CSM II, p. 17 (also pp. 14 and 30, where different phrasing is used to express the same idea).

12 CSM II, pp. 14 and 30.

13 CSM II, p. 17.

14 CSM II, p. 53.

or smell".¹⁵

BEVAN: So an extended thing is basically what I would call a 'physical object'. Stones and sheep and buildings and the like are extended things, but ghosts and angels and God and the like aren't.

KEVIN: Yes, that's right.

Now presumably, a Cartesian mind -- since it is not extended -- *lacks* all the features I've just listed. A Cartesian mind, then, is *not* a corporeal thing, a material thing, a body. It does *not* have a determinable shape, a definable location, or a size. It does *not* occupy space in such a way as to exclude any other body. And it is *not* perceived by the senses of touch, sight, hearing, taste or smell.

BEVAN: So Cartesian minds belong in that group made up of ghosts and angels and God and the like?

KEVIN: Yes. In fact, a phrase that has become fashionable for describing a Cartesian mind is 'the Ghost in the Machine'.¹⁶

1.4 A Cartesian mind is a substance.

KEVIN (cont.): The third feature that Descartes emphasizes about a Cartesian mind is that it is a *substance*:

. . . all the things that we clearly and distinctly conceive of as different *substances* (*as we do in the case of mind and body*) are in fact substances which are really distinct one from the other . . .
(Synopsis, CSM II, p. 9, my emphasis)

. . . I think that a stone is a substance, or is a thing capable of existing independently, and I also think that *I am a substance*. Admittedly I conceive of myself as a thing that thinks and is not extended, whereas I conceive of the stone as a thing that is extended and does not think, so that the two conceptions differ enormously; but they seem to agree with respect to the classification 'substance'. (Third Meditation, CSM II, p. 30, my emphasis)

. . . understanding, willing, doubting etc. are forms by which I recognize the *substance which is called mind*. (Fourth Set of

¹⁵ CSM II, p. 17.

¹⁶ See Ryle (1949, pp. 15-16) for the coining of the phrase.

Replies, CSM II, p. 157, my emphasis)

This second quote here has the beginnings of an explanation as to what Descartes means by the term 'substance' -- a 'substance' is "a thing capable of existing independently". A slightly better explanation is given in the Fourth Set of Replies:

. . . the notion of a *substance* is just this -- that it can exist by itself, that is without the aid of any other substance. (CSM II, p. 159, Descartes's emphasis)

BEVAN: So any particular substance, such as a Cartesian mind, is a complete, self-sufficient unit? It could exist even if nothing else did?

KEVIN: Well, not quite if *nothing* else did. For Descartes has this idea that all substances depend on *God* for their existence.¹⁷ But don't worry too much about this point. Just note that substances don't depend on anything *besides* God for their existence. Each substance that exists could do so even if no others did.

BEVAN: That would be a funny sort of world, wouldn't it -- one Cartesian mind, and nothing else?

KEVIN: Well yes, it does sound a bit bizarre. But I guess that once you accept there *are* substances, and that God creates them, it's not hard to imagine God creating just the one Cartesian mind. In fact, in the First and Second Meditations Descartes spends a lot of time discussing exactly that scenario.¹⁸

1.5 Substance dualism and Cartesian bodies.

KEVIN (cont.): Okay. There's a fairly brief outline of what a Cartesian mind is -- it's a non-extended thinking substance. Now, before I go on to tell you about Descartes's proof that he *has* one of these things, I think I should first paint you the wider picture, so to speak. If you are aware of Descartes's overall plan, I think you will better appreciate what he is trying to accomplish.

In arguing that he has a Cartesian mind, Descartes is advocating a

¹⁷ See CSM II, p. 10.

¹⁸ See Sections 2.6 (pp. 28-32), 3.5 (pp. 42-44) and 4.1 (pp. 45-47).

theory called 'substance dualism'. This is a theory about what kind of creatures you and I and our kind are. It maintains that we are each composed of two quite distinct parts, one of which is -- surprise, surprise -- a Cartesian mind.

BEVAN: What's the other part?

KEVIN: Descartes calls it a 'body'. (I'll call it a 'Cartesian body', because again Descartes has his own unique view as to what a 'body' is.)¹⁹ Basically, it's the antithesis of a Cartesian mind. It too is a substance, but instead of being a non-extended thinking substance, it's a *non-thinking extended* one. It's composed of a whole lot of flesh and bone bits and pieces -- arms, legs, torso, head, brain, and other internal organs. Descartes describes it thus:

. . . I propose to concentrate on what came into my thoughts spontaneously and quite naturally whenever I used to consider what I was. Well, the first thought to come to mind was that I had a face, hands, arms and the whole mechanical structure of limbs which can be seen in a corpse, and which I called the *body*. (Second Meditation, CSM II, p. 17, my emphasis)

. . . I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. (Sixth Meditation, CSM II, p. 54)

. . . being extended and divisible and having shape etc. are forms or attributes by which I recognize the substance called *body* . . . (CSM II, p. 157, Descartes's emphasis)

BEVAN: In the first quote here Descartes likens a Cartesian body to what can be seen in a corpse. Does that mean he considers a Cartesian body to be a *lifeless* thing, like (say) a stone?

KEVIN: No, I don't think so. For in the Sixth Meditation he gives a description of a Cartesian body that is not 'connected up' to a Cartesian mind (which Cartesian bodies usually are), and this creature is very much alive:

. . . I might consider the body of a man as a kind of machine equipped with and made up of bones, nerves, muscles, veins, blood and skin in such a way that, even if there were no mind in

¹⁹ Descartes actually has two different meanings for the word 'body'. Sometimes he means 'corporeal thing' (see p. 7 above). Other times his meaning concerns a *particular* corporeal thing. It is this second use of the word 'body' that I am discussing here.

it, it would still perform all the same movements as it now does in those cases where movement is not under the control of the will or, consequently, of the mind < but occurs merely as a result of the disposition of the organs >. (CSM II, p. 58)

Descartes gives some examples of movements that occur "merely as a result of the disposition of the organs" in the Fourth Set of Replies:

. . . a very large number of the motions occurring inside us do not depend in any way on the mind. These include heartbeat, digestion, nutrition, respiration when we are asleep, and also such waking actions as walking, singing and the like, when these occur without the mind attending to them. When people take a fall, and stick out their hands so as to protect their head, it is not reason that instructs them to do this; it is simply that the sight of the impending fall reaches the brain and sends the animal spirits into the nerves in the manner necessary to produce this movement even without any mental volition, just as it would be produced in a machine. (CSM II, p. 161)

So a Cartesian body on its own is certainly not lifeless. But neither is it particularly versatile. I guess its behaviour would be fairly similar to that of a severely mentally-disabled adult.

BEVAN: In having arms and legs, a torso, a head, a brain and other internal organs, a Cartesian body is quite clearly an extended thing. That much I understand. But why is it also a *non-thinking* thing? If it has a brain and other internal organs, why can't it doubt, understand, affirm, deny etc.?

KEVIN: Well, the fundamental idea behind substance dualism is that no flesh and bone organs are *relevant* to being able to think. What's required for that is a *further* organ -- a Cartesian mind.²⁰ So a Cartesian body on its own is really just a funny sort of *machine*, as Descartes suggests in those last two quotes. In fact, in the Sixth Meditation quote Descartes is actually likening a Cartesian body to a *clock*. With a clock, says Descartes, you have particular parts combined in a particular way, and the resulting movements of those parts are limited in range and (of course) machine-like. Similarly, reasons Descartes, with a Cartesian body on its own you have

²⁰ I personally find the description of a Cartesian mind as an 'organ' extremely helpful. It seems to disperse (if only for a moment) some of the murkiness surrounding the notion of a 'non-extended thinking substance', and bring everything down to a more manageable level. I stole the description from Ryle (1949, p. 168).

particular parts combined in a particular way, and the resulting movements of those parts are limited in range and machine-like. Those movements, he suggests, are the unthinking/instinctive/reflex movements that he and you and I exhibit -- breathing, going to sleep, recoiling from heat, crying out when the stomach is empty or the skin is pierced, perspiring when hot, emitting water from the eyes when around onions, reaching out when falling, stuff like that. *Non-reflexive* movements, such as buying clothes, preparing food, driving cars, doing crosswords, conversing with people etc., just don't fall within the range of movements that a Cartesian body on its own could perform.²¹

BEVAN: So what's going on 'upstairs', or 'in the head of', a Cartesian body on its own?

KEVIN: Nothing at all. Again, think in terms of machines. Try plants and animals too. Just ask yourself how much is going on 'upstairs' when (say) a Venus Fly Trap closes its leaves around a fly, or when a dog twitches its leg when you scratch the right spot, or when a clock keeps time, or when a mechanical arm does some soldering on a car assembly line.

BEVAN: I don't suppose there's *anything* going on 'upstairs' in these cases.

KEVIN: That's right. And that's how it would be with a Cartesian body too. There would be nothing going on 'upstairs', ever. A Cartesian body on its own would be a complete 'airhead'.

BEVAN: This lack of thought -- it wouldn't be due (say) to a lack of training, or to a deformity, or to anything like that, would it?

KEVIN: No. A Cartesian body -- even a mature healthy one -- just wouldn't be capable of having thoughts. It wouldn't have the right design for it, just as (say) a *clock* doesn't have the right design for having thoughts.

BEVAN: Hmm. So having a brain and other internal organs isn't going to help a Cartesian body to think one bit. For according to substance

21 That a Cartesian body on its own would be limited in its behaviour patterns is a point that has nearly always been missed, I think. And this has resulted in substance dualism receiving some rather bad press. For the mistaken view that a Cartesian body on its own would behave just like a Cartesian body-*plus-mind* generates various difficulties, the most notable of which is the 'problem of other minds'. This problem highlights how difficult it would be to detect other Cartesian minds, if Cartesian bodies on their own not only looked but also *acted* just like Cartesian bodies-*plus-minds*.

Once it is made clear, though, that Cartesian bodies on their own would be *limited* in their behaviour patterns, it becomes very easy to detect other Cartesian minds. Just look for Cartesian bodies that are *versatile* in their behaviour patterns; ones that act like that are obviously connected up to Cartesian minds.

dualism, thinking is an activity performed solely by Cartesian minds. Brains and the like don't feature in it at all. You could find a brain as big as a house, but you wouldn't get an ounce of thought out of it. No Cartesian mind means no thinking.

KEVIN: Correct.

Incidentally, this is exactly why Descartes often uses the expression 'My mind is distinct from my body' (or something similar) when claiming he has a Cartesian mind.²² The point he's making is that the organ responsible for his thinking is not one of his *extended* organs. It's not his brain, nor any other part of his body. It's an organ which *lacks* extension -- a Cartesian mind.

1.6 The 'separateness' and 'togetherness' of a united Cartesian mind and body.

KEVIN (cont.): Right, let's continue with substance dualism. According to the theory, you and I are made up of two distinct parts: a Cartesian mind -- a non-extended thinking substance; and a Cartesian body -- a non-thinking extended substance. Now, since these two parts are *substances*, each could exist even if the other didn't. So that the two just happen to exist side by side in you and I doesn't detract at all from their 'separateness'. This point is made quite clearly by Descartes a number of times:

. . . I < that is, my soul, by which I am what I am > am really distinct from my body, *and can exist without it.* (Sixth Meditation, CSM II, p. 54, my emphasis)

. . . the mind and the body are incomplete substances when they are referred to a human being which together they make up. But if they are considered on their own, they are complete.

For just as being extended and divisible and having shape etc. are forms or attributes by which I recognize the substance called *body*, so understanding, willing, doubting etc. are forms by which I recognize the substance which is called *mind*. And I understand a thinking substance to be just as much a complete thing as an extended substance. (Fourth Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 157, Descartes's emphasis)

²² I mentioned earlier (p. 1 above) that Descartes often expresses the matter this way. As you will see in Section 7.1 (pp. 87-90), it is more or less this expression that Descartes employs in his Cartesian mind proof.

. . . the notions of a thinking thing and an extended or mobile thing are completely different, and independent of each other. . . . [H]owever often we find them in one and the same subject -- e.g. when we find thought and corporeal motion in the same man -- we should not think that they are therefore one and the same in virtue of a unity of nature, but should regard them as the same only in respect of unity of composition. (Sixth Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 287)

BEVAN: I see from these last two quotes that there is something of a 'flip-side' to the 'separateness' of a Cartesian mind and body: in spite of their being so different, and so complete in themselves, they still manage to come together somehow to form a union, which Descartes calls a 'man'.

KEVIN: Oh yes, Descartes emphasizes this 'togetherness' just as much as he does their 'separateness'. The Sixth Meditation is full of claims to that effect. When discussing his sensory perceptions of the objects around him, for example, Descartes says things like,

. . . the fact that some of the perceptions are agreeable to me while others are disagreeable makes it quite certain that my body, or rather my whole self, *in so far as I am a combination of body and mind*, can be affected by the various beneficial or harmful bodies which surround it (CSM II, p. 56, my emphasis),

and,

My sole concern here is with what God has bestowed on me as a combination of mind and body. (CSM II, p. 57)

These indicate that Descartes considers himself to be a walking, talking, breathing example of a united Cartesian mind and Cartesian body.

BEVAN: Does Descartes say much about the *nature* of this union?

KEVIN: Well, one thing he says is that it's a very close, very intimate, union. He tries to indicate the degree of intimacy by saying it's *not* like the union of a sailor to his ship:

Nature also teaches me, by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst and so on, that I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit. If this were not so, I, who am nothing but a thinking thing, would not feel pain when the body was hurt, but would perceive the damage purely by the intellect, just as a sailor perceives by sight if

anything in his ship is broken. (Sixth Meditation, CSM II, p. 56)

The overall impression I get from the phrases he uses here -- "closely joined", "intermingled", "form a unit" -- and elsewhere -- "a kind of unit",²³ "combination",²⁴ "composite",²⁵ "united"²⁶ -- is that this union isn't any sort of loose affiliation. When a Cartesian body and a Cartesian mind are united, they are as thick as thieves, so to speak.

Unfortunately though, Descartes doesn't say *how* they unite. He just says they *do*. But how a ghostly thing could ever connect up with a physical thing is really something of a mystery. And he doesn't say much about *where* they unite either. He suggests the brain, or perhaps a small part of it,²⁷ but again this is all a bit of a mystery. Indeed, the issues of how and where a Cartesian mind and body unite are considered to be major problems with substance dualism. But don't worry yourself over these issues. Descartes first has to prove that a Cartesian mind *exists* before he can claim it unites with anything. And I think he's got his work cut out just doing this first job.

BEVAN: Well, now that I've got the wider picture, I'm very keen to see if Descartes *can* do this first job. For I guess that if I want to believe in any sort of 'life after death', I have to believe there's a part of me that is something like a Cartesian mind -- a part that is the source of my consciousness, and can survive the death of my physical body.

KEVIN: Yes, that's right. Descartes mentions several times that one of his main aims in proving he has a Cartesian mind is to show that "the decay of the body does not imply the destruction of the mind", which is "enough to give mortals the hope of an after-life" (Synopsis, CSM II, p. 10).²⁸

Right then, let's get down to business. I think it will be a good idea if I start you off at the beginning of the Meditations, and take you through the issues that lead up to the proof. The proof itself is fairly brief, but it draws

23 CSM II, p. 11.

24 CSM II, pp. 56, 57, 61.

25 CSM II, pp. 57 and 59.

26 CSM II, p. 59.

27 CSM II, p. 59.

28 See also CSM II, p. 3, where the same sentiments are expressed.

quite heavily on the preceding discussion. So you need to find out exactly where Descartes is coming from, and what the technical terms he uses in his proof mean, and so on. How does that sound?

BEVAN: Sounds fine. . . . Just before we get going though, there's something I'd like to ask you.

KEVIN: What's that?

BEVAN: Will you get me another beer?

2

THE FIRST MEDITATION: (a) FINDING EXTENSION BELIEFS ARE DOUBTABLE.

2.1 Undoubtable beliefs are true beliefs.

KEVIN: The First Meditation is entitled, 'What can be called into doubt', which pretty accurately indicates the topic of discussion. Descartes sets about examining all his current beliefs about himself and the world around him, in an effort to see which ones are open to even the slightest doubt, and which ones are not.

BEVAN: Why does he want to do this?

KEVIN: I think he feels that if any of his beliefs -- and in particular his belief that he has a Cartesian mind -- can be identified as 'undoubtable' i.e. as beliefs which he cannot even *imagine* grounds for doubting, then he can assume those beliefs are *true*. For Descartes, undoubtability seems to be a *guide* to truthfulness. This he reveals in the Second Set of Replies:

. . . as soon as we think that we correctly perceive something, we are spontaneously convinced that it is true. Now if this conviction is so firm that it is impossible for us ever to have any reason for doubting what we are convinced of, then there are no further questions for us to ask: we have everything that we could reasonably want. . . . For the supposition we are making here is of a conviction so firm that it is quite incapable of being destroyed; and such a conviction is clearly the same as the most perfect certainty. (CSM II, p. 103)¹

BEVAN: Does Descartes have a guide to undoubtability as well?

KEVIN: As a matter of fact he does. But we aren't told what it is until

1 Some commentators e.g. Frankfurt (1970, pp. 179-180), read this passage as a statement by Descartes that he is using undoubtability to guide him merely to *unshakable subjective convictions*. Other commentators e.g. Cottingham (1986, p. 69), read this passage as a statement by Descartes that he is using undoubtability to guide him all the way to *objective truths*. Personally, I feel Descartes is *claiming* that undoubtability guides him to objective truths, but that in *fact* it only gives him unshakable subjective convictions. However, I'll ignore this problem, as it's not the issue I want to have Descartes on about.

the Third Meditation. So for now, just be content with what Descartes has indicated thus far: undoubtability is a guide to truthfulness.²

BEVAN: Okay.

Isn't Descartes being rather over-cautious, in looking all the way to undoubtability as an indicator of truth? There are lots of beliefs that *I* accept are true, even though I realize they are open to doubt. Everything you're saying about Descartes here today, for example, is quite open to doubt. Maybe you're lying. Or maybe the book you're quoting from is a fake, though you don't know it. But I'm satisfied that you *aren't* lying, and that the book *isn't* a fake, and consequently I'm satisfied that what you're saying is true rather than false. Contrary to Descartes, I don't need to be shown that something is undoubtable before I'll accept it's true.

KEVIN: I think Descartes's concern is that the traditionally accepted guides to truth -- such as taking people to be speaking honestly and knowledgeably -- just aren't all that reliable. For as you've noted, people sometimes lie, or they're mis-informed etc. So I think Descartes is wanting to stop relying on these somewhat inaccurate guides to truth, and start relying on an accurate one. And he seems to feel that undoubtability will do the job. With undoubtability, he feels he'll never be mistaken about what the truth is.

BEVAN: Is that a reasonable assumption to make?

KEVIN: Well, it's certainly a *tempting* assumption. You see, something that is undoubtable is something you cannot even imagine could be false. Take, for example, the belief 'Either it's raining or it's not raining'. I cannot imagine any grounds, no matter how outrageous or insignificant, for supposing this belief could be false.³ That is, I am unable to doubt it. And consequently I feel inclined to say the belief is *true*. Because I can't even *imagine* that it could be false, I feel it must be correct. Don't you?

² Descartes's guide to undoubtability is discussed in Chapter 6, p. 78.

³ In fact, I *can* imagine grounds for supposing that 'Either it's raining or it's not raining' could be false: it could be false if *contradictions were true*. But if the normal rules of logic were to come unstuck for Descartes, then -- plausibly -- so too would any attempt by him to identify true beliefs (which is the whole point of the exercise). For how could he *argue* that such and such a belief is true, if he had no secure guide-lines as to what *counts* as a good argument?! So I am going to assume that grounds for doubt which violate normal rules of logic are just *too* outrageous, and don't qualify as legitimate doubts. Beliefs, then, that are doubttable only if normal rules of logic are violated are not really doubttable at all.

Descartes himself seems to support this view -- see p. 21 below, and its footnote 4 (though unfortunately there are times when he seems to *reject* it as well -- see footnote 10 on p. 28 below).

BEVAN: I guess so.

KEVIN: Well, Descartes guesses so too. His general feeling is: undoubtable beliefs are true beliefs. So, by identifying undoubtable beliefs, he hopes to also identify true beliefs.

2.2 The "general demolition": identifying doubttable beliefs.

BEVAN: Okay, how does Descartes begin to identify his undoubtable beliefs?

KEVIN: First of all, he notes that in his childhood he developed numerous beliefs, many of which he has since realized are false. This leads him to wonder whether perhaps a great many more of his childhood beliefs are false, and also whether the beliefs he has *derived* from these childhood ones are false. So he decides to give all his beliefs a thorough going-over:

Some years ago I was struck by the large number of falsehoods that I had accepted as true in my childhood, and by the highly doubtful nature of the whole edifice that I had subsequently based on them. I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last. . . . So today I have expressly rid my mind of all worries and arranged for myself a clear stretch of free time. I am here quite alone, and at last I will devote myself sincerely and without reservation to the general demolition of my opinions. (First Meditation, CSM II, p. 12)

BEVAN: What does he mean by "foundations" here?

KEVIN: That's the label he gives to those beliefs from which all his others are derived. He's not planning to examine only his derived beliefs, but also the ones underpinning them too -- the "foundations". And probably, some *new* foundations are going to have to be found. For a number of the existing ones were set in place during childhood, remember, and in Descartes's experience childhood beliefs have often turned out to be false.

BEVAN: I see. And what's this talk of a "general demolition"? Is Descartes going to throw out all his current beliefs and start again from scratch?

KEVIN: No, not at all -- though you'd think so from the way he is talking here, wouldn't you. But really, all Descartes is going to do is *temporarily set aside those beliefs which he can imagine could be false*. Now, this is not to say those beliefs *are* false, or even that they are *probably*

false. It is not to pass any judgement on their truth value at all! It is simply to *suspend* judgement, to *reserve* judgement, on their truth value. It is merely to identify them for what they are -- namely, doubtable beliefs -- and to make sure they don't get mistaken for what they are not -- namely, *undoubtable* beliefs. Descartes, remember, is searching for beliefs of this second type. And to that extent he doesn't need to *throw out* beliefs, he just needs to find out how *doubtable* they are.

BEVAN: So the "demolition" is really just a sorting of beliefs into piles, according to their level of doubtability -- the 'doubtable' pile, and the 'undoubtable' pile. Am I right?

KEVIN: Yes. In the very next part of the First Meditation Descartes reveals that this is his real intention. He says he's not going to throw out beliefs, or even try to show up the false ones among them. He's merely going to show up the *doubtable* ones among them:

. . . I will devote myself sincerely and without reservation to the general demolition of my opinions.

But to accomplish this, it will not be necessary for me to show that all my opinions are false, which is something I could perhaps never manage. Reason now leads me to think that I should hold back my assent from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable just as carefully as I do from those which are patently false. So, for the purposes of rejecting all my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt. (CSM II, p. 12)

This is backed up by a passage in the Appendix to the Fifth Set of Objections and Replies, where Descartes discusses the First Meditation:

. . . in order to get rid of every kind of preconceived opinion, all we need to do is resolve not to affirm or deny anything which we have previously affirmed or denied until we have examined it afresh. (CSM II, p. 270)

So Descartes is only interested in finding out if he can imagine grounds for doubting beliefs, and -- if so -- reserving judgement on them. He is not *throwing out* beliefs.

So, the "general demolition" Descartes speaks of is not as destructive as it first sounds.

2.3 Not all beliefs will be doubtable.

KEVIN (cont.): So, early in the First Meditation Descartes gets ready to sift through his beliefs and identify the doubtable ones among them:

. . . for the purposes of rejecting all my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt. (CSM II, p. 12)

BEVAN: Descartes makes it sound like he is wanting to find that *all* his beliefs are doubtable. Is this right?

KEVIN: I don't think so, because that would mean he doesn't expect to find any *undoubtable* beliefs. No, I wouldn't pay much attention to this. As we go on, you'll see that Descartes most definitely thinks *some* of his beliefs are undoubtable. This he makes clear in the Second Set of Replies, when he says,

Now some of these perceptions [of the intellect] are so transparently clear and at the same time so simple that we cannot ever think of them without believing them to be true. . . . For we cannot doubt them unless we think of them; but we cannot think of them without at the same time believing they are true, as was supposed. Hence we cannot doubt them without at the same time believing they are true; that is, we can never doubt them. (CSM II, p. 104)

At this point the belief 'What is done cannot be undone' is given as an example of an undoubtable belief. A little further on, some other examples are mentioned in passing e.g. 'The same thing cannot both be and not be at the same time', and 'Nothingness cannot be the efficient cause of anything' (Second Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 115).⁴

BEVAN: Why does he only mention these beliefs in *passing*? I thought that's what his project is all about -- looking for and emphasizing undoubtable beliefs.

KEVIN: Yes, well, he just seems to be rather selective about which undoubtable beliefs he gets excited about. As we go on, you'll see that he really only jumps up and down about undoubtable beliefs that concern his

4 That Descartes says beliefs such as 'The same thing cannot both be and not be at the same time' are undoubtable suggests he agrees with the point I made in footnote 3 on p. 18 above -- that beliefs which are doubtable only if normal rules of logic are violated are not really doubtable at all.

Cartesian mind and God. Though I guess that's only to be expected, since these two are his ultimate concerns, remember.⁵

So, in spite of what Descartes suggests, not *all* his beliefs are going to end up doubtable.⁶

2.4 Extension beliefs are doubtable: (1) deceptive sense experiences.

KEVIN (cont.): Right, let's see how Descartes sets about identifying his doubtable beliefs. First of all, he realizes he will save a lot of time if he goes straight to the beliefs from which all his others are derived. Examining all the derived ones individually would be very time-consuming, he feels, and besides, if he finds that any of the foundational beliefs are doubtable, then he can safely conclude that the beliefs derived from them are doubtable too:

. . . for the purposes of rejecting all my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt. And to do this I will not need to run through them all individually, which would be an endless task. Once the foundations of a building are undermined, anything built on them collapses of its own accord; so I will go straight for the basic principles on which all my former beliefs rested. (First Meditation, CSM II, p. 12)

Next Descartes isolates a particular foundational belief -- his belief in the reliability of his senses:

Whatever I have up till now accepted as most true I have acquired either from the senses or through the senses. (CSM II, p. 12)

Quickly, however, Descartes finds that his belief in the reliability of his senses is not quite as secure as he previously accepted. For occasionally in the past, when sensing extended things, his senses have deceived him, which shows that his senses are not so reliable after all:

. . . from time to time I have found that the senses deceive, and it

5 See Chapter 1, p. 1.

6 From now on, then, I am going to assume that Descartes's repeated claim that *all* his beliefs are doubtable means something less than what it literally suggests. (By the end of this chapter it will have become clear that I am assuming it means no more than that all his *beliefs about extended things* are doubtable.)

is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once. (CSM II, p. 12)

In the Sixth Meditation, while airing his fears about the reliability of his senses again, Descartes mentions some specific cases of sense-deception:

. . . I had many experiences which gradually undermined all the faith I had had in the senses. Sometimes towers which had looked round from a distance appeared square from close up; and enormous statues standing on their pediments did not seem large when observed from the ground. In these and countless other such cases, I found that the judgements of the external senses were mistaken. (CSM II, p. 53)⁷

Descartes feels these cases of sense-deception show that, at the very least, his belief in the reliability of his senses is *doubtable* -- he is quite able to imagine that it could be false.

Now I noted earlier, remember, that Descartes feels it is via his senses that he perceives *extended things*.⁸ So, in examining his foundational belief in the reliability of his senses, it seems his beliefs that *concern* extended things -- his 'extension' beliefs, I'll call them -- are being examined too. For these beliefs rely heavily on information provided by the senses, and if that information is *doubtable*, then so too are the resulting beliefs. Indeed, the Sixth Meditation examples of sense-deception suggest quite strongly that it

7 Austin (1962) argues that viewing items from different perspectives *shouldn't* lead one to say that the viewer is 'deceived' some of the time:

. . . one *can* play tricks with perspective, but in the ordinary case there is no question of illusion. That a coin should 'look elliptical' . . . from some points of view is exactly what we expect and what we normally find; indeed, we should be badly put out if we ever found this not to be so. (p. 26, Austin's emphasis)

Kenny (1968) echoes this sentiment:

. . . to deceive is to induce a false belief, and it is possible for a tower to *look* round, or a star to *look* tiny, without my believing that the tower *is* round or the star *is* tiny. (p. 25, Kenny's emphasis)

So cases of sense-deception are perhaps not as common as Descartes thinks. (No doubt there *are* cases though -- as Kenny (1968, p. 25) notes, cases of camouflage, and mirages, seem like plausible candidates.)

8 See Chapter 1, pp. 7-8.

is extension beliefs which have come under the spotlight.

BEVAN: Is Descartes saying that, through being *occasionally* deceived, *all* his extension beliefs are doubtable?

KEVIN: No, he doesn't quite get to that point. For when he thinks a little more about the times when his senses have deceived him, he decides that it's only when small and far-off extended things are involved that he has problems, and then only very occasionally. When close, sizeable extended things are involved, his senses seem to do a much better job. So he concludes that a wholesale mistrust of his senses is uncalled for here; he has found grounds for doubting his beliefs about *small and far-off* extended things, but his beliefs about *close, sizeable* extended things remain as secure as ever:

. . . from time to time I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once.

Yet although the senses occasionally deceive us with respect to objects which are very small or in the distance, there are many other beliefs about which doubt is quite impossible, even though they are derived from the senses -- for example, that I am here, sitting by the fire, wearing a winter dressing-gown, holding this piece of paper in my hands, and so on. Again, how could it be denied that these hands or this whole body are mine? (First Meditation, CSM II, pp. 12-13)

BEVAN: Tell me if I've got this straight. At this point Descartes is saying his senses are not particularly reliable with regard to small and far-off extended things, but they are with regard to close, sizeable extended things. So he is saying his beliefs about small and far-off extended things are doubtable, while his beliefs about close, sizeable extended things are *undoubtable*. Is that right?

KEVIN: Yes.

2.5 Extension beliefs are doubtable: (2) the deceptiveness of dreams.

KEVIN (cont.): A bit more examination, however, convinces Descartes that not even his beliefs about *close, sizeable* extended things are free from doubt. For he stops thinking about cases of sense-deception, and starts thinking about a more *unusual* form of deception -- namely, the deception he experiences when he mistakes dreams for reality:

How often, asleep at night, am I convinced of just such familiar events -- that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire -- when in fact I am lying undressed in bed! Yet at the moment my eyes are certainly wide awake when I look at this piece of paper; I shake my head and it is not asleep; as I stretch out and feel my hand I do so deliberately, and I know what I am doing. All this would not happen with such distinctness to someone asleep. Indeed! As if I did not remember other occasions when I have been tricked by exactly similar thoughts while asleep! As I think about this more carefully, I see plainly that there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep. The result is that I begin to feel dazed, and this very feeling only reinforces the notion that I may be asleep. (First Meditation, CSM II, p. 13)

I think Descartes is here isolating a second foundational belief he has -- the belief that he can always tell his waking experiences apart from his dreamt experiences. And, just as with the belief that his senses are reliable, Descartes is suddenly realizing that this second belief is not as secure as he previously thought. For occasionally in the past, when it seemed to him that he was awake, he was really asleep and dreaming, which shows that he is not so competent at distinguishing waking and dreamt experiences after all.

BEVAN: I see. And this idea that he may be asleep and dreaming, not awake and sensing, affects *all* his extension beliefs, not just the ones that involve small and far-off extended things. It invites a *wholesale* mistrust of his senses, not just a partial mistrust. For everything that can be sensed can also be dreamt. So, because Descartes realizes he does sometimes mistake dreamt experiences for waking ones, he can take any waking experience he seems to have and doubt its veracity -- he can wonder if he is in fact dreaming. Which means he can hang a doubt over each and every extension belief he has, for they all rely on one or some of these experiences-which-might-be-dreamt-experiences. He can say, then, that all his extension beliefs are doubtable.

KEVIN: Well again, he doesn't quite get to the point of saying that *all* his extension beliefs are doubtable. He does say that his beliefs about small and far-off extended things *and his beliefs about close, sizeable extended things* are doubtable. But he now introduces some *other* extension beliefs, and declares that they are not affected by the dreaming issue. These beliefs are very general ones, beliefs that don't *mention* particular (big or small or near or distant) extended things. They are beliefs such as 'There exist extended things of some description or other', 'There are shapes', 'There are sizes' etc.

BEVAN: What leads Descartes to say these beliefs aren't affected by the dreaming issue?

KEVIN: Well, Descartes begins by saying that dreamt experiences are very *parasitic* on waking experiences -- someone who dreams about extended things isn't having sensory contact with anything extended at the time, but they must have *previously* had sensory contact with extended things of some description or other, in order to arrive at the general notions of size, shape, colour, extension etc. that occur in their dreams. It's rather like someone who *paints* extended things, suggests Descartes -- a painter must have previously had sensory contact with extended things of some description or other, in order to arrive at the general notions of size, shape, colour, extension etc. that they include in their paintings.

Now, what this means, says Descartes, is that in spite of his inability to determine right now whether any particular experience he has is a waking or a dreamt one, the very basic elements that appear in his experiences -- size, shape, number and the like -- must be real things, not the fictitious creations of a dreamer. For even if an experience *is* a dreamt one, the basic elements in it must have been gleaned from real objects (just as the basic elements in a *painting* must have been gleaned from real objects). Which means, says Descartes, that his beliefs about these basic elements are not rendered doubtful by the dreaming issue:

Suppose then that I am dreaming, and that these particulars -- that my eyes are open, that I am moving my head and stretching out my hands -- are not true. Perhaps, indeed, I do not even have such hands or such a body at all. Nonetheless, it must surely be admitted that the visions which come in sleep are like paintings, which must have been fashioned in the likeness of things that are real, and hence that at least these general kinds of things -- eyes, head, hands and the body as a whole -- are things which are not imaginary but are real and exist. For even when painters try to create sirens and satyrs with the most extraordinary bodies, they cannot give them natures which are new in all respects; they simply jumble up the limbs of different animals. Or if perhaps they manage to think up something so new that nothing remotely similar has ever been seen before -- something which is therefore completely fictitious and unreal -- at least the colours used in the composition must be real. By similar reasoning, although these general kinds of things -- eyes, head, hands and so on -- could be imaginary, it must at least be admitted that certain other even simpler and more universal things are real. These are as it were the real colours from which we form all the images of things, whether true or false, that occur in our thought.

This class appears to include corporeal nature in general, and

its extension; the shape of extended things; the quantity, or size and number of these things; the place in which they may exist, the time through which they may endure, and so on. (First Meditation, CSM II, pp. 13-14)

So, Descartes feels that his 'universal' extension beliefs -- 'There exist extended things of some description or other', 'There are shapes', 'There are sizes' etc. -- aren't affected by the dreaming issue. For these beliefs require only that *some or other* of his experiences be waking ones, and thus far this has not been challenged. However, those extension beliefs that mention *specifics* -- say, 'This tower here is square', 'That statue up there on the pediment is small' etc. -- *are* affected by the dreaming issue. For those beliefs require that *particular* experiences be waking ones. And this is something Descartes no longer feels he can guarantee. For he now considers it possible that any particular experience he has is a dreamt one.⁹

BEVAN: So, instead of there being a split between beliefs about small and far-off extended things and beliefs about close, sizeable extended things -- like we had before -- now there's a split between 'specific' and 'universal'

9 There are at least two objections to the idea that the dreaming issue affects all of Descartes's 'specific' extension beliefs. The first -- which is put forward by Malcolm (1968) and Macdonald (1964) -- is that if Descartes *considers* it possible that any particular experience he has is a dreamt one, then it follows he is currently awake and having experiences that are *not* possibly dreamt ones. For considering possibilities, arguing, thinking etc. are all activities which can only be performed by someone who is wide awake, not by someone who is asleep and dreaming. If Descartes *was* asleep and dreaming, then he would (of course) be merely *dreaming* he was considering it possible that any particular experience he has is a dreamt one, and this wouldn't help to show one bit that 'specific' extension beliefs are doubtable. So in wanting the 'Dreaming Argument' to *be* an argument -- rather than simply a *dream* -- Descartes must ultimately deny its conclusion, since it makes no sense for him to *consider* it possible that his *current* experiences are dreamt ones.

The second objection -- which is put forward by Cook (1969, pp. 122-123) and Bouwsma (1965a) -- stems from the realization that someone who dreams is (typically) someone who: lies in a bed with their clothes off, the lights out, the curtains drawn, their head resting on a pillow, their body tossing and turning during the night, and so on. All of which shows that the concept of dreaming carries a lot of 'baggage' about extended things around with it -- that is, the concept of dreaming carries with it the concepts of beds and pillows and heads and bodies etc. So, when Descartes considers it possible that he might currently be dreaming, this actually amounts to him considering it possible that he might currently be: lying in a bed with his clothes off, the lights out, the curtains drawn, his head resting on a pillow, his body tossing and turning during the night, and so on. Which means that a whole host of his 'specific' extension beliefs are not affected by the dreaming issue at all. Beliefs such as 'There are beds', 'I have a head' and 'I have a body' remain as secure as ever.

So, the Dreaming Argument may not deliver all that Descartes says it does. Once again though, I'll ignore this issue, as it's not the one I want to have Descartes on about. And anyway, a little further on in the First Meditation the Dreaming Argument is dropped by Descartes, and replaced by *another* 'sceptical' argument.

extension beliefs. 'Specific' extension beliefs, says Descartes, are doubtable, because he cannot guarantee that the experiences they rely on are waking ones rather than dreamt ones. 'Universal' extension beliefs, on the other hand, are *undoubtable*, as they do not require such a guarantee. They just require that there *are* waking experiences. And this is something Descartes still feels sure of.

KEVIN: Yes.¹⁰

2.6 Extension beliefs are doubtable: (3) the possibility of a deceiving God.

KEVIN (cont.): Once again though, this difference in the level of

¹⁰ At this point of the First Meditation Descartes suggests that not only are 'universal' extension beliefs undoubtable, but mathematical beliefs are too:

. . . a reasonable conclusion [to draw] from this [Dreaming Argument] might be that physics, astronomy, medicine, and all other disciplines which depend on the study of composite things, are doubtful; while arithmetic, geometry and other subjects of this kind, which deal only with the simplest and most general things, regardless of whether they really exist in nature or not, contain something certain and indubitable. For whether I am awake or asleep, two and three added together are five, and a square has no more than four sides. It seems impossible that such transparent truths should incur any suspicion of being false. (CSM II, p. 14)

But a little further on, after considering a third type of deception, Descartes suggests that mathematical beliefs are actually *doubtable*:

. . . since I sometimes believe that others go astray in cases where they think they have the most perfect knowledge, may I not similarly go wrong every time I add two and three or count the sides of a square, or in some even simpler matter, if that is imaginable? (CSM II, p. 14)

I'm just going to ignore Descartes's treatment of mathematical beliefs, for two reasons. (1) Just as I don't think Descartes could carry out his project of identifying true beliefs if the rules of logic came unstuck (see footnote 3 on p. 18 above), neither do I think Descartes could carry out the project if mathematical beliefs came unstuck. To say merely that extension beliefs are doubtable doesn't seem to rule out further rational enquiry; but to say that fundamental beliefs in other areas of life are doubtable too seems to invite a sort of mental helplessness, a feeling of not knowing how to go on from this point. (2) It turns out anyway that Descartes no sooner suggests that mathematical beliefs are doubtable than he drops the issue: a little further on in the First Meditation, when the 'malicious demon' is given the job of falsifying all the beliefs Descartes said were affected by the third type of deception, only extension beliefs are discussed; mathematical beliefs are not mentioned at all (see Chapter 3, p. 43). So I presume Descartes's goal in the First Meditation is really only to say that *extension* beliefs are doubtable, not also that *other* beliefs are too. This is borne out by Descartes himself in the Sixth Meditation, when he says it is merely the "truth of the things perceived by the senses" (CSM II, p. 53) that are called into question by the sceptical arguments of the First Meditation.

doubtability among Descartes's extension beliefs doesn't last. For Descartes stops thinking about the deceptiveness of dreams, and starts thinking about *another* type of deception -- namely, the deception he would experience if there was a supremely powerful being -- God -- who created the world such that all of Descartes's 'specific' *and* 'universal' extension beliefs were false:

. . . firmly rooted in my mind is the long-standing opinion that there is an omnipotent God who made me the kind of creature that I am. How do I know that he has not brought it about that there is no earth, no sky, no extended thing, no shape, no size, no place, while at the same time ensuring that all these things appear to me to exist just as they do now? (First Meditation, CSM II, p. 14)

BEVAN: What a bizarre idea! No earth, no sky, no shape or size, and all the while Descartes has all the thoughts and experiences he normally has. Does this make any sense?

KEVIN: Well, it all seems to hang together when you talk about it pretty quickly, and throw in a few analogies for good measure: God and Descartes are sort of floating round in a sort of vacuum, and God is working on a sort of big Candid Camera operation which has Descartes as its victim. And as a result Descartes is completely oblivious to his real situation. He keeps having all these experiences about being on a little planet called Earth, where he hob-nobs it with the rich and famous over on the Continent, eating their chips and drinking their beer and consequently bumping into things which are variously shaped and variously sized and variously textured etc. But really, not an ounce of it is true. It's all simply part of God's latest movie project.

BEVAN: The Candid Camera analogy only goes so far towards capturing the spirit of the thing, doesn't it. For Descartes isn't imagining a situation where he is surrounded by actors, and temporary buildings, and tomato sauce instead of blood. He's imagining a situation where there aren't even any materials with which to *make* movies. And it's not just that there aren't any *actors* and *prefabs*, it's that there isn't even any cardboard with which to make cardboard *cut-outs* of people and buildings.

KEVIN: That's exactly right. I guess Descartes is thinking that God would be running a whole lot of unextended something-or-others past him, and he would be inferring from *them* that extended things exist.¹¹

¹¹ That I am reduced to using analogies, and phrases such as 'unextended something-or-others', to describe this type of deception may simply be due to my having a limited imagination. Quite possibly

BEVAN: Is this the same as having God *controlling* Descartes's thoughts? Would God be . . . well, *injecting* thoughts into Descartes?

KEVIN: It's hard to say, isn't it. The cash-value of 'God running unextended something-or-others past Descartes' may well be 'God injecting thoughts into Descartes'. However, *Descartes* seems to feel there is a difference between the two. For in the Second Meditation he briefly mentions the idea that God "puts into" him the thoughts he has (CSM II, p. 16), but then immediately decides that this is not entailed by anything he has said previously. So Descartes obviously feels that a divine Candid Camera operation is *different* to a divine injection of thoughts.¹²

BEVAN: I see. Well, I guess Descartes now feels that all his 'specific' and 'universal' extension beliefs are doubtable. Not only can he now take any *particular* sensory experience he apparently has and doubt its veracity -- by wondering if it's really just an illusion brought on by a divine Candid Camera operation -- but he can also question whether there are any sensory experiences at all! For divinely-inspired illusions don't seem to be parasitic on sensory experiences in the way that dreamt experiences are. Descartes could be the victim of a divine Candid Camera operation constantly, and never ever 'wake up' and have a sensory experience. All the notions of size, shape, extension and the like that Descartes has in his extension beliefs could be gleaned from the unextended something-or-others that God runs past him.¹³

though, it may be due to this type of deception being fundamentally incoherent, and unable to stand up to any amount of scrutiny. However, I'll ignore this, as (once again) it's not the issue I want to have Descartes on about.

12 The Second Meditation passage I refer to here is examined in more detail in Chapter 4, pp. 45-46.

13 Bouwsma (1965b) notes that illusions of this type -- cases of deception brought on by a divine Candid Camera operation -- would be such that no amount of seeing, touching, smelling, tasting or listening by Descartes would be "relevant to detecting the illusion" (p. 96). So they would be quite unlike run-of-the-mill illusions, where (say) a *second look* at some paper flowers can help to detect the illusion that they are real. In fact, argues Bouwsma, because of this it's not really correct to call these divine cases 'illusions' at all. For humans only apply the word 'illusion' in cases where a second (or third) look or touch etc. will reveal an anomaly of some sort (as in the flower example). Cases where further looking or touching etc. is not even *relevant* to detecting an anomaly do not qualify as 'illusions' at all. For really, says Bouwsma, there *is* no anomaly present in these cases. Instead, these cases are normal, unproblematic, everyday examples of veridical sense perception. (Items in a vase that are impervious to severe scrutinization are not paper, or plastic, or figments of the imagination -- they are *real flowers*.)

What this means, says Bouwsma, is that the 'Deceiving God Argument' does not accomplish what Descartes says it does. Since it does not outline a situation where Descartes's experiences are illusory, it

does not demonstrate that his extension beliefs are doubttable.

It is interesting to note that, at one point in the Second Set of Replies, Descartes seems to more or less *agree* with Bouwsma:

. . . as soon as we think that we correctly perceive something, we are spontaneously convinced that it is true. Now if this conviction is so firm that it is impossible for us ever to have any reason for doubting what we are convinced of, then there are no further questions for us to ask: we have everything that we could reasonably want. What is it to us that someone could make out that the perception whose truth we are so firmly convinced of may appear false to God or an angel, so that it is, absolutely speaking, false? Why should this alleged 'absolute falsity' bother us, since we neither believe in it nor have even the smallest suspicion of it? For the supposition we are making here is of a conviction so firm that it is quite incapable of being destroyed; and such a conviction is clearly the same as the most perfect certainty. (CSM II, p. 103)

However, in the First Meditation it is clear that Descartes adopts the opposite stance, and maintains that the Deceiving God Argument *does* open up all his extension beliefs to doubt. And I myself tend to agree with this First Meditation view. (I'll ignore footnote 11 on pp. 29-30 above for now.) Bouwsma, I think, misrepresents the Deceiving God Argument in his discussion. True, if Descartes *is* in a position to have second and third looks, touches etc. of (say) the items in a vase, but these activities are not relevant to detecting any anomaly, then it doesn't sound right to say there is an 'illusion' here nevertheless. But Bouwsma has forgotten that Descartes is *not* in this position. According to the Deceiving God Argument, remember, Descartes has no eyes, no ears, no hands etc. These items have been removed from the picture, along with flowers and vases and all other extended things. So Descartes cannot look or touch etc. the items in the vase even *once*, let alone two or three times. All of Descartes's experiences are *part* of the deception.

So in saying that looking and touching etc. are not "relevant" to detecting this type of illusion, Bouwsma has missed the point. It is not that looking and touching etc. aren't *relevant* any more, but rather that there *is* no looking and touching etc. any more. Now, I suppose there is a sense in which Bouwsma's point that it is unnatural to use the particular word 'illusion' to describe these cases still applies. But all this really means is that we need *another word to describe the mere appearance of flowers*. It doesn't mean that there are still *real flowers* present (which is what Bouwsma wants to maintain).

At this point it might be argued that, no matter *what* word we use, "talk of deception only *makes sense* against a background of general non-deception" (Austin (1962) p. 11, his emphasis). There can be bogus flowers only where there are real flowers, just as -- to use an example of Ryle's (1954, p. 94) -- there can be counterfeit coins only where there are authentic coins. My reply to this is that, although there needs to have been authentic coins at *some* stage for the notion of counterfeit ones to make any sense, there doesn't need to be any *now*. Perhaps all authentic coins have secretly been destroyed overnight, and now people are dealing purely in counterfeit coins. Nevertheless, it still *makes sense* to say all coins are counterfeit. Similarly, perhaps all real flowers and extended things have been destroyed, say, by a deceiving God, and now Descartes is dealing purely with bogus flowers and bogus extended things. Nevertheless, it still *makes sense* to say all flowers and extended things are bogus.

So, although the Deceiving God Argument may not outline a situation whereby all of Descartes's present *and past* experiences can be classified as deceptive, it does outline a situation whereby all his *present* ones can be. And that, I feel, is sufficient for Descartes to conclude that all his extension beliefs are doubttable.

So, Descartes feels that all of his 'specific' *and* 'universal' extension beliefs are doubtable. Correct?

KEVIN: Correct.

BEVAN: Now, does Descartes spring any *new* extension beliefs on us, the way he did with 'universal' extension beliefs?

KEVIN: No, 'specific' and 'universal' seem to account for *all* extension beliefs. For he says (at last),

I have no answer to these arguments, but am finally compelled to admit that there is not one of my former beliefs about which a doubt may not properly be raised; and this is not a flippant or ill-considered conclusion, but is based on powerful and well thought-out reasons. (First Meditation, CSM II, pp. 14-15)

BEVAN: Okay, that accounts for all extension beliefs. Descartes no longer feels they belong on his 'undoubtable' pile.

Now, does he come up with any *other* types of deception, types that would undermine his faith in yet *more* beliefs?

KEVIN: No. This is as far as he goes. Once he gets all his extension beliefs onto his 'doubtable' pile, he stops thinking about different types of deception, and moves on to other issues.¹⁴

2.7 Extension beliefs are not being seriously questioned.

BEVAN: In the last passage you quoted, Descartes says it is because of "powerful and well thought-out reasons" that he now feels all his extension beliefs are doubtable. This doesn't mean he is *seriously questioning* his extension beliefs, does it? He isn't supposing that he really *is* being deceived by God, is he?

¹⁴ There *are* other types of deception that Descartes could present here, for example the divine thought-injection type (see p. 30 above). (I guess the modern-day equivalent of this is the case of the mad scientist who plays around with a brain in a vat.) On the surface at least, this type of deception seems much more invasive than the Candid Camera type, since in the former God is fiddling around with the inside of Descartes's head, not just with the outside world. So presumably He can affect a lot more of Descartes's beliefs with the former.

That Descartes doesn't go beyond the 'Candid Camera' type of deception in the First Meditation again shows, I feel, that he is really only interested in saying *extension* beliefs are doubtable. (What's more, it allows him to continue to search for true beliefs. For if Descartes were to entertain the possibility that someone or something else is responsible for what he thinks, then by rights a feeling of insecurity should set in. For perhaps *he* isn't doing any searching at all; perhaps he's just a puppet on a string, a mouth-piece, mouthing ideas that are randomly being injected into him!)

KEVIN: No, not at all. If we jump to a passage a little further on in the First Meditation, we find Descartes saying that, in spite of his being able to imagine that God exists and is deceiving him, he nevertheless feels his extension beliefs are "highly probable":

I shall never get out of the habit of confidently assenting to these opinions, so long as I suppose them to be what in fact they are, namely highly probable opinions -- opinions which, despite the fact that they are in a sense doubtful, as has just been shown, it is still much more reasonable to believe than to deny. (CSM II, p. 15)

And in several other places Descartes makes much the same point. For example, in the Synopsis he says that "no sane person has ever *seriously* doubted" they are surrounded by real live extended things (CSM II, p. 11, my emphasis). And in the Third Meditation he says,

. . . since I have no cause to think that there is a deceiving God, and I do not yet even know for sure whether there is a God at all, any reason for doubt which depends simply on this supposition is a very slight and, so to speak, metaphysical one. (CSM II, p. 25)

So the possibility of a deceiving God isn't posing a real threat to extension beliefs. Descartes isn't suggesting these beliefs are now *dubious*, but merely that they are now *doubtable* (*able* to be doubted).

I take it, then, that Descartes's talk of "powerful and well thought-out reasons" means only that he has spent a fair amount of time carefully considering the matter at hand, and has come to the conclusion that extension beliefs are doubttable rather than *undoubtable* -- he can *imagine* that they could be false. But remember, this doesn't mean he is going to deny them (nor affirm them either).¹⁵ Rather, he is simply going to *reserve* judgement on them.

Okay, as I said before, as soon as Descartes gets all his extension beliefs onto his 'doubtable' pile, he moves on to some other issues. Let's have a look now at what those issues are.

¹⁵ See pp. 19-20 above.

3

THE FIRST MEDITATION: (b) PRETENDING EXTENSION BELIEFS ARE FALSE.

3.1 The temptation to assent to extension beliefs.

KEVIN: Here's a quick summary of what has happened so far in the First Meditation: After considering (1) cases of sense-deception, (2) the deceptiveness of dreams, and especially (3) the possibility of a deceiving God, Descartes has decided that all his extension beliefs are doubtable:

I have no answer to these arguments, but am finally compelled to admit that there is not one of my former beliefs about which a doubt may not properly be raised; and this is not a flippant or ill-considered conclusion, but is based on powerful and well thought-out reasons. So in future I must withhold my assent from these former beliefs just as carefully as I would from obvious falsehoods, if I want to discover any certainty. (First Meditation, CSM II, pp. 14-15)

BEVAN: And since Descartes is not *seriously* doubting his extension beliefs, but rather is merely regarding them as *doubtable* (*able* to be doubted), this 'withholding of assent' only amounts to reserving judgement on their truth value. It doesn't amount to saying they are false, or even probably false.

KEVIN: That's right. Descartes is currently affirming undoubtable beliefs only, but that doesn't mean he is denying doubtable ones. Rather, he is neither affirming *nor* denying doubtable beliefs.

However, Descartes soon finds that this plan to 'withhold his assent' from his extension beliefs is easier said than done. For up till now he has *always* assented to them, *always* thought they were undoubtable. Recall his initial attitude towards beliefs about close, sizeable extended things:

. . . there are many other beliefs *about which doubt is quite impossible*, even though they are derived from the senses -- for example, that I am here, sitting by the fire, wearing a winter dressing-gown, holding this piece of paper in my hands, and so on. (First Meditation, CSM II, pp. 12-13, my emphasis)

So it has become customary, habitual, for him to affirm these beliefs. And as the saying goes, old habits die hard:

. . . it is not enough merely to have noticed [that I should withhold my assent from extension beliefs]; I must make an effort to remember it. My habitual opinions keep coming back, and, despite my wishes, they capture my belief, which is as it were bound over to them as a result of long occupation and the law of custom. (First Meditation, CSM II, p. 15)

And it's not only the force of habit that is making it difficult to withhold his assent. For during the periods when he *does* keep it in mind that his extension beliefs are doubtful, he nevertheless feels they are *highly probable*. So *again* he is tempted to assent to them:

I shall never get out of the habit of confidently assenting to these opinions, so long as I suppose them to be what in fact they are, namely highly probable opinions -- opinions which, despite the fact that they are in a sense doubtful, as has just been shown, it is still much more reasonable to believe than to deny. (First Meditation, CSM II, p. 15)

BEVAN: I take it that this second temptation is the temptation to accept not just *undoubtability* as a guide to truth, but also *high probability* as well. Descartes, I presume, is not altogether against the idea that undoubtable beliefs *and* highly probable beliefs are true.

KEVIN: Yes. Although Descartes has decided that, for the duration of this project, he will only accept undoubtable beliefs as true, I think he realizes that this is a little unusual (as you yourself noted earlier).¹ I think he usually accepts *more* than just undoubtable beliefs as true; at the very least, highly probable ones usually get the nod as well.

BEVAN: Okay, tell me if I've got this straight. As far as guides to truth and falsity are concerned, Descartes is currently only accepting that undoubtability is a guide to truth. So the only beliefs he will currently judge to be true are undoubtable ones. All other beliefs he wants to *reserve* a judgement on. Now, because he has discovered that his extension beliefs are *doubtable*, he wants to reserve a judgement on their truth value. But there

¹ See Chapter 2, p. 18.

are two things tempting him to say they are *true*: (1) his habitual opinion that they are *undoubtable*, not *doubtable*; and (2) a nagging feeling that *highly probable* beliefs, *as well as* *undoubtable* ones, should be accepted as true. Is that right?

KEVIN: Yes.

3.2 Counter-balancing the temptation: pretending extension beliefs are false.

KEVIN (cont.): So, Descartes is a little worried that his project of finding beliefs which are true, and true because they are *undoubtable*, is starting to come off the tracks. For now he's got a whole bunch of *doubtable* beliefs which half the time he wants to say are *undoubtable*, and half the time he wants to say are *doubtable but true*.

However, he soon comes up with a plan to get things back in order. Instead of supposing his extension beliefs to be what in fact they are -- *doubtable*, yet *highly probable* and *worthy of assent* -- he will *pretend they are false*. This way, there will be no temptation to think them *undoubtable*, or *doubtable yet true*. So he'll be quite able to put these beliefs to one side, and get on with the business of finding beliefs which are true, and true because they are *undoubtable*:

I think it will be a good plan to turn my will in completely the opposite direction and deceive myself, by pretending for a time that these former opinions are utterly false and imaginary. I shall do this until the weight of preconceived opinion is counter-balanced and the distorting influence of habit no longer prevents my judgement from perceiving things correctly. (First Meditation, CSM II, p. 15)

I imagine he gets this idea from something he has mentioned a couple of times already:

Reason now leads me to think that I should hold back my assent from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable *just as carefully as I do from those which are patently false*. (First Meditation, CSM II, p. 12, my emphasis)

. . . in future I must withhold my assent from these former beliefs *just as carefully as I would from obvious falsehoods*, if I want to discover any certainty. (First Meditation, CSM II, p. 15, my emphasis)

Descartes seems to be implying in these passages that he always goes to great lengths to ensure that obvious falsehoods never get accepted as true. And if this is so, then *treating extension beliefs as obvious falsehoods* is going to help immensely with his current problem.

BEVAN: Let me see if I understand. Tell me if this is similar to what Descartes is doing: Suppose I catch a bus each day to work, and a whole year goes by without it ever arriving at my stop on time. Now, after the first six months of this I decide that my bus is always late -- I put it, let's say, on my 'always late' pile. But suppose one day in the second year it arrives on time (and I miss it, and get to work late, and get hell from the boss). Well, now I'm not sure *what* to think about my bus. So every day for the next few months I monitor closely its arrival time at my stop, and I find it's back to being regularly late. Really then, I should now decide that my bus is occasionally on time -- that is, I should put it on my 'occasionally on time' pile. But I got such a hard time from the boss that I never want to be late for work again. So, even though I really feel it's highly probable my bus will arrive late each day, I force myself to think otherwise, and I pretend it will always arrive *early* each day -- that is, I put it on my 'always early' pile.

KEVIN: Yes, that's something like what Descartes is doing. It's basically a matter of finding that something isn't quite as you thought it was, and then forcing yourself to think the complete opposite, so as not to forget your new discovery. Descartes used to put his extension beliefs on his 'undoubtable' pile, but now realizes they belong on his 'doubtable' pile. So he decides to temporarily place them all on his 'obviously false' pile, in an effort to ensure they don't slip back to their customary resting place.

3.3 The potential for error in pretending extension beliefs are false.

KEVIN (cont.): So, pretending extension beliefs are false is apparently going to sort out a few problems for Descartes. And what's more, he says, it's not going to generate any new ones:

In the meantime, I know that no danger or error will result from my plan, and that I cannot possibly go too far in my distrustful attitude. This is because the task in hand does not involve action but merely the acquisition of knowledge. (First Meditation, CSM II, p. 15)

It's obvious that the error or danger Descartes is thinking of here is the error of *performing imprudent acts*. Even though he's taking the attitude that his

extension beliefs are false, and hence that extended things don't exist, he realizes that it's not going to be wise for him to 'stand up' and put his 'hands' in the 'fire', or 'tie' the 'cord' of his 'dressing gown' around his 'neck', or 'eat' the 'wax' from his 'candle' etc. After all, he's only *pretending* extended things don't exist. He *really* thinks his extension beliefs are highly probable. So he's not going to *do* anything he wouldn't normally do.

BEVAN: Oh, so the pretence Descartes is embarking on is only to make him *think* differently. It isn't like my pretence with the bus, where the aim is to not only think but also *act* differently.

KEVIN: Yes. Descartes spells this out more clearly in the Fifth Set of Replies, when he says that it's only for the purpose of an *intellectual enquiry* that he is pretending extended things don't exist. He's not going to start *acting* on the pretence, and end up like those characters who *genuinely believe* extended things don't exist:

. . . we must note the distinction which I have insisted on in several passages, between the actions of life and the investigation of the truth. For when it is a question of organizing our life, it would, of course, be foolish not to trust the senses, and the sceptics who neglected human affairs to the point where friends had to stop them falling off precipices deserved to be laughed at. Hence I pointed out in one passage that no sane person ever seriously doubts such things. But when our enquiry concerns what can be known with complete certainty by the human intellect, it is quite unreasonable to refuse to reject these things in all seriousness as doubtful and even as false; the purpose here is to come to recognize that certain other things which cannot be rejected in this way are thereby more certain and in reality better known to us. (CSM II, p. 243)

So, Descartes is not going to be committing any errors which amount to acting imprudently. His intention is only to *meditate* on the pretence that his extension beliefs are false. He's not going to jump up and *act* on it.

This is all well and good. But it seems to me there's *another* sort of error that might occur here -- an error that occurs not in action but in *meditation*. Descartes says the task in hand is the "acquisition of knowledge". I assume this means the task in hand is the search for undoubtable beliefs. Well, isn't there a chance that treating his extension beliefs as false will muck up that search? Isn't there a chance that (say) he'll identify a belief as undoubtable while pretending his extension beliefs are false, but that really this identification is unwarranted, since it somehow *trades* on the pretence that his extension beliefs are false?

Let me give you an example of what I mean, using your bus analogy. Suppose you have been pretending for some months that your bus will always arrive early. And suppose one day your neighbour asks you how good the bus service is. Now, if you temporarily forget that you're only *pretending* your bus always arrives early, you might tell your neighbour that the bus service is excellent. But of course this is wrong -- the service is in fact lousy, since your bus usually arrives late.²

Now, isn't it possible that Descartes could make the same type of mistake, in relation to his extension beliefs?

BEVAN: Yes, I see your point. If Descartes forgets he is merely *pretending* his extension beliefs are false, and starts taking it for granted that they really *are* false, then he might end up believing that (say) passenger vehicles don't exist at all! But deciding what objects do and don't exist on the basis of a pretence isn't really a smart way to go about things, is it.

KEVIN: No, it isn't. So Descartes, I think, needs to be wary not just of imprudent acts, but also of *bad reasoning*.

3.4 The Real, Old, and Pretend Scenarios.

KEVIN (cont.): Let me try and present my point another way. First, here's a quick summary of what Descartes is doing. The discussion about sense-deception, dreams and a deceiving God has convinced him that his extension beliefs do not, as he previously thought, belong on his 'undoubtable' pile. But the discussion didn't go so far as to convince him that his extension beliefs belong on his 'obviously false' pile. No, he still feels they are highly probable, and ultimately worthy of assent. So he considers the correct pile to put his extension beliefs on is his 'doubtable' pile. However, he's worried that the force of habit may make him forget where these beliefs really belong, and delude him into thinking once again that they belong on the 'undoubtable' pile. So he decides to temporarily adopt the attitude that his extension beliefs belong on the 'obviously false' pile, which he feels will dispose him to put only *genuinely* undoubtable beliefs on the 'undoubtable' pile.

Now, in all this I think you'll find that Descartes vaguely gestures at

² This particular example, I realize, is not all that believable. But no matter -- all I'm wanting to suggest here is that sometimes when people indulge in pretence, they get a little confused about what's real and what's pretend. So people who want to pretend things should be on their guard.

three different attitudes he can adopt with regard to his extension beliefs. The first is the attitude he currently feels is the correct one: his extension beliefs belong on the 'doubtable' pile. They are not undoubtable, and they are not obviously false. They are doubtable. The discussion about sense-deception, dreams and a deceiving God has convinced him of this. Now, I'm going to call the situation where Descartes has this attitude the 'Real Scenario', since this attitude is the one Descartes *really* has at this point in the Meditations:

THE REAL SCENARIO

'Undoubtable' pile:

'Doubtable' pile: extension beliefs.

'Obviously false' pile:

The second attitude Descartes gestures at is the attitude he used to have, and the one he worries that the force of habit might delude him into having again: his extension beliefs belong on the '*undoubtable*' pile. I'm going to call the situation where Descartes has this attitude the 'Old Scenario', since this attitude is the one Descartes *used* to have, but now feels is mistaken:

THE OLD SCENARIO

'Undoubtable' pile: extension beliefs.

'Doubtable' pile:

'Obviously false' pile:

The third attitude Descartes gestures at is the attitude he decides to temporarily adopt: his extension beliefs belong on the 'obviously false' pile. This decision is intended to counter the force of habit, which can delude him into thinking extension beliefs belong on the 'undoubtable' pile. I'm going to call the situation where Descartes has this attitude the 'Pretend Scenario', since this attitude is the one Descartes *pretends* to have at this point in the Meditations:

THE PRETEND SCENARIO

'Undoubtable' pile:

'Doubtable' pile:

'Obviously false' pile: extension beliefs.

Now, I hope you can see that Descartes's attitude in the Pretend

Scenario is *just as mistaken* as his attitude in the Old Scenario. *Any* attitude different to the one he has in the Real Scenario is incorrect. Descartes, of course, is well aware of this -- he explicitly states that he's only "pretending"³ to have this attitude, and that he's only going to do so "for a time",⁴ and that really his extension beliefs are "highly probable"⁵ etc. So Descartes realizes what he's doing -- he's temporarily adopting an attitude that he considers to be mistaken. Now this in itself is not a problem. What is a problem is that Descartes might *forget* what he's doing, and in the process muck up his search for undoubtable beliefs. That is, he might consciously shift the discussion away from the Real Scenario to the Pretend Scenario, make some statements about life in the Pretend Scenario, but then forget that he *changed Scenarios*, and use those Pretend Scenario statements to draw some conclusions about life in the *Real* Scenario.

BEVAN: Let me see if I've understood you properly. Go back to my bus analogy again. You're saying I've in effect mentioned three scenarios there. In one I have my *real* attitude towards the bus -- it belongs on my 'occasionally on time' pile:

THE REAL BUS SCENARIO

'Always late' pile:

'Occasionally on time' pile: my bus.

'Always early' pile:

In another scenario I have my *old, mistaken* attitude towards the bus -- it belongs on my 'always late' pile:

THE OLD BUS SCENARIO

'Always late' pile: my bus.

'Occasionally on time' pile:

'Always early' pile:

And in a third scenario I have a *pretend* attitude towards the bus -- it belongs on my 'always early' pile:

3 CSM II, p. 15.

4 CSM II, p. 15.

5 CSM II, p. 15.

THE PRETEND BUS SCENARIO

'Always late' pile:

'Occasionally on time' pile:

'Always early' pile: my bus.

Now, you're saying that if I switch from the Real Bus Scenario to the Pretend Bus Scenario, it *will* help me avoid the Old Bus Scenario. But unfortunately, you say, now I may have another problem. Now I may inadvertently use Pretend Bus Scenario claims to deliver *Real* Bus Scenario claims, the result being that my conclusions probably won't be true of the real bus.

KEVIN: Yes, that's right.

BEVAN: So, anyone who switches from the Real to the Pretend Scenario runs the risk of blending the two together, and consequently having nothing accurate to say about the real world. This is the risk you feel Descartes opens himself up to.

KEVIN: Exactly. When the Real and Pretend Scenarios are not kept apart, things get distorted just as much as they do when the Real and *Old* Scenarios are not kept apart. But it was to avoid such distortions that Descartes introduced the Pretend Scenario in the first place! So Descartes, I feel, has to be very careful. If he doesn't keep his Real and Pretend Scenarios apart, he'll very likely distort his search for undoubtable beliefs.

BEVAN: This is really quite a weird move by Descartes, isn't it. I can sort of understand why someone would pretend their bus always comes early, if they were in danger of losing their job. But pretending that all extension beliefs are false, purely so as to stop thinking a certain way -- there must be less dramatic ways of going about it!

KEVIN: I quite agree. But Descartes just seems to have a real bee in his bonnet about the force of habit he is wanting to overcome, and he seems quite convinced that an elaborate pretence is what will do the job for him. And maybe it will. But he'd just better watch out that it doesn't end up doing him more harm than good.

3.5 The malicious demon.

KEVIN (cont.): Right, let's get back to the First Meditation. Descartes, apparently oblivious to the potential for bad reasoning that comes with a pretence, proceeds to switch from the Real Scenario to the Pretend Scenario.

Now, this means that all his extension beliefs suddenly become false. So, all of a sudden there are no extended things any more -- no sky, no earth, no flesh, nothing. These things just *appear* to exist:

I will suppose therefore that not God, who is supremely good and the source of truth, but rather some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams which he has devised to ensnare my judgement. I shall consider myself as not having hands or eyes, or flesh, or blood, or senses, but as falsely believing that I have all these things. (CSM II, p. 15)

BEVAN: Who's this 'malicious demon'? And what's this business about him taking the place of *God*?

KEVIN: Well, first of all, tell me what it was that finally got Descartes to shift all his extension beliefs off his 'undoubtable' pile and onto his 'doubtable' pile?

BEVAN: The possibility of a deceiving God. Descartes felt it was possible that an omnipotent deceiver existed and was making it appear extended things existed too, when really they didn't.

KEVIN: Exactly. And now, about a page further on in the First Meditation, Descartes is wanting to pretend that extension beliefs are obviously false, in order to counter the force of habit. Now, how might Descartes flesh this pretence out a little? How might he 'animate' the pretence that extended things *appear* to exist, but don't *really* exist? Well, he already *has* the perfect tool for that job, doesn't he -- an omnipotent deceiver. Such a creature has only been an imaginary one for Descartes up to now, but in a pretence all sorts of imaginary things can come to life. There's nothing stopping Descartes from making an omnipotent deceiver part of his Pretend Scenario.

Telling a story like this would really bring the pretence alive, which in turn would ensure that extension beliefs stay off his 'undoubtable' pile. That, I think, is why Descartes introduces a omnipotent deceiver into the pretence.

BEVAN: But why does he say this creature in is "not God, who is supremely good and the source of truth, but rather some malicious demon"?

KEVIN: I imagine he is wanting to avoid offending church authorities. Suggesting that God (with a capital 'g') -- if He exists -- might be a deceiver

probably wasn't a wise move in 17th Century France. Logically speaking too, it's a little unusual to combine God (with a capital 'g') and deception. Most people treat 'God is a deceiver' like they do 'Bachelors are married' -- as contradictory. In fact, Descartes picks up on this point himself in the Third Meditation, as you'll find out.⁶ But anyway, for now I think Descartes is just wanting to avoid having these issues detract from his animation of the Pretend Scenario. So he changes his terminology a little, by replacing 'deceiving God' with 'malicious demon'. But the basic idea is the same -- there exists an omnipotent deceiver, and this creature is making extended things appear to exist, when really they don't.

So, now Descartes has got his pretence up and running. Now he has switched to the Pretend Scenario, where he regards extension beliefs as obviously false. With this in mind, then, let's turn to the Second Meditation. If Descartes continues on in the same vein there, it will be very interesting to see whether he manages to say anything accurate about the *Real Scenario*.

⁶ See Chapter 6, pp. 80-81.

4

THE SECOND MEDITATION: (a) *COGITO ERGO SUM.*

4.1 'I exist' is undoubtable.

KEVIN: Descartes begins the Second Meditation by reminding us that he is pretending his extension beliefs are obviously false:

Anything which admits of the slightest doubt I will set aside just as if I had found it to be wholly false; and I will proceed in this way until I recognize something certain

I will suppose then, that everything I see is spurious. I will believe that my memory tells me lies, and that none of the things that it reports ever happened. I have no senses. Body, shape, extension, movement and place are chimeras. (CSM II, p. 16)

So, Descartes is firmly entrenched in the Pretend Scenario, where extended things don't exist.

Next, he asks himself what *does* exist in the Pretend Scenario:

Yet apart from everything I have just listed, how do I know that there is not something else which does not allow even the slightest occasion for doubt? (CSM II, p. 16)

And the first thing he thinks of is the malicious demon:

Is there not a God, or whatever I may call him, who puts into me the thoughts I am now having? (CSM II, p.16)

Now of course, in the Pretend Scenario there *is* a malicious demon. Descartes decided this when he set about *animating* the Pretend Scenario.¹ However, he doesn't actually come out and *say* this here. He seems to get side-tracked by what he has just suggested the malicious demon is *doing* -- namely, putting thoughts into him. (This is the passage concerned with a

¹ See Chapter 3, pp. 43-44.

'divine injection of thoughts' that I spoke of earlier.)² This idea, he decides, is a little too strong. Granted, the malicious demon is running unextended something-or-others past him, but that doesn't mean this creature is now *the author of his thoughts*. The malicious demon is only fiddling around with the outside world, not the inside of Descartes's head as well! So Descartes feels that *he* is still the author of his thoughts:

Is there not a God, or whatever I may call him, who puts into me the thoughts I am now having? But why do I think this, since I myself may perhaps be the author of these thoughts? (CSM II, p. 16)

And this starts Descartes wondering whether *he himself* exists in the Pretend Scenario:

. . . why do I think this, since I myself may perhaps be the author of these thoughts? In that case am not I, at least, something? (CSM II, p. 16)

Now, the idea that he himself exists in the Pretend Scenario looks a little screwy to Descartes. It does *seem* that he exists in the Pretend Scenario, having all these thoughts about the malicious demon, and about extended things only appearing to exist etc. But the import of these thoughts is precisely that there *aren't* any extended things in the Pretend Scenario. No bodies, no shapes, no movements, nothing. In particular, there aren't any heads or torsos or limbs. Not any! So there aren't things called '*Descartes's* head' and '*Descartes's* torso' and '*Descartes's* limbs' in the Pretend Scenario. That is, a *physical* Descartes, an *extended* Descartes, doesn't exist in the Pretend Scenario. So shouldn't he conclude *he* doesn't exist in the Pretend Scenario either? For isn't he just an extended thing?

But I have just said that I have no senses and no body. This is the sticking point: what follows from this? Am I not so bound up with a body and with senses that I cannot exist without them? But I have convinced myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds,³ no bodies. Does it now follow

2 See Chapter 2, p. 30.

3 The inclusion of Cartesian minds on this list is rather surprising, since Descartes has thus far only implicated *extended* things in his pretence, not *unextended* things as well. The best I can make of it is that Descartes does this here just for something to do. For in the Seventh Set of Replies he says,

that I too do not exist? (CSM II, p. 16)

Descartes answers this last question in the negative. In spite of there being no extended things in the Pretend Scenario, he cannot go past the fact that he exists.⁴ He's the thing doing all that thinking about the malicious demon, and about extended things not existing etc. Try as he might, Descartes just cannot imagine that he is not a real live creature. And so, he concludes, 'I exist' is an undoubtable, and hence true, belief:

No: if I convinced myself of something < or thought anything at all > then I certainly existed. But there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that case I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me; and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something. So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind. (CSM II, p. 17, Descartes's emphasis)

4.2 'I exist' is undoubtable because 'I think' is undoubtable.

BEVAN: I'm not sure if I fully comprehend Descartes's argument here. What *exactly* is it that convinces him the belief 'I exist' is undoubtable?

KEVIN: The deciding factor for Descartes seems to be the realization that he is *doing some thinking*. Remember what it was that got Descartes onto the topic of his own existence? It was his insistence that he is the author of his own thoughts. Then, once he had the notion of thoughts

At the outset, when I was *supposing* that I had not yet sufficiently perceived the nature of the mind, I included it in the list of doubtful things; but later on, when I realized that a thing that thinks cannot but exist, I used the term 'mind' to refer to this thinking thing, and said that the mind existed. (CSM II, p. 318, my emphasis)

Whatever the reason, Cartesian minds do not remain on any "list of doubtful things" for very long.

4 This sentence should really be continued, '. . . he cannot go past the fact that he exists *in the Pretend Scenario*'. But it turns out that Descartes wants it to be continued, '. . . he cannot go past the fact that he exists in the *Real Scenario*'. So it turns out that Descartes is here mixing Scenarios, which is the error I warned against in Section 3.4 (pp. 39-42).

That Descartes is committing this error here will be fully discussed in Sections 4.4 - 4.6 (pp. 50-54). But for now, just put this issue 'on hold'.

being *his*, he pretty quickly moved on to the notion that he *exists*.

Consider that last quote again. There Descartes more or less says it is *because* he convinces himself of things, and is deceived, and thinks he is something, or indeed thinks anything at all, that 'I exist' is true, and undoubtedly so. In fact, most people call this passage the *cogito ergo sum* passage (or the *cogito* passage for short), since *cogito ergo sum* is Latin for 'I think therefore I am', and that's basically what Descartes appears to be saying here.

Now, if Descartes feels he exists because he thinks, and he feels it is *undoubtable* that he exists, then presumably he feels that his thinking -- his performing various psychological tasks -- is *also* something undoubtable. This isn't explicitly stated here, but it's strongly hinted at elsewhere in the Second Meditation:

Is it not one and the same 'I' who is now doubting almost everything, who nonetheless understands some things, who affirms that this one thing ['I exist'] is true, denies everything else, desires to know more, is unwilling to be deceived, imagines many things even involuntarily, and is aware of many things which apparently come from the senses? Are not all these things *just as true as the fact that I exist*, even if I am asleep all the time, and even if he who created me is doing all he can to deceive me? The fact that it is I who am doubting and understanding and willing is *so evident that I see no way of making it any clearer*. But it is also the case that the 'I' who imagines is the same 'I'. For even if, as I have supposed, none of the objects of imagination are real, the power of imagination is something which *really exists* and is part of my thinking. Lastly, it is also the same 'I' who has sensory perceptions, or is aware of bodily things as it were through the senses. For example, I am now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. But I am asleep, so all this is false. Yet I certainly *seem* to see, to hear, and to be warmed. *This cannot be false . . .* (CSM II, p.19, my emphasis except for 'seem')

There's also a nice passage in the Fifth Set of Replies pertaining to this issue:

. . . I am not wholly certain of any of my actions, with the sole exception of thought (in using the word 'certain' I am referring to metaphysical certainty, which is the sole issue at this point). I may not, for example, make the inference 'I am walking, therefore I exist', except in so far as the awareness of walking is a thought. The inference is certain only if applied to this awareness, and not to the movement of the body which sometimes -- in the case of dreams -- is not occurring at all, despite the fact that I seem to myself to be walking. (CSM II, p. 244)

I take it that "metaphysical certainty", which Descartes mentions in this last quote, is the same as undoubtability. So it's fairly clear, isn't it, that Descartes feels his belief 'I think' is undoubtable. And it's this, I maintain, that leads him to say his belief 'I exist' is also undoubtable.

BEVAN: Well, now my question arises again, only this time one step back: what convinces Descartes that 'I *think*' is undoubtable?

KEVIN: I don't really know if Descartes ever confronts this issue. But I imagine it has something to do with his description of thoughts as "everything that is within us in such a way that we are immediately aware of it" (Second Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 113). It would seem pretty unusual for Descartes to question whether he was right about those things he is "immediately aware" of, wouldn't it. His thinking he exists, his awareness of walking etc., just don't seem to be things about which he could be *mistaken*. How could he be thinking (say) that he exists when, really, he wasn't thinking that at all?!

BEVAN: I suppose you're right. Suggesting that Descartes might not be thinking those things he is immediately aware of does sound rather contradictory, doesn't it.

4.3 'I think, therefore I exist': a formal inference.

KEVIN: So, Descartes feels that 'I exist' is an undoubtable belief, and this because 'I think' is an undoubtable belief. We can put this into the form of a deductive inference. The conclusion we know is 'I exist', and it is inferred from the premise 'I think'.⁵ If we add the further premise 'If I think, then I exist', we get the following valid argument, which I'll call the 'Cogito Argument':

- (1) If I think, then I exist.
- (2) I think.
-
- (C) I exist.⁶

⁵ Note that 'I think' can be replaced by any premise that mentions a particular thought of Descartes's e.g. 'I seem to see a light', 'I have an awareness of walking', 'I think I am something'. The passages I have quoted on p. 48 above show, I believe, that Descartes would accept any of these claims as undoubtable.

⁶ I realize this 'inference' interpretation of the *cogito* passage is not universally accepted. Many writers

BEVAN: You've told me that Descartes considers Premise (2) to be undoubtable, but what about Premise (1)?

KEVIN: Well, Descartes presents Premise (1) almost word for word at the beginning of the *cogito* passage ("if I convinced myself of something < or thought anything at all > then I certainly existed"), and it's pretty obvious that he is there giving it his seal of approval. What's more, he says elsewhere that the related claim 'Whatever thinks exists' is "so evident to the understanding that we cannot but believe it" (Appendix to the Fifth Set of Objections and Replies, CSM II, p. 271). So I think it's safe to say that Descartes feels Premise (1) belongs on his 'undoubtable' pile too.

BEVAN: So Descartes is actually coming up with *three* undoubtable beliefs here: 'If I think, then I exist'; 'I think'; and 'I exist'.

KEVIN: Well, yes. Though only 'I exist' is explicitly identified as such in the text. But remember that Descartes keeps fairly quiet about *lots* of beliefs that he feels are undoubtable e.g. 'The same thing cannot both be and not be at the same time'.⁷ So that he comes up with three here, but only mentions one, shouldn't really come as a surprise.

4.4 Mixing Scenarios in the Cogito Argument.

BEVAN: Descartes formulates the Cogito Argument while he's embracing the Pretend Scenario, doesn't he. He's at the time pretending he is in a world devoid of extended things.

KEVIN: That's right.

e.g. Hintikka (1965), feel the passage is more conducive to a 'performance' interpretation: 'I exist' is undoubtable for Descartes because the specific act of thinking 'I exist' is *self-verifying* -- the act demonstrates the truth of 'I exist'. (Conversely, the specific act of thinking 'I do not exist' is *self-defeating* -- the act demonstrates the falsity of 'I do not exist'.) Also, sometimes it appears Descartes *himself* denies that the passage contains an inference e.g. CSM II, p. 100 (though there are times when he appears to *affirm* that the passage contains an inference as well e.g. CSM II, p. 271).

Canvassing various interpretations of the *cogito* passage at length would, I feel, be of little use to my project. It seems to me that even if something like the 'performance' interpretation *does* more accurately reflect Descartes's own intuitions, this does not alter my view of his Cartesian mind proof. That is, I feel my criticism of Descartes's proof is applicable *regardless* of how the *cogito* passage is interpreted. So I will simply table my 'inference' interpretation -- which I trust is at least a *plausible* interpretation -- and move on.

⁷ See Chapter 2, p. 21.

BEVAN: So we could put a little reminder of this at the beginning of each claim in the argument, couldn't we:

(1*) (In the Pretend Scenario) If I think, then I exist.

(2*) (In the Pretend Scenario) I think.

(C*) (In the Pretend Scenario) I exist.

But what use is it to Descartes to discover that 'I exist' is undoubtable in the Pretend Scenario? I thought he was wanting to find out things that are undoubtable in the *Real* Scenario.

KEVIN: He still is. In fact, I think he feels he *has* discovered something that is undoubtable in the Real Scenario -- namely, he exists. The big song and dance Descartes makes about this belief is an indication, I reckon, that he has suddenly switched back to the Real Scenario, and is announcing that 'I exist' is undoubtable in *that* Scenario.

BEVAN: Oh. So you feel Descartes is really arguing like this:

(1*) (In the Pretend Scenario) If I think, then I exist.

(2*) (In the Pretend Scenario) I think.

(C) (In the *Real* Scenario) I exist.**

KEVIN: Yes.

BEVAN: Well then, isn't Descartes doing what you feared he might do: forgetting that he temporarily switched Scenarios, and using claims about the Pretend Scenario to deliver a conclusion about the Real Scenario?

KEVIN: Yes, I think he is. You can see the mixing of Scenarios quite clearly in the *cogito* passage. Just look at how Descartes describes his situation early on in the passage:

But there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that case I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me; and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something. (Second Meditation, CSM II, p. 17)

This omnipotent deceiver, remember, resides in the *Pretend* Scenario. But by the end of the passage, the excitement that Descartes displays suggests that

he feels he is finally on to one of those things he has been searching for -- an undoubtable belief in the *Real Scenario*:

. . . I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind. (CSM II, p. 17, Descartes's emphasis)

So, in my opinion, Descartes *is* forgetting that he temporarily switched Scenarios, and is using claims about the Pretend Scenario to deliver a conclusion about the Real Scenario.

4.5 Saving the Cogito Argument.

BEVAN: So Descartes has mucked up his search for undoubtable beliefs in the Real Scenario. He shouldn't say 'I exist' qualifies as one, should he.

KEVIN: Not with things as they are, no. But with a little re-working, I think he can show quite easily that 'I exist' *is* undoubtable in the Real Scenario. Look carefully at what it is about the Pretend Scenario that Descartes is using to generate his conclusion. It's not that there aren't any extended things -- which is what makes the Pretend Scenario different to the Real Scenario. It's that he *thinks*. And thinking is something he does in both the Pretend *and* Real Scenarios. In *both* Scenarios he has beliefs, and notions of shapes and movements, and thinks he is something etc. So Descartes could -- and should -- simply stay in the Real Scenario. There's no *need* for him to switch to the Pretend Scenario, and start talking about all the extended things that don't exist there. He should just stick to the Real Scenario, and tell it like it is: extended things are doubtable, but he's not.

Really then, Descartes should phrase the *cogito* passage, and the build-up to it, like this:

Anything which admits of the slightest doubt I will set aside as *doubtable*; and I will proceed in this way until I recognize something certain. . . . I admit, then, that everything I see is *doubtable*. . . . That I have senses is *doubtable*. Body, shape, extension, movement and place are *doubtable*. . . . Do not all these thoughts I'm having suggest that I, at least, am *undoubtable*? But I have just said that my senses and body are *doubtable*. This is the sticking point: what follows from this? Am I not so bound up

with a body and with senses that I cannot be *undoubtable* unless they are? But I realize that the sky, the earth, and all bodies are *doubtable*. Does it now follow that I too am *doubtable*? No: if I realized something < or thought anything at all > then I certainly existed. . . . It can never be brought about that I am *doubtable* so long as I think that I am something. So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.

You see, all the key pieces are still there. In the Real Scenario -- as in the Pretend Scenario -- Descartes *thinks*. Furthermore, in the Real Scenario -- as in the Pretend Scenario -- it is *undoubtable* that he thinks (for his thoughts are still such that he is "immediately aware" of them).⁸ And finally, in the Real Scenario -- as in the Pretend Scenario -- it is undoubtable that *if he thinks, then he exists* (for that notion is still "so evident to the understanding that we cannot but believe it").⁹ All of which means the premises of the Cogito Argument can simply be 'transplanted' out of the Pretend Scenario and into the Real one:

(1) (In the Real Scenario) If I think, then I exist.**

(2) (In the Real Scenario) I think.**

(C) (In the Real Scenario) I exist.**

Nothing about the Cogito Argument is peculiar to the Pretend Scenario. So we can fashion it into a perfectly good argument that deals only with the Real Scenario.

So, while having a Pretend Scenario is certainly distorting Descartes's reasoning, as I feared it might, in this case at least it is thankfully not ruining his search for undoubtable beliefs in the Real Scenario. Descartes *can* say 'I exist' is an undoubtable belief in the Real Scenario after all.

⁸ See p. 49 above.

⁹ See p. 50 above.

4.6. Descartes's indifference towards mixing Scenarios.

BEVAN: How could Descartes have made such a blunder in his reasoning? How could he have consented to a '(1*) (2*) therefore (C**)' argument?

KEVIN: I guess you have to put a lot of it down to the fact that the original Cogito Argument -- (1) (2) therefore (C) -- can survive in both the Real *and* Pretend Scenarios. It doesn't trade on any feature that's unique to either Scenario. I suppose that if you concentrate on the similarities between two things, it can sometimes get a little hard trying to keep them apart. But really, Descartes needs to be doing better than this, because of the invalid reasoning that results from mixing 'pretend' and 'real' statements. The problem is, he doesn't even seem to be *aware* of this danger, as we saw in the First Meditation. There he said, remember, that *acting imprudently* was the only danger that could result from adopting a pretend statement.¹⁰ But *reasoning invalidly* is most definitely another danger he faces, and we've just seen he's not above succumbing to it.

The fact that Descartes seems unaware of this danger doesn't bode well for the rest of the Meditations. The worry is that he may *never* pay much attention to when and where he uses 'pretend' and 'real' statements. Why should he bother to keep them apart, if he doesn't feel his reasoning will be distorted by mixing them together? That is, why should he avoid switching between the Pretend and Real Scenarios, if he feels these switches are completely innocent? The little 'reminders' you added onto the premises above are essential when switching between the two Scenarios, but Descartes, unfortunately, seems quite unaware of this. Just look at how, in the *cogito* passage, he goes on at length about the Pretend Scenario ("no sky, no earth" etc.), but then immediately holds up 'I exist' as something he can be certain of in the *Real* Scenario.

It seems that the distinction between what's pretend and what's real has become somewhat unimportant for Descartes. And this, of course, is distorting his reasoning. So, as I tell you about the next part of the Second Meditation, you'd best keep your ears open for more invalid arguments.

¹⁰ See Chapter 3, pp. 37-38.

5

THE SECOND MEDITATION: (b) *SUM RES COGITANS*.

5.1 The Meditation Two Cartesian Mind Argument.

BEVAN: At the end of the *cogito* passage, Descartes says,

. . . this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind. (Second Meditation, CSM II, p. 17, Descartes's emphasis)

Where does this talk of *minds* come from? I didn't realize Descartes had *got* to the point of proving he had a Cartesian mind. I thought he'd only proved that he *exists*.

KEVIN: Yes, this mind-talk is puzzling, isn't it. Tell me, what Scenario is Descartes in here?

BEVAN: Well, he's doing his song and dance about 'I exist' being undoubtable. So he's presently in the Real Scenario.

KEVIN: Yes. Now why would Descartes be using the term 'mind' here to describe himself in the Real Scenario?

BEVAN: I wonder if he's again using Pretend Scenario premises to draw a Real Scenario conclusion. We know he's already done it once here, so why not twice! Just prior to this point, he's been in the Pretend Scenario, where no extended things exist. And from his realizing that he *thinks* in the Pretend Scenario, he's concluded that he *exists*. Only he's switched back to the *Real* Scenario when he says this. So it would hardly be surprising if Descartes has put all these statements together -- 'No extended things exist', 'I exist', and 'I think' -- and concluded that, in the Real Scenario, he is a non-extended thinking substance -- a Cartesian mind.

KEVIN: Interesting. Your explanation of the use of 'mind' in the *cogito* passage is that, between the two Scenarios mentioned there, Descartes already has enough material to conclude he has a Cartesian mind. Though he doesn't actually present it, you feel Descartes has come up with something like the following argument:

- (1) No extended things exist.
- (2) I exist.
- (3) I think.

(C) I am a non-extended thinking substance -- a Cartesian mind.

BEVAN: Yes.

KEVIN: Let's call this the 'Meditation Two Cartesian Mind Argument'. Now, we of course have to remind ourselves what Scenario Descartes is in when he makes the claims that constitute this argument. With (1) and (3) we know he's in the Pretend Scenario,¹ and with (2) and (C) we know he's in the Real Scenario. So we should put your little 'reminders' in front of all the claims:

(1*) (In the Pretend Scenario) No extended things exist.

(2**) (In the *Real* Scenario) I exist.

(3*) (In the Pretend Scenario) I think.

(C**) (In the *Real* Scenario) I am a non-extended thinking substance -- a Cartesian mind.

And once we do this, we see the argument is quite invalid; not all the premises are about the same Scenario as the conclusion.

BEVAN: The *last* time Descartes used Pretend Scenario premises to draw a Real Scenario conclusion, you said he had nevertheless come up with a conclusion that *could* be accepted as undoubtable in the Real Scenario. Can the same be said this time?

KEVIN: No, I don't think so. For you just can't 'transplant' all the premises of this argument into the Real Scenario, the way you could with the Cogito Argument. Premise (3*) can be transplanted all right, because we found it to be undoubtable for Descartes in both the Pretend *and* Real Scenarios.² But Premise (1*) is *not* undoubtable for Descartes in the Real

1 Although I argued in Section 4.5 (pp. 52-53) that (3) can quite happily be a claim about the *Real* Scenario, it must be remembered that Descartes's treatment of it has (thus far) been in terms of the *Pretend* Scenario. This is why I say here that (3) is a claim made by Descartes about the Pretend (not the Real) Scenario.

2 See Section 4.5 (pp. 52-53).

Scenario. It's not even *probably true* for him there. In the Real Scenario, remember, Descartes thinks there probably *are* extended things.³ That's his *real* attitude towards extended things. So the claim 'No extended things exist' is very much a pretend assumption -- that is, it can only be used in the Pretend Scenario. It might even be worthwhile to *label* it the 'Pretend Assumption'. Anyway, it's clear that Descartes would have to reject the Meditation Two Cartesian Mind Argument as unsound, if all its premises were transplanted into the Real Scenario. For he would not regard the first premise as undoubtable (or even probable):

(1**) (In the Real Scenario) No extended things exist.

(2**) (In the Real Scenario) I exist.

(3**) (In the Real Scenario) I think.

(C**) (In the Real Scenario) I am a non-extended thinking substance -- a Cartesian mind.

BEVAN: So Descartes cannot justifiably say here that he has a Cartesian mind in the Real Scenario.

KEVIN: No.

5.2 'Thought-haver' ('thinking substance') v. 'Cartesian mind' ('non-extended thinking substance').

BEVAN: Well, it was a nice try by Descartes, but you were right all along. When you expose his hops between the Real and Pretend Scenarios, you destroy his argument for the existence of his Cartesian mind. That's a very nice thesis you've got there.

KEVIN: I wish it were that easy. I wish his argument *did* come as early as the Second Meditation. But it was *you*, remember, who put forward the Meditation Two Cartesian Mind Argument as Descartes's proof that he has a Cartesian mind. I don't think *Descartes* puts forward this argument at all!

BEVAN: How can that be? How else can you account for his use of the word 'mind' here?

KEVIN: Ah yes, it was the occurrence of the word 'mind' in that final statement of the *cogito* passage that got us onto this, wasn't it:

³ See Section 2.7 (pp. 32-33).

. . . this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind. (Second Meditation, CSM II, p. 17, Descartes's emphasis)

Now, your suggestion was that at this point Descartes already has enough material from the Pretend and Real Scenarios to conclude he has a Cartesian mind, and that what he's doing in the above quote is drawing exactly that conclusion. Now I quite agree that Descartes already has enough material. And this *does* make it tempting to say that Descartes did indeed formulate the Meditation Two Cartesian Mind Argument in his head, and furthermore that he slipped in the conclusion of this extra argument when he was stating the conclusion of the Cogito Argument. But unfortunately, the contention that Descartes is saying he has a Cartesian mind *as early as the Second Meditation* doesn't fit in well with a lot of other things he says. Which makes me wonder if this is really what he's saying here at all.

BEVAN: What *else* could he be saying?

KEVIN: Maybe Descartes doesn't mean by 'mind' here '*Cartesian mind*' ('non-extended thinking substance'). Maybe he just means something that's consistent with what he's found out about himself thus far. Maybe he just means 'thinking substance'.

BEVAN: What's the difference?

KEVIN: The difference is that more things will qualify as a 'thinking substance' than as a 'non-extended thinking substance'. Go back to your 'guard' example again.⁴ If you describe a guard as a 'protecting substance', well, a guard could be any one of the following: a legal guardian, a big brother, a bodyguard, a guard-dog, a gun, a guardian angel, God. But if you describe a guard as an '*non-extended* protecting substance', it can only be one of the last two things. What's happening is that, as the description of 'guard' gets more and more elaborate, less and less things qualify as it. And so it is with 'mind': if 'mind' means 'thinking substance', then a number of things could be a 'mind' -- a human body, a sophisticated computer, a Cartesian mind. But if 'mind' means '*non-extended* thinking substance', then only the last thing on that list qualifies.

BEVAN: I see. But didn't you say earlier that Descartes *does* mean

⁴ See Chapter 1, pp. 5-6.

'non-extended thinking substance' when he uses the term 'mind'?⁵

KEVIN: Well, by the time he gets to the *latter Meditations*, this is indeed the case. But as you will soon find out, in several of the *Replies* Descartes repeatedly says that *in the Second Meditation he doesn't yet know whether the thing he is calling his 'mind' is unextended or not*. Which means that when he says he has a 'mind' in the *Second Meditation*, his meaning is compatible with the thing so labeled being either unextended or *extended*. So his meaning cannot be 'non-extended thinking substance'. Something less elaborate is called for. 'Thinking substance' fits the bill perfectly.

BEVAN: This is getting pretty confusing. That Descartes has not one but two meanings for 'mind' complicates horribly the matter of trying to see exactly where he argues that he has a *Cartesian* mind.

KEVIN: I quite agree. But that's just the way it is, unfortunately. What I suggest we do is have a good look whenever Descartes uses the term 'mind', and see if we can work out which meaning he intends. If he intends 'non-extended thinking substance', let's make it clear by replacing 'mind' with 'Cartesian mind'. And if he intends 'thinking substance', let's make it clear by replacing 'mind' with, say, 'thought-haver'. That should uncomplicate matters somewhat.

BEVAN: Good idea. With 'Cartesian mind', we know exactly where we stand -- we're talking about a *non-extended* thinking substance. Whereas 'thought-haver' has a neutral flavour about it; it only implies the *tasks* that are performed by the thing labeled, not the *make-up*, the *nuts and bolts*, of the thing. A 'thought-haver' could turn out to be *either* unextended or extended.

KEVIN: Exactly. And notice that at the end of the *cogito* passage -- where Descartes first uses the word 'mind' to describe himself -- he is only *aware* of the tasks he performs. He has discovered that he undoubtedly thinks, and hence undoubtedly exists. But that's as far as he's got. So he had *better* only mean 'thinking substance' i.e. 'thought-haver', when he speaks of his 'mind' there.

In fact, Descartes himself admits as much in the *Seventh Set of Replies*. This is after Bourdin, the author of the *Seventh Set of Objections*, queries Descartes's use of the word 'mind' in the *cogito* passage (just as you have):

⁵ See Sections 1.2 - 1.4 (pp. 3-9), especially Section 1.3 (pp.6-8).

. . . may I ask why you refer to the *mind* (I mean in the phrase 'whenever it is conceived in my mind')? (CSM II, p. 322, Bourdin's emphasis)

Descartes's reply is,

. . . 'it is conceived in the mind' here means simply 'it is thought of'; and hence he [Bourdin] is incorrect in supposing that I am referring to the 'mind' *qua* part of a man. (CSM II, p. 323, Descartes's emphasis)

Descartes's point, it seems, is that this particular use of the word 'mind' is only meant to indicate that the thing referred to has thoughts, not also that it is or isn't extended. So Descartes's meaning here is 'thought-haver', not 'Cartesian mind'.

5.3 Introducing the *sum res cogitans* passage.

KEVIN (cont.): If you read on in the Second Meditation, you find *more* examples of Descartes talking about his 'mind', and meaning 'thought-haver' rather than 'Cartesian mind'. For immediately after the *cogito* passage, Descartes starts asking himself what type of thing the 'I' or 'mind' whose existence he has just established *is* -- what it does, what its nuts and bolts are, that kind of stuff. And his conclusion is: it's definitely a thinking substance, but it's *not* yet clear whether it's unextended or not.

Let's see how Descartes builds up to this conclusion. Immediately after finding that 'I exist' is undoubtable, he asks himself, 'What type of thing am I?':

. . . this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.

But I do not yet have a sufficient understanding of what this 'I' is, that now necessarily exists. So I must be on my guard against carelessly taking something else to be this 'I', and so making a mistake in the very item of knowledge that I maintain is the most certain and evident of all. I will therefore go back and meditate on what I originally believed myself to be, before I embarked on this present train of thought. I will then subtract anything capable of being weakened, even minimally, by the arguments now introduced, so that what is left at the end may be exactly and only what is certain and unshakeable. (Second Meditation, CSM II, p. 17, Descartes's emphasis)

BEVAN: This passage suggests that Descartes is not so much asking the question 'What type of thing am I?' as the question 'What type of thing am I for *certain?*', or 'What is undoubtable about my nature?'

KEVIN: You're quite right. He's ferreting around again for stuff he can be absolutely sure of i.e. more undoubtable beliefs. So he isn't going to bother with anything that is only possibly, or even *probably*, true about himself. Only beliefs that aren't open to even the slightest doubt will get an airing here.

Next, Descartes gives a run-down on his *previous* beliefs about himself. These are *Old Scenario* beliefs, beliefs he had back when his attitude was that extension beliefs were undoubtable:

What then did I formerly think I was? . . . Well, the first thought . . . was that I had a face, hands, arms and the whole mechanical structure of limbs which can be seen in a corpse, and which I called the body. The next thought was that I was nourished, that I moved about, and that I engaged in sense-perception and thinking; and these actions I attributed to the soul. But as to the nature of this soul, either I did not think about this or else I imagined it to be something tenuous, like a wind or fire or ether, which permeated my more solid parts. (CSM II, p. 17)

BEVAN: What Descartes meant by 'soul' in the Old Scenario wasn't 'Cartesian mind', was it. He was picturing some sort of *extended* thing -- not a *solid* extended thing, like a rock, but a *tenuous* extended thing, like a vapour.

KEVIN: Yes. And it's interesting to note that neither Gassendi nor Bourdin feel Descartes ever manages to show that the thinking part of him is *not* a 'vapour-soul' (as I'll call it).⁶ Descartes, of course, disagrees; he replies to Gassendi that he only ever mentioned this view of the soul, and a number of other "commonly held views", in order to "show in the appropriate place that they were false" (Fifth Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 243). It remains to be seen whether Descartes succeeds in this venture.

But let's get back to the Second Meditation, where Descartes has just listed his Old Scenario beliefs about himself. The next thing he does is switch over to the *Pretend* Scenario. And from that vantage point, he takes

⁶ See CSM II, pp. 181-185 for Gassendi's comments, and CSM II, pp. 327-329 for Bourdin's comments.

a second look at the beliefs he has just listed:

But what shall I now say that I am, when I am supposing that there is some supremely powerful and, if it is permissible to say so, malicious deceiver, who is deliberately trying to trick me in every way he can? Can I now assert that I possess even the most insignificant of all the attributes which I have just said belong to the nature of a body? I scrutinize them, think about them, go over them again, but nothing suggests itself; it is tiresome and pointless to go through the list once more. But what about the attributes I assigned to the soul? Nutrition or movement? Since now I do not have a body, these are mere fabrications. Sense-perception? This surely does not occur without a body, and besides, when asleep I have appeared to perceive through the senses many things which I afterwards realized I did not perceive through the senses at all. Thinking? At last I have discovered it -- thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist -- that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. For it could be that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally cease to exist. At present I am not admitting anything except what is necessarily true. I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks; that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason -- words whose meaning I have been ignorant of until now. But for all that I am a thing which is real and which truly exists. But what kind of thing? As I have just said -- a thinking thing. (CSM II, p. 18)

Now, I want you to look very closely at this passage. I'm going to call it the *sum res cogitans* passage. (*Sum res cogitans* is Latin for 'I am a thing that thinks', which is the conclusion Descartes draws here.) It's one of the most talked-about pieces of the Meditations, since it's often taken to be the place where Descartes tries to prove he has a Cartesian mind. He seems to spend all his time here denying he is an extended thing, and affirming he is a thinking thing. Which gives the impression he is saying he is undoubtedly a non-extended thinking substance -- a Cartesian mind. But I disagree. For while he is indeed denying he is an extended thing and affirming he is a thinking thing, I feel he is working in two different Scenarios here, and is *not* (for once) combining the claims he makes in each. So, as far as the Real Scenario is concerned, Descartes is only saying he is undoubtedly a thinking substance -- a thought-haver. He is *not* saying he is undoubtedly a *non-extended* thinking substance -- a Cartesian mind.

BEVAN: It seems to me you're suggesting that Descartes spends a considerable amount of time here saying something that, really, he's already said in the *cogito* passage -- namely, that 'I think' is undoubtable. Are you sure Descartes is taking us over that territory again? It certainly *looks* like

something extra is being said here.

KEVIN: Well, remember we noted that Descartes only concentrates on the belief '*I exist*' in the *cogito* passage.⁷ So really, he *doesn't* spend 'a considerable amount of time' examining the belief 'I think' there. We had to do some *digging* to uncover this belief. And what's more, the little Descartes *does* say about 'I think' in the *cogito* passage pertains to the Pretend Scenario, doesn't it. (Remember how the premises of the Cogito Argument come from the Pretend Scenario?)⁸ But here, in the *sum res cogitans* passage, I reckon Descartes's comments about his ability to think pertain to the *Real* Scenario.

So all in all, Descartes *isn't* going over old territory in the *sum res cogitans* passage. Something new *is* being said -- namely, the belief 'I think' is undoubtable, and undoubtable in the Real Scenario. As far as a reading of the *text* goes, this isn't something that has cropped up prior to this point at all.

5.4 An incorrect interpretation of the *sum res cogitans* passage.

BEVAN: What has led people to see in the *sum res cogitans* passage talk of a non-extended thinking substance -- a Cartesian mind -- when really they should only have seen talk of a thinking substance -- a thought-haver? What makes you so sure that they're all wrong and you're right?

KEVIN: You'll see I'm right if you go through the passage very slowly. Start with the first sentence:

But what shall I now say that I am, when I am supposing that there is some supremely powerful and, if it is permissible to say so, malicious deceiver, who is deliberately trying to trick me in every way he can? (CSM II, p. 18)

Now, the tone here clearly indicates that Descartes is placing himself under Pretend Scenario conditions -- the malicious demon is hard at work on the Candid Camera project, deceiving Descartes about extended things. So Descartes is starting out the passage in the Pretend Scenario. But now skip ahead to the end of the passage:

⁷ See Chapter 4, p. 50.

⁸ See Section 4.4 (pp. 50-52).

Thinking? At last I have discovered it -- thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist -- that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. For it could be that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally cease to exist. At present I am not admitting anything except what is necessarily true. I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks; that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason -- words whose meaning I have been ignorant of until now. But for all that I am a thing which is real and which truly exists. But what kind of thing? As I have just said -- a thinking thing. (CSM II, p. 18)

The big song and dance Descartes is making makes it fairly obvious he is finishing up the passage in the *Real Scenario*. That he uses phrases such as "certain", "truly exists", and "I am not admitting anything except what is necessarily true" is a tell-tale sign (as it was in the *cogito* passage).

Now, if Descartes is *connecting* the beginning and end of the passage, then probably he *is* arguing that he has a Cartesian mind here. For he will be mixing Pretend and Real Scenario statements again, and you've already noted that between these two Scenarios he has enough material to (invalidly) conclude he has a Cartesian mind.⁹ So the big question is: *does* Descartes connect the beginning and the end of the passage? Well, let's see what happens in the middle.

After the initial reminder that he is in the Pretend Scenario, Descartes notes that there he doesn't possess any of the features he previously attributed to extended things such as his body. For it is exactly those features that the malicious demon is deceiving him about:

Can I now assert that I possess even the most insignificant of all the attributes which I have just said belong to the nature of a body? I scrutinize them, think about them, go over them again, but nothing suggests itself; it is tiresome and pointless to go through the list once more. (CSM II, p. 18)

Neither does he possess three of the four features he previously attributed to a vapour-soul -- nutrition, movement and sense-perception. For he now feels that, quite apart from them still being the features of an *extended* thing, they are actually features of a *solid human body*. And solid human bodies, of course, don't exist in the Pretend Scenario:

⁹ See pp. 55-56 above.

But what about the attributes I assigned to the soul? Nutrition or movement? Since now I do not have a body, these are mere fabrications. Sense-perception? This surely does not occur without a body, and besides, when asleep I have appeared to perceive through the senses many things which I afterwards realized I did not perceive through the senses at all. (CSM II, p. 18)

Descartes doesn't *explicitly* say he has put nutrition, movement and sense-perception in the domain of solid human bodies here, but in the Fifth Set of Replies he reveals that this is his intention:

. . . I expressly referred nutrition to the body alone [shortly after referring it to a vapour-soul]; and as for movement and sensation, I refer them to the body for the most part, and attribute nothing belonging to them to the soul,¹⁰ apart from the element of thought alone. (CSM II, p. 243)

BEVAN: Why does Descartes change his tune about the first three features of vapour-souls, but not the fourth -- thinking?

KEVIN: Well, to start off with, I imagine he reconsiders the features of nutrition, movement and sense-perception, and decides that what they really involve are mouths (to eat and taste with) and digestive systems (to break down food with) and legs (to move around on) and eyes and ears and noses and hands (to sense things with) -- that is, what they really involve are organs that belong in the domain of solid human bodies. And since such bodies don't exist in the Pretend Scenario, he concludes that he doesn't possess these features in the Pretend Scenario. But as for thinking, well, it seems that Descartes suddenly comes to terms with the idea that, no matter *what* Scenario he's in, he cannot doubt that he (who exists) thinks:

Thinking? At last I have discovered it -- thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist -- that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. For it could be that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally cease to exist. (CSM II, p. 18)

BEVAN: Ah, now I think I see how people can interpret the *sum res cogitans* passage as the place where Descartes tries to prove he has a

¹⁰ By this stage, what Descartes means by "soul" is 'Cartesian mind', not 'vapour-soul'.

Cartesian mind. At the beginning of the passage, while in the Pretend Scenario, Descartes basically emphasizes the Pretend Assumption -- 'No extended things exist'. In the middle of the passage he goes on about the Pretend Assumption some more, and then realizes that he both exists and thinks in the Real Scenario. And at the end of the passage he emphasizes that 'I think' is undoubtable in the Real Scenario. Now, anyone who feels Descartes *combines* all these ideas will naturally feel the conclusion he draws is that he is a non-extended thinking substance -- a Cartesian mind.

KEVIN: Exactly. And to be fair to those people, the final section of the *sum res cogitans* passage -- which is where Descartes emphasizes that 'I think' is undoubtable in the Real Scenario -- is very amenable to this interpretation:

At present I am not admitting anything except what is necessarily true. I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks; that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason -- words whose meaning I have been ignorant of until now. But for all that I am a thing which is real and which truly exists. But what kind of thing? As I have just said -- a thinking thing. (CSM II, p. 18)

BEVAN: This interpretation of the *sum res cogitans* passage has Descartes arguing in a way that amounts to my Meditation Two Cartesian Mind Argument, doesn't it:

- (1) No extended things exist.
- (2) I exist.
- (3) I think.

- (C) I am a non-extended thinking substance -- a Cartesian mind.

KEVIN: Yes. And of course, this is still an invalid argument. When we put our Scenario reminders at the beginning of each claim in the argument, we find that they are still not all about the same Scenario:

- (1*) (In the Pretend Scenario) No extended things exist.
- (2**) (In the Real Scenario) I exist.
- (3**) (In the Real Scenario) I think.

- (C**) (In the Real Scenario) I am a non-extended thinking substance -- a Cartesian mind.

And if (1*) -- the Pretend Assumption -- is transplanted into the Real Scenario, in order to make the argument *valid*, Descartes will have to reject the argument as *unsound*, since he will not accept the first premise:

(1**) (In the Real Scenario) No extended things exist.

(2**) (In the Real Scenario) I exist.

(3**) (In the Real Scenario) I think.

(C**) (In the Real Scenario) I am a non-extended thinking substance -- a Cartesian mind.

BEVAN: I see. But how valid or sound this argument is, you say, is ultimately beside the point. For your view is that to interpret the *sum res cogitans* passage as containing this argument is incorrect.

KEVIN: Yes.

5.5 The correct interpretation of the *sum res cogitans* passage.

BEVAN: Why isn't the interpretation of the *sum res cogitans* passage that we've just gone through the correct one? It looks a very plausible interpretation to me.

KEVIN: Look again at the final section of the passage:

At present I am not admitting anything except what is necessarily true. I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks; that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason -- words whose meaning I have been ignorant of until now. But for all that I am a thing which is real and which truly exists. But what kind of thing? As I have just said -- a thinking thing. (CSM II, p. 18)

Now first of all, I fully agree that, whatever it is Descartes is saying here, he's saying something about the *Real* Scenario. The big song and dance that he's making indicates this. So I'm not disagreeing about which Scenario Descartes ends up in.

Secondly, I admit that when you read the sentence "I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks; that is, I am a mind" *immediately after* reading the beginning and middle sections of the *sum res cogitans* passage -- where Descartes goes on at length about the Pretend Assumption -- it's extremely hard not to interpret the sentence as saying:

- (i) (In the Real Scenario) I am a thing that thinks *and is not extended*; that is, I am a *Cartesian mind*.

Indeed, that's probably a very *sensible* interpretation to have, if you take the beginning, middle and end sections of the *sum res cogitans* passage to be working in unison towards a single conclusion.

What I disagree with, however, is the idea that at the end of the passage Descartes is actually making a judgement about whether he is or isn't extended. It seems to me that he is purposely *avoiding* that issue, and is merely highlighting the fact that he undoubtedly thinks. So, even though Descartes doesn't make it very clear (or at least, not *here* he doesn't), I feel the end of the passage is quite separate to the beginning of it. At the beginning of the passage the Pretend Assumption dominates. But by the end of the passage the Pretend Assumption has been dropped, and replaced by a Real Scenario claim about Descartes's ability to think. So I interpret the sentence "I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks; that is, I am a mind" as saying:

- (ii) (In the Real Scenario) I am a thing that thinks; that is, I am a *thought-haver*.

And this leaves it quite open whether the thing that thinks is unextended or not i.e. whether it is a Cartesian mind or not.

BEVAN: I see what you're getting at. But again, exactly what convinces you that (ii), not (i), is what Descartes really means?

KEVIN: Well, when he says "At present I am not admitting anything except what is necessarily true" in the final section of the passage, he seems to be indicating that he is only wanting to discuss his *undoubtable beliefs*. That's why the 'necessarily' is in there. And really, we already knew that, didn't we -- at this stage of the Second Meditation, remember, Descartes is only trying to answer the question 'What type of thing am I for *certain*?'¹¹

Now then, what Real Scenario beliefs about himself has Descartes identified as undoubtable?

BEVAN: That he exists, and that he thinks. The first was emphasized in the *cogito* passage, and the second in this *sum res cogitans* passage.

¹¹ See p. 61 above.

KEVIN: Yes. Now, being sure you *exist* doesn't reveal what type of thing you are, does it. It just tells you that you *are* a thing. So really, that he *thinks* is the sole revealing fact Descartes knows about himself for certain in the Real Scenario. So when he goes on to say "I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks", all Descartes means is that he is undoubtedly a thinking thing in the Real Scenario. And this is not at all to say he is undoubtedly a *non-extended* thinking thing in the Real Scenario. Rather, it is to say that the only thing he knows for sure about himself is that he thinks. It is only to speak of the *tasks* he performs, not also of his *make-up*, his *nuts and bolts*.

BEVAN: The word 'only' in "I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks" seems to be a little ambiguous. I admit that it can be interpreted in such a way that the sentence reads: '(In the Real Scenario) It's only undoubtable that I am a thing-that-thinks'. And when read this way, I agree that the issue of whether the thinking thing is or isn't extended doesn't come into play. But isn't it more natural to interpret the 'only' in such a way that the sentence reads: '(In the Real Scenario) It's undoubtable that I am only-a-thing-that-thinks'? And when read this way, the 'extension' issue (as I'll call it) *does* seem to feature -- it seems to be implied that the thinking thing is *not* extended.

KEVIN: That's the more natural interpretation when you take the beginning, middle and end sections of the *sum res cogitans* passage to be working towards a single conclusion, I agree. But immediately after the *sum res cogitans* passage Descartes implies rather strongly that that's *not* how the passage is working. For he says he *doesn't yet know* whether he -- the thing that thinks -- is unextended or not:

What else am I? I will use my imagination. I am not that structure of limbs which is called a human body. I am not even some thin vapour which permeates the limbs -- a wind, fire, air, breath, or whatever I depict in my imagination; for these are things which I have supposed to be nothing. Let this supposition stand; for all that I am still something. And yet may it not perhaps be the case that these very things which I am supposing to be nothing, because they are unknown to me, are in reality identical with the 'I' of which I am aware? *I do not know, and for the moment I shall not argue the point, since I can make judgements only about things which are known to me.* (Second Meditation, CSM II, p. 18, my emphasis)

BEVAN: This passage is contradictory, isn't it? In the first half of it

Descartes says he definitely *isn't* extended, while in the second half he says he's *not sure* about it. Maybe he's just got all confused!

KEVIN: The passage is only contradictory if you take Descartes to be in the *same Scenario throughout*. But it's obvious he's not. In the first half he explicitly acknowledges that he is *supposing* no extended things exist:

I am not that structure of limbs which is called a human body. I am not even some thin vapour which permeates the limbs -- a wind, fire, air, breath, or whatever I depict in my imagination; *for these are things which I have supposed to be nothing*. (CSM II, p. 18, my emphasis)

So you can take him as working under *Pretend Scenario* conditions there, and effectively saying '(In the Pretend Scenario) I'm definitely not extended'. But then, in the second half of the passage, he explicitly acknowledges that, *really*, he's not sure yet whether extended things exist or not:

And yet may it not perhaps be the case that these very things which I am supposing to be nothing, because they are unknown to me, are in reality identical with the 'I' of which I am aware? *I do not know . . .* (CSM II, p. 18, my emphasis)

So you can take him as working under *Real Scenario* conditions there, and effectively saying '(In the Real Scenario) I'm not sure yet whether I'm unextended'. Now, *these* two statements -- '(In the Pretend Scenario) I'm definitely not extended', and '(In the *Real Scenario*) I'm not sure yet whether I'm unextended' -- aren't contradictory, are they. Since they are statements about two different Scenarios, Scenarios which differ precisely on the issue of extended things, there's no common ground where they can contradict each other.

So then, given that Descartes is in the *Real Scenario* at the end of the *sum res cogitans* passage (the song and dance he makes reveals this), and given that a few lines later -- when he's *next* in the *Real Scenario* -- he effectively says '(In the *Real Scenario*) I'm not sure yet whether I'm unextended', which do you think is the correct interpretation of "I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks" -- '(In the *Real Scenario*) It's only undoubtable that I am a thing-that-thinks', or '(In the *Real Scenario*) It's undoubtable that I am only-a-thing-that-thinks'?

BEVAN: The former, I guess. But again, maybe Descartes is just contradicting himself. Maybe he really *does* mean '(In the *Real Scenario*) It's

undoubtable that I am only-a-thing-that-thinks', but unfortunately in the next passage about the Real Scenario he says something incompatible with this. And you can't say he's in different Scenarios this time!

KEVIN: No I can't. But I can give you a reply straight from Descartes this time. For Gassendi levels exactly the same charge at Descartes that you just have -- namely, that the end of the *sum res cogitans* passage and the very next passage are contradictory.¹² And Descartes explicitly denies he is contradicting himself, on the grounds that he does *not* mean he is unextended when he says "I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks":

I said in one place that while the soul is in doubt about the existence of all material things, it knows itself *praecise tantum* -- 'in the strict sense only' -- as an immaterial substance; and seven or eight lines further down I showed that by the words 'in the strict sense only' I do not at all mean an entire exclusion or negation, but only an abstraction from material things; for I said that in spite of this we are not sure that there is nothing corporeal in the soul, even though we do not recognize anything corporeal in it. Here my critic [Gassendi] is so unfair to me as to try to persuade the reader that when I used the phrase 'in the strict sense only' I meant to exclude the body, and that I thus contradicted myself afterwards when I said that I did not mean to exclude it. (Appendix to the Fifth Set of Objections and Replies, CSM II, p. 276)

It's quite clear from this that in *both* the *sum res cogitans* passage and the following one Descartes is leaving it open whether he -- the thing that thinks -- is unextended. So Descartes is *not* saying '(In the Real Scenario) It's undoubtable that I am only-a-thing-that-thinks' at the end of the *sum res cogitans* passage. For that implies the thinking thing *is* unextended. No, the correct interpretation must be '(In the Real Scenario) It's only undoubtable that I am a thing-that-thinks'.

I can quote you several *more* passages where Descartes says the *sum res cogitans* passage is not concerned with proving he is unextended, but merely with highlighting the certainty that he thinks. For instance, when the authors of the Second Set of Objections remind Descartes that it would be incorrect of him to use the Pretend Assumption to conclude he is in fact

¹² See CSM II, p. 276, footnote 1 for Gassendi's charge.

unextended,¹³ Descartes replies,

. . . you warn me to remember that my rejection of the images of bodies as delusive was not something I actually and really carried through, but was merely a fiction of the mind, enabling me to draw the conclusion that I was a thinking thing; and I should not suppose that it followed from this that I was in fact nothing more than a mind. But I already showed that I was quite well aware of this in the Second Meditation, where I said 'Yet may it not perhaps be the case that these very things which I am supposing to be nothing, because they are unknown to me, are in reality identical with the "I" of which I am aware? I do not know, and for the moment I shall not argue the point.' Here I wanted to give the reader an express warning that at that stage I was not yet asking whether the mind is distinct from the body, but was merely examining those of its properties of which I can have certain and evident knowledge. . . . *I admit that I did not yet know whether this thinking thing is identical with the body or with something different from the body . . .* (Second Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 93, my emphasis)

Here Descartes explicitly says that in the *sum res cogitans* passage he is not trying to give a complete account of himself, whom he is calling a 'mind', but is merely pointing out what is *undoubtable* about this 'mind'. And thus far all he can say is that this 'mind' thinks. He *cannot* yet say that it is unextended.

Another nice example occurs in the Fifth Set of Replies. When Gassendi again argues that Descartes assumes he is unextended in the *sum res cogitans* passage, even though he admits a few lines on that he *doesn't know* if he is unextended,¹⁴ Descartes replies,

. . . there is the passage where I said that it may perhaps be that that of which I do not yet have knowledge (namely my body) is not distinct from the 'I' of which I am aware (namely my mind); 'I do not know', I said, 'and I shall not argue the point.' Here you [Gassendi] object: 'If you do not know, if you are not arguing the point, why do you assume that you are none of these things?' But it is false that I assumed anything I did not know. *On the contrary, since I did not know whether the body was identical with the mind or not, I did not make any assumptions on this matter, but*

13 See CSM II, p. 87 for this reminder.

14 See CSM II, p. 185 for Gassendi's charge.

considered only the mind; it was only afterwards, in the Sixth Meditation, that I said there was a real distinction between the mind and the body, and here I did not assume it but demonstrated it. (CSM II, p. 247, my emphasis)

Here Descartes makes it clear that he does not discuss the 'extension' issue in the Second Meditation. He discusses "only the mind" there i.e. only the *thinking* aspect of himself.

A whole bunch of examples can be found in the Seventh Set of Replies. The first one I'll quote you is Descartes's response to a charge by Bourdin that, through 'renouncing' a belief in extended things and adopting the Pretend Assumption, Descartes concludes in the *sum res cogitans* passage that he is unextended.¹⁵ Descartes responds,

I never drew any conclusions from the fact that I had renounced a belief. Indeed, I expressly indicated that this was not the case when I said 'It may perhaps be the case that these things which I am supposing to be nothing, because they are unknown to me, are in reality identical with the "I" of which I am aware,' etc. (CSM II, p. 332)

Here Descartes is saying that the 'extension' issue is not decided in the *sum res cogitans* passage. So the passage does not conclude that he is unextended.

Here's another example from the Seventh Set of Replies. When Bourdin suggests that Descartes's conclusion in the *sum res cogitans* passage is that he has a Cartesian mind,¹⁶ Descartes retorts,

What I did [in the *sum res cogitans* passage] was to inquire whether there were in me any of the features which I had previously been in the habit of attributing to the soul as previously described by me. Now I did not find within me all the attributes which I had formerly referred to the soul; the only one I found was thought, and hence I did not say I was a soul but merely that I was a thinking thing. In applying the term 'mind' or 'intellect' or 'reason' to this thinking thing, *I did not intend to endow the term 'mind' with any more weighty significance than the phrase 'thinking thing'; I did not suppose I was making some further discovery . . .* On the contrary, I expressly went on to say that up till now I had been ignorant of the meaning of the words

15 See CSM II, p. 330 for Bourdin's charge.

16 See CSM II, p. 330 for Bourdin's charge.

'mind', 'intellect', etc. This puts it beyond doubt that by these words I understood exactly and only what is conveyed by the term 'thinking thing'. (CSM II, p. 332, my emphasis)

Here Descartes emphasizes that what he means by the term 'mind' in the *sum res cogitans* passage is only 'thinking thing' (i.e. 'thought-haver'). He has not yet made "some further discovery" such that what he means is 'non-extended thinking thing' (i.e. 'Cartesian mind').

The final example I'll quote you from the Seventh Set of Replies is Descartes's response to still more claims by Bourdin that Descartes has illegitimately concluded in the *sum res cogitans* passage that the thing labeled 'mind' there is unextended.¹⁷ Descartes's reply is,

. . . if he [Bourdin] pretends that I meant anything more by the term 'mind' than I did by the term 'thinking thing', then a firm denial on my part is in order. . . . I deny that I in any way presupposed that the mind is incorporeal; though later on, in the Sixth Meditation, I did in fact demonstrate as much. (CSM II, p. 333)

Again Descartes is saying the 'extension' issue is *not* debated in the *sum res cogitans* passage, and hence that the term 'mind' there only means 'thinking thing'.

There is also a passage in the Fourth Meditation that is quite relevant to this issue. In it Descartes does not explicitly discuss the *sum res cogitans* passage, but he makes it clear that my interpretation of the passage is the correct one:

. . . besides the knowledge that I exist, in so far as I am a thinking thing, an idea of corporeal nature comes into my mind; and I happen to be in doubt as to whether the thinking nature which is in me, or rather which I am, is distinct from this corporeal nature or identical with it. *I am making the further supposition that my intellect has not yet come upon any persuasive reason in favour of one alternative rather than the other.* This obviously implies that I am indifferent as to whether I should assert or deny either alternative, or indeed refrain from making any judgement on the matter. (CSM II, p. 41, my emphasis)

Descartes's point is that he has not yet come to a decision on the 'extension'

¹⁷ See CSM II, pp. 331-332 for Bourdin's claims.

issue. And if he's saying that in the Fourth Meditation, then for consistency's sake I don't think a decision on that issue should be read into the Second Meditation.

BEVAN: Hmm. So really then, the *sum res cogitans* passage isn't concerned with Cartesian minds at all. It's simply the place where Descartes realizes that 'I think' is undoubtable in the Real Scenario.

KEVIN: Basically, yes. By the time Descartes gets to the end of the *sum res cogitans* passage, he has only uncovered two undoubtable beliefs about himself in the Real Scenario: he exists; and he thinks. Whether he is unextended or not in the Real Scenario isn't an issue that has been addressed yet. So at this point the *correct* answer to the question '(In the Real Scenario) What type of thing am I for certain?' is '(In the Real Scenario) It's only certain that I am a thing-that-thinks'. And somehow or other, in spite of all his switching back and forth between the Real and Pretend Scenarios, Descartes does manage to give this answer.

BEVAN: So Descartes's uses of the terms 'mind' and 'thinking thing' here are only intended to indicate that the thing labeled thinks, not that it thinks-and-is-not-extended.

KEVIN: Yes. When Descartes describes himself as a 'mind' in the Second Meditation, he only means he is a thinking substance -- a thought-haver. He *doesn't* mean he is a *non-extended* thinking substance -- a Cartesian mind.

6

THE THIRD, FOURTH AND FIFTH MEDITATIONS: CLEAR AND DISTINCT IDEAS, AND GOD.

6.1 Descartes says his Cartesian mind proof occurs in the Sixth Meditation.

BEVAN: In a couple of those quotes where Descartes denies that the *sum res cogitans* passage is the place where he demonstrates he is unextended,¹ he says that the Sixth Meditation is the place where he demonstrates it. Is that where we should be looking for Descartes's proof that he has a Cartesian mind?

KEVIN: I think so. Descartes certainly points in that direction often enough. We already have two examples of this, as you say. Here are five more:

. . . all the things that we clearly and distinctly conceive of as different substances (as we do in the case of mind and body) are in fact substances which are really distinct one from the other; and this conclusion is drawn in the Sixth Meditation. (Synopsis, CSM II, p. 9)

. . . items [of knowledge] which are put forward first must be known entirely without the aid of what comes later; and the remaining items must be arranged in such a way that their demonstration depends solely on what has gone before. I did try to follow this order very carefully in my *Meditations*, and my adherence to it was the reason for my dealing with the distinction between the mind and the body only at the end, in the Sixth Meditation, rather than in the Second. (Second Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 110)

'It may be', [Hobbes] says, 'that the thing that thinks is something corporeal. The contrary is assumed [in the *sum res cogitans* passage], not proved.' But I certainly did not assume the contrary, nor did I use it as the 'basis' of my argument. I left it quite undecided until the Sixth Meditation, where it is proved. (Third

¹ See the passage from CSM II, p. 247 that I quoted in Chapter 5, pp. 72-73, and the passage from CSM II, p. 333 that I quoted in Chapter 5, p. 74.

Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 123)

. . . in the Sixth Meditation, where I dealt with the distinction between the mind and the body, I also proved at the same time that . . . (Fourth Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 160)

. . . everything I wrote on the subject of God and truth in the Third, Fourth and Fifth Meditations contributes to the conclusion that there is a real distinction between the mind and the body, which I finally established in the Sixth Meditation. (Fourth Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 159)

So I think the Sixth Meditation is definitely the place to look for Descartes's proof that he has a Cartesian mind.

Before we do that though, note what Descartes says in that last quote. He says that parts of the Third, Fourth and Fifth Meditations *contribute* to his proof. So I think I should get you acquainted with these matters first, before you meet them head-on in the Sixth Meditation proof.

6.2 Whatever is clearly and distinctly perceived is true.

KEVIN (cont.): Early on in the Third Meditation Descartes starts talking about *clear and distinct perceptions*. But he doesn't really say what these perceptions *are* (neither here nor anywhere else in the Meditations or Replies). So it's a little hard to understand what he means. From what I can gather though, to clearly and distinctly perceive something is to *recognize that it is undoubtable*. For he examines his most recent undoubtable belief -- '(In the Real Scenario) I am a thinking thing -- a thought-haver' -- and finds that it is *because* of his clear and distinct perception of it that he takes it to be undoubtable. And from this, together with his First Meditation assumption that undoubtable beliefs are true,² he goes on to conclude that *whatever he clearly and distinctly perceives is true*:

I am certain that I am a thinking thing. Do I not therefore also know what is required for my being certain about anything? In this first item of knowledge there is simply a clear and distinct perception of what I am asserting; this would not be enough to make me certain of the truth of the matter if it could ever turn out that something which I perceived with such clarity and

² See Section 2.1 (pp. 17-19).

distinctness was false. So I now seem to be able to lay it down as a general rule that whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true. (Third Meditation, CSM II, p. 24)

The form of the argument here, I think, is this:

- (1) (In the Real Scenario) Whatever is clearly and distinctly perceived is undoubtable.
- (2) (In the Real Scenario) Whatever is undoubtable is true.
-
- (C) (In the Real Scenario) Whatever is clearly and distinctly perceived is true.

You just drop out the 'middle man' between clear and distinct perceptions and truth -- namely, undoubtability -- and the conclusion falls into place.

BEVAN: I take it this is the point where Descartes reveals what his guide to undoubtability is.³ His guide is clear and distinct perception. So, in trying to locate definite truths, he looks for undoubtability, and in trying to locate undoubtability, he looks for clear and distinct perceptions. Is that how it goes?

KEVIN: Yes, I think so. Descartes suggests this not just here but in several other places as well. For example, in the Fourth Meditation he says that every clear and distinct perception is "undoubtedly true" (CSM II, p. 43). And in the Second Set of Replies he says,

There are . . . truths which are *perceived very clearly* by our intellect so long as we attend to the arguments on which our knowledge of them depends; and we are therefore *incapable of doubting them* during this time. (CSM II, p. 104, my emphasis)

These passages suggest that when Descartes uses undoubtability as a guide to true beliefs, his guide to *undoubtability* is clear and distinct perception. So, all along it has been his clear and distinct perceptions of '(In the Real Scenario) I exist' and '(In the Real Scenario) I am a thinking thing -- a thought-haver' that have revealed their undoubtability to him. And presumably, it will be clear and distinct perceptions that will reveal the

³ This issue was raised in Chapter 2, pp. 17-18.

undoubtability of any *further* beliefs.⁴

6.3 God exists, and is not a deceiver.

KEVIN (cont.): So things are looking up for Descartes in the Third Meditation. He has a brand new principle to help him in his search for truths: '(In the Real Scenario) Whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true'. But straight away he starts worrying about how secure this principle really is. In particular, he starts worrying about whether the possibility that there is a deceiving God -- which was discussed in the First Meditation, remember⁵ -- casts any doubt on it. For if there *is* a deceiving God, muses Descartes, then the principle may be *true but useless*: the deceiving God may have given Descartes such woeful powers of discernment that he goes around *saying* he clearly and distinctly perceives this and that, when really he *doesn't*:

. . . I now seem to be able to lay it down as a general rule that whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true.

Yet I previously accepted as wholly certain and evident many things which I afterwards realized were doubtful. . . . And whenever my preconceived belief in the supreme power of God comes to mind, I cannot but admit that it would be easy for him, if he so desired, to bring it about that I go wrong even in those matters which I think I see utterly clearly with my mind's eye. Yet when I turn to the things themselves which I think I perceive very clearly, I am so convinced by them . . . (Third Meditation, CSM II, pp. 24-25).

The worry here for Descartes is that, if he can't *correctly identify* clear and distinct perceptions, then there's not much use in knowing that whatever he perceives in this way is *true*.⁶

4 I do not think, then, that undoubtability for Descartes is a matter of 'falling outside the scope of the Deceiving God Argument', or anything like that. I hope I made it clear in Chapter 2 that that argument is designed simply to get extension beliefs off the 'undoubtable' pile; it is not intended to be used as the criterion for getting anything *onto* that pile. This second job, I feel sure, is reserved for clear and distinct perception.

5 See Section 2.6 (pp. 28-32).

6 The possibility of a deceiving God, I think, also creates *another* worry for Descartes -- namely, that his new principle might be *false*. For a deceiving God could give Descartes such an undiscerning intellect that he goes around saying clear and distinct perceptions are *true*, when in actual fact they're *not*. And if that's the case Descartes is back to square one, trying to figure out what would be a good indicator of true

So in an effort to overcome this worry, Descartes decides to examine whether God *does* exist, and if so, whether He is or could be a deceiver:

. . . as soon as the opportunity arises I must examine whether there is a God, and, if there is, whether he can be a deceiver. For if I do not know this, it seems that I can never be quite certain about anything else. (Third Meditation, CSM II, p. 25)⁷

And to cut a long story short, Descartes concludes the Third Meditation by saying yes, God does exist, and no, He is not a deceiver. Now, I don't really want to go into Descartes's argument here in any detail, since it's rather long and involved, and warrants a whole thesis itself. And besides, it's not the issue I want to have Descartes on about. So just accept for the sake of argument that Descartes's investigation into the existence and nature of God *does* deliver the following conclusion:

. . . I recognize that it would be impossible for me to exist with the kind of nature I have -- that is, having within me the idea of God -- were it not the case that God really existed. By 'God' I mean the very being the idea of whom is within me, that is, the possessor of all the perfections which I cannot grasp, but can somehow reach in my thought, who is subject to no defects whatsoever. It is clear from this that he cannot be a deceiver, since it is manifest by the natural light that all fraud and deception depend on some defect. (CSM II, p. 35)

BEVAN: And from this Descartes concludes that he does correctly identify clear and distinct perceptions after all. Am I right?

beliefs.

Descartes does not seem to be aware of this further worry. He only ever questions his ability to *identify* clear and distinct perceptions; their *truth value* he takes for granted. But presumably, if this second worry was ever pointed out to him, he would no doubt say it can be solved in exactly the same way the *first* worry is solved -- namely, by proving that God exists and is not a deceiver.

7 At this point the issue of whether Descartes falls into the 'Cartesian Circle' arises. In worrying about his ability to correctly identify clear and distinct perceptions, Descartes is in effect worrying about his ability to correctly identify true beliefs. He feels, however, that he can remove this worry by proving that an honest God exists. But the question now arises as to how he can be sure the beliefs which *make up* this proof are correctly identified as true. For the original worry hasn't been removed yet!

This is another issue I won't be going into, as it is (again) not the issue I want to have Descartes on about. So I will just accept for the sake of argument that somehow or other Descartes does *not* fall into this circle.

KEVIN: Yes. At the beginning of the Fourth Meditation he says that God, since He is no deceiver, has given him a wonderfully discerning intellect:

. . . I recognize that it is impossible that God should ever deceive me. For in every case of trickery or deception some imperfection is to be found; and although the ability to deceive appears to be an indication of cleverness or power, the will to deceive is undoubtedly evidence of malice or weakness, and so cannot apply to God.

Next, I know by experience that there is in me a faculty of judgement which, like everything else which is in me, I certainly received from God. And since God does not wish to deceive me, he surely did not give me the kind of faculty which would ever enable me to go wrong while using it correctly. (CSM II, pp. 37-38)

6.4 Free will: the source of Descartes's errors.

KEVIN: So, Descartes feels that the principle '(In the Real Scenario) Whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true' is one he can use to good effect. This because he feels that an honest God has given him a discerning intellect, one which is able to correctly identify clear and distinct perceptions.

But then Descartes notices a problem with this. If God gave him a discerning intellect, then he shouldn't make mistakes. But he does, and quite often:

. . . if everything that is in me comes from God, and he did not endow me with a faculty for making mistakes, it appears that I can never go wrong. . . . But when I turn back to myself, I know by experience that I am prone to countless errors. (Fourth Meditation, CSM II, p. 38)

I suppose the errors Descartes is thinking of are errors such as remembering things wrongly, and being deceived by his senses sometimes, and thinking extension beliefs are undoubtable when really they're not etc. etc. -- all cases of thinking a perception is clear and distinct when really it isn't.

BEVAN: So it looks like Descartes has a *woeful* intellect, not a *discerning* one. He regularly mis-identifies perceptions as clear and distinct. So maybe '(In the Real Scenario) Whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true' is a true but useless principle after all.

KEVIN: Yes, this is the worry Descartes now faces. However, after

thinking about it for a while, he decides that in spite of his errors he *does* have a discerning intellect, and hence that the principle '(In the Real Scenario) Whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true' *is* useful. For he decides that his errors stem not from his intellect, but rather from his *free will*. His free will, he says, oversteps the mark on occasions, and affirms and denies things that have not yet been clearly and distinctly perceived by his (discerning) intellect:

. . . I perceive that the power of willing which I received from God is not, when considered in itself, the cause of my mistakes; for it is both extremely ample and also perfect of its kind. Nor is my power of understanding to blame; for since my understanding comes from God, everything which I understand I undoubtedly understand correctly, and any error here is impossible. So what then is the source of my mistakes? It must be simply this: the scope of the will is wider than that of the intellect; but instead of restricting it within the same limits, I extend its use to matters which I do not understand. Since the will is indifferent in such cases, it easily turns aside from what is true and good, and this is the source of my error and sin. (Fourth Meditation, CSM II, pp. 40-41)

So long as he keeps his free will in check, and only brings it into play when a clear and distinct perception is present, he will always affirm true beliefs and deny false ones:

The cause of error must surely be the one I have explained; for if, whenever I have to make a judgement, I restrain my will so that it extends to what the intellect clearly and distinctly reveals, and no further, then it is quite impossible for me to go wrong. (Fourth Meditation, CSM II, p. 43)

BEVAN: I'm sorry, but I just don't see how introducing free will into the picture removes the doubt currently surrounding '(In the Real Scenario) Whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true'. For Descartes hasn't removed the *possibility* of his continuing to mis-identify perceptions as clear and distinct. He's simply changed the faculty that will be *responsible* for these errors. Instead of a *faulty intellect* being the culprit, an *impulsive free will* will be the culprit. But either way, the possibility of him continuing to commit these errors is still very real.

KEVIN: Yes, you're quite right. Descartes has given his *intellect* a clean bill of health, but that's not really going to solve the problem. He requires no less than that *all* his faculties get a clean bill of health; only *that* will

remove the possibility of him continuing to mis-identify perceptions as clear and distinct. Laying the blame for errors of judgement on an impulsive free will rather than an undiscerning intellect isn't going to stop the errors. It's not going to make the free will suddenly *unimpulsive*, is it!

Descartes, then, has really only shifted the problem *sideways*, not *removed* the problem. But again, let's just go easy on him, and accept for the sake of argument that he *has* removed the problem. This isn't the issue I want to have him on about.

6.5 Descartes's talk in the Third and Fourth Meditations of a Cartesian mind.

KEVIN: The Fifth Meditation is pretty much taken up with a second argument for God's existence, which again I won't go into. And then comes the Sixth Meditation, where Descartes argues that he has a Cartesian mind. But before we look at that argument, I just want to quickly read you a couple of passages that come *prior* to the Sixth Meditation, and which I find a little odd. The first is from the Third Meditation. In it Descartes touches on the 'extension' issue -- whether he is unextended or not. Now, we've already seen that in the Second Meditation Descartes explicitly says he doesn't yet know whether he's unextended.⁸ And we've also seen that he repeats this sentiment in the Fourth Meditation.⁹ So you would expect from this, wouldn't you, that any mention of the 'extension' issue in the Third Meditation would be equally non-committal. But look at what Descartes says when he is discussing the notion 'substance' in the Third Meditation:

. . . I think that a stone is a substance, or is a thing capable of existing independently, and I also think that I am a substance. Admittedly I conceive of myself as *a thing that thinks and is not extended*, whereas I conceive of the stone as a thing that is extended and does not think, so that the two conceptions differ enormously; but they seem to agree with respect to the classification 'substance'. (Third Meditation, CSM II, p. 30, my emphasis)

BEVAN: And nothing has happened since his discussion of the

8 See Chapter 5, pp. 69-70.

9 See Chapter 5, p. 74.

'extension' issue in the Second Meditation that would entitle Descartes, or make him *feel* entitled, to start saying he was unextended?

KEVIN: Not that I'm aware of, no. I think this is the very first mention of the issue since that Second Meditation passage.

BEVAN: Maybe Descartes is just *hypothesizing* here, just putting forward a *suggestion*. After all, he only says he *conceives* of himself as a non-extended thinking thing, not that he *clearly and distinctly perceives* it, or that it's *undoubtable*, or anything like that. So maybe he's in more of a 'subjective opinion' mode than an 'objective fact' mode.

KEVIN: Yes, I tend to agree. As far as I can see, it's either that or say he's making one of his 'free will mistakes' -- letting his free will pass judgement on something he isn't clearly and distinctly perceiving. We know he *isn't* clearly and distinctly perceiving that he is unextended, because of that passage which comes later on, near the end of the Fourth Meditation:

. . . besides the knowledge that I exist, in so far as I am a thinking thing, an idea of corporeal nature comes into my mind; and I happen to be in doubt as to whether the thinking nature which is in me, or rather which I am, is distinct from this corporeal nature or identical with it. I am making the further supposition that my intellect has not yet come upon any persuasive reason in favour of one alternative rather than the other. (CSM II, p. 41)

And Descartes's numerous pronouncements that he doesn't prove he has a Cartesian mind until the Sixth Meditation *also* suggest that a Third Meditation perception of himself as unextended is not a *clear and distinct* one.

BEVAN: So you feel there are two ways you can go with this Third Meditation passage. (1) You can read it as mere speculation by Descartes that he has a Cartesian mind, in which case that's all it is -- mere speculation. Or (2) you can read it as a statement by Descartes that he really *does* have a Cartesian mind, in which case it's a 'free will mistake'.

KEVIN: Yes.

Now, there's one other passage prior to the Sixth Meditation that jumps out at me. Right at the beginning of the Fourth Meditation Descartes says that his ideas of unextended things are far more vivid than his ideas of extended things. And as an example he presents his idea of "the human mind":

. . . the idea I have of the human mind, in so far as it is a thinking thing, *which is not extended in length, breadth or height and has no other bodily characteristics*, is much more distinct than the idea of any corporeal thing. (CSM II, p. 37, my emphasis)

BEVAN: This is unusual, isn't it. Descartes's mind-talk here is most definitely about *Cartesian* minds, not *thought-havers*.

KEVIN: Yes. Now again, this passage comes *before* the Fourth Meditation passage where Descartes admits he doesn't know whether he is unextended. And it also comes before the Sixth Meditation (of course), which is where Descartes repeatedly says his Cartesian mind is proved to exist. So if this earlier passage is intended to mean that *Descartes* has a Cartesian mind, I'm again inclined to say he is making a 'free will mistake'.

BEVAN: I wonder if Descartes is intending something else here. Perhaps he is merely explaining in full what a Cartesian mind is like, *without implying that such things exist*. People do this type of thing all the time. For example, I can explain to you what a guardian angel is like by telling you what a guardian angel does -- it provides protection -- and what its make-up is -- it's unextended -- but never once suggest that you or I *have* a guardian angel, or that any exist at all! I don't even have to *believe* that any exist -- I can be a *screaming atheist* and still describe a guardian angel for you.

KEVIN: That's a nice idea. What you're saying is that Descartes is quite at liberty to explain to us what a Cartesian mind is like, by telling us what a Cartesian mind does -- it thinks -- and what its make-up is -- it's unextended -- but not imply from this that he *has* a Cartesian mind, or that any exist at all.

BEVAN: Yes.

KEVIN: I guess this early Fourth Meditation passage is quite amenable to such an interpretation. For Descartes only seems to be saying he has an "idea" of a Cartesian mind:

. . . the *idea* I have of the human mind, in so far as it is a thinking thing, which is not extended in length, breadth or height and has no other bodily characteristics, is much more distinct than the idea of any corporeal thing. (Fourth Meditation, CSM II, p. 37, my emphasis)

When you emphasize the word 'idea' like this, the passage does seem to fall short of saying that Cartesian minds actually *exist*.

BEVAN: Yes. So, just as with the quirky Third Meditation passage, there are two ways we can go with this early Fourth Meditation passage. (1) We can read it as a statement by Descartes that he really does have a Cartesian mind, in which case it is a 'free will mistake'. Or (2) we can read it as a mere description of a Cartesian mind, a description that carries no existential implications.

KEVIN: Agreed.

Right, let's turn to the Sixth Meditation now, and examine this proof that is going to demonstrate once and for all that Descartes really does have a Cartesian mind.

7

THE SIXTH MEDITATION: DESCARTES'S PROOF THAT HE HAS A CARTESIAN MIND.

7.1 The proof.

KEVIN: Let's just do one more thing before we look at Descartes's proof that he has a Cartesian mind. Let's quickly take stock of what has happened so far. In the first five Meditations, what Real Scenario beliefs has Descartes been particularly interested in saying are true?

BEVAN: Let's see now. In the First Meditation he came out with:

(In the Real Scenario) I exist.

In the Second Meditation he came out with:

(In the Real Scenario) I am a thinking thing -- a thought-haver.

And in the Third, Fourth and Fifth Meditations he came out with:

(In the Real Scenario) God exists and is not a deceiver,

and,

(In the Real Scenario) Whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true.

KEVIN: Quite right. Now, keep these in mind as I read out the passage in the Sixth Meditation where Descartes supposedly proves he has a Cartesian mind:

. . . I know that everything which I clearly and distinctly understand is capable of being created by God so as to correspond exactly with my understanding of it. Hence the fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another is enough to make me certain that the two things are distinct, since they are capable of being separated, at least by God. The question of

what kind of power is required to bring about such a separation does not affect the judgement that the two things are distinct. Thus, simply by knowing that I exist and seeing at the same time that absolutely nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I can infer correctly that my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing. It is true that I may have . . . a body that is very closely joined to me. But nevertheless, on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it. (CSM II, p. 54)

Let's try and work out the structure of this proof. Then we can evaluate how good it is. To start off with, consider the first half of the passage on its own:

. . . I know that everything which I clearly and distinctly understand is capable of being created by God so as to correspond exactly with my understanding of it. Hence the fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another is enough to make me certain that the two things are distinct, since they are capable of being separated, at least by God. The question of what kind of power is required to bring about such a separation does not affect the judgement that the two things are distinct. (CSM II, p. 54)

I think what we've got here is the following line of reasoning:

- (1) **(In the Real Scenario) If I clearly and distinctly perceive X apart from Y , then X and Y can be created apart by God or some other power.**
 - (2) **(In the Real Scenario) If X and Y can be created apart by God or some other power, then X is distinct from Y .**
-
- (C1) **(In the Real Scenario) If I clearly and distinctly perceive X apart from Y , then X is distinct from Y .**

Now look at the last quarter of the passage, minus the last sentence:

. . . on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply

an extended, non-thinking thing. (CSM II, p. 54)

It seems to me that Descartes is trying to produce the antecedent of (C1), with 'I' and 'my body' replacing 'X' and 'Y'. He comes up with:

- (3) (In the Real Scenario) I clearly and distinctly perceive that I am a non-extended thinking thing -- a Cartesian mind,

and,

- (4) (In the Real Scenario) I clearly and distinctly perceive that my body is an non-thinking extended thing -- a Cartesian body.

And if we add the following unstated premise:

- (5) (In the Real Scenario) If I clearly and distinctly perceive that I am a non-extended thinking thing -- a Cartesian mind -- and that my body is an non-thinking extended thing -- a Cartesian body -- then I clearly and distinctly perceive that I am apart from my body,

then the three of them combine to give the desired statement -- the antecedent of (C1), with 'I' and 'my body' replacing 'X' and 'Y':

- (3) (In the Real Scenario) I clearly and distinctly perceive that I am a non-extended thinking thing -- a Cartesian mind.
 (4) (In the Real Scenario) I clearly and distinctly perceive that my body is an non-thinking extended thing -- a Cartesian body.
 (5) (In the Real Scenario) If I clearly and distinctly perceive that I am a non-extended thinking thing -- a Cartesian mind -- and that my body is an non-thinking extended thing -- a Cartesian body -- then I clearly and distinctly perceive that I am apart from my body.

- (C2) (In the Real Scenario) I clearly and distinctly perceive that I am apart from my body.

And the final sentence of the passage ("It is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it") rounds everything off, by

drawing the conclusion that follows from (C1) and (C2):

(C1) (In the Real Scenario) If I clearly and distinctly perceive X apart from Y, then X is distinct from Y.

(C2) (In the Real Scenario) I clearly and distinctly perceive that I am apart from my body.

(C3) (In the Real Scenario) I am distinct from my body.

When Descartes says he is 'distinct from his body' in (C3), what he means is that he -- who exists and thinks -- is not extended i.e. he means he is a non-extended thinking substance -- a Cartesian mind. So saying he is 'distinct from his body' is just another way of saying he has a Cartesian mind (as I pointed out earlier).¹ This is made clear in the third quarter of the passage, where Descartes prematurely states the conclusion of the proof in more familiar terms:

. . . simply by knowing that I exist and seeing at the same time that absolutely nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I can infer correctly that my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing. (CSM II, p. 54)

7.2 Back to the Second Meditation.

KEVIN (cont.): Now, I wouldn't be surprised if it turned out that this proof contains not just one fault, but a *number* of faults. However, I have no intention of trying to spot them all. I will have enough to dismiss the argument as unsound if I manage to find a *single* fault.

On with the job, then! There's a particular premise in the argument that I find very surprising. Can you see which one it is?

BEVAN: Yes, Premise (3):

(In the Real Scenario) I clearly and distinctly perceive that I am a non-extended thinking thing -- a Cartesian mind.

KEVIN: That's right. Descartes is here claiming to have a brand new

¹ See Chapter 1, p. 13.

clear and distinct perception, one that has up till now eluded him. Now remember, to clearly and distinctly perceive something is to *recognize that it is undoubtable*.² So Descartes is claiming that he now recognizes it is undoubtable that he thinks and is not extended. Now, I've no problem with the part of this premise that says it is undoubtable that Descartes *thinks* (and so is a *thought-haver*). This was demonstrated quite adequately in the Second Meditation. But where was it demonstrated that he cannot doubt he is *unextended* as well (and so is a *Cartesian mind*)? This 'extension' issue was last mentioned in that passage near the end of the Fourth Meditation, and Descartes stated there that he was still in *doubt* as to whether he is unextended.³ So what has suddenly persuaded Descartes in the Sixth Meditation to dismiss a doubt he had as recently as the Fourth Meditation?

BEVAN: Is it possible that you've *missed* something, say, somewhere in the Fifth or early in the Sixth Meditation? Are you *positive* Descartes doesn't explain somewhere there how he now cannot doubt that he is unextended (and so has a Cartesian mind)?

KEVIN: There's nothing I can see there that is of any relevance. And I'm quite convinced that nothing there is *intended* to be relevant either. For in several places Descartes more or less *says* that he doesn't discuss his clear and distinct perception of himself as a Cartesian mind there. The place to look, he suggests, is the Second Meditation:

If there are those who claim that they do not have distinct ideas of mind and body, I can only ask them to pay careful attention to the contents of the Second Meditation. (Second Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 95)

Now the mind can be perceived distinctly and completely (that is, sufficiently for it to be considered as a complete thing) without any of the forms or attributes by which we recognize that body is a substance, as I think I showed quite adequately in the Second Meditation. (Fourth Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 157)

. . . those who repeatedly ponder on what I wrote in the Second Meditation will be easily convinced that the mind is distinct from the body, and distinct not just by a fiction or abstraction of the intellect: it can be known as a distinct thing because it is in reality

² See Chapter 6, p. 78.

³ I have quoted the relevant passage in Chapter 5, p. 74, and again in Chapter 6, p. 84.

distinct. (Fourth Set of Replies, CSM II, pp. 160-161)

These three examples explicitly contain the words 'Second Meditation'. And there are plenty of other passages where Descartes is definitely *discussing* the Second Meditation -- particularly the *sum res cogitans* passage -- and he insists that he clearly and distinctly perceives that he has a Cartesian mind there. For example, in the Synopsis, while discussing the immortality of Cartesian minds, Descartes has this to say about the Second Meditation:

Now the first and most important prerequisite for knowledge of the immortality of the soul is for us to form a concept of the soul which is as clear as possible and is also quite distinct from every concept of body; *and this is just what has been done in this section.* (CSM II, p. 9, my emphasis)

Another example comes in the Appendix to the Fifth Set of Objections and Replies, where Descartes says that in the *sum res cogitans* passage he clearly and distinctly perceives his psyche to be unextended, and that this "determines the truth of things" (CSM II, p. 272). And in the Seventh Set of Replies he suggests that the clear and distinct perception he has of himself in the Second Meditation not only reveals that psychological properties *do* belong to him, but also that bodily properties "do *not* belong" to him (CSM II, p. 352, my emphasis).

In fact, when you stand back a little from the Seventh Set of Replies, it suddenly dawns on you that this is really all Descartes is doing 50% of the time -- saying that in the Second Meditation he clearly and distinctly perceives that he has a Cartesian mind. For Bourdin (in the Seventh Set of Objections) never discusses anything *beyond* the Second Meditation, and spends half his time arguing that the *sum res cogitans* passage doesn't prove Descartes has a Cartesian mind. And Descartes argues against every one of Bourdin's claims to that effect.

BEVAN: This is very weird! You told me earlier⁴ that Descartes says he really has *no idea* in the Second Meditation whether he has a Cartesian mind, because he's only looking at what he *does* -- which is think -- not also at what his *make-up* is. But now you're telling me that sometimes he says he has a *clear and distinct perception* in the Second Meditation that he has a Cartesian mind.

⁴ See Section 5.5 (pp. 67-75).

KEVIN: That's right! And I agree, it *is* weird. But that's the way it is, I'm afraid. We look at the Second Meditation, and we wonder if that's the place where Descartes tries to prove his Cartesian mind exists. But Descartes says, 'No, no, this Meditation falls way short of being about Cartesian minds. I'm only discussing *one-half* of Cartesian minds here. Wait till the Sixth Meditation; what you're looking for is there.' So we wait till the Sixth Meditation. And when we go over his proof we find there's a startling premise -- '(In the Real Scenario) I clearly and distinctly perceive that I am a non-extended thinking thing -- a Cartesian mind'. It's startling because up till now Descartes has been *denying* this premise. So we hunt around for something, *anything*, to support the premise. And lo and behold, we find Descartes saying, 'Go back to the Second Meditation. What you're looking for is there.' So we go back to the Second Meditation, only to be greeted by Descartes saying, 'No, no, this Meditation falls way short of being about Cartesian minds. I'm only discussing *one-half* of Cartesian minds here . . .'. So we end up shuttling back and forth between the Second and Sixth Meditations, but we don't find what we're looking for.

BEVAN: I see. This is the issue you've been building up to all along, isn't it. When Descartes argues in the Sixth Meditation that he has a Cartesian mind, he assumes that a key premise -- that he *clearly and distinctly perceives* he has a Cartesian mind -- was established in the Second Meditation. But really, this is not so, and Descartes (at times) is the first to admit it.

KEVIN: Yes, this is the point I've been wanting to make.

7.3 The discussion with Arnauld.

BEVAN: So, the problem is basically this: In the Second Meditation Descartes hits upon the clear and distinct perception that he thinks. But then, when rehearsing this perception in the Sixth Meditation, he transforms it into the perception that he thinks-and-is-not-extended. And such a transformation is not legitimate.

KEVIN: That's right. And it's interesting to note that Descartes himself seems to be well *aware* that a transformation like this is not legitimate. This he reveals in the Fourth Set of Replies, when discussing a point made by Arnauld.

Arnauld seems to share my view (or, at least, he has a sneaking suspicion of it) that between the Second and Sixth Meditations Descartes transforms the clear and distinct perception that he thinks into the

perception that he thinks-and-is-not-extended. And with the help of an analogy Arnauld attempts to point out to Descartes that this type of move -- transforming 'I clearly and distinctly perceive that X has property *p*' into 'I clearly and distinctly perceive that X has property *p* but not property *q*' -- is a bad one.⁵ He introduces into the discussion the idea of a triangle inscribed in a semi-circle. He then notes it is possible for a man to clearly and distinctly perceive that this triangle is right-angled, without recognizing that it also conforms to Pythagoras's Theorem -- that the square of its hypotenuse is equal to the combined squares of the other sides. Which means, he says, that the man can have a clear and distinct perception of the triangle simply as being right-angled, a perception which *does not address* the issue of whether the triangle conforms to Pythagoras's Theorem or not. But to perceive the triangle in this way, he continues, is not of course to perceive the triangle as *having* the property of being right-angled and *lacking* the property of conforming to Pythagoras's Theorem. That is, the clear and distinct perception that the triangle is *right-angled* does not amount to the clear and distinct perception that the triangle is *right-angled-and-does-not-conform-to-Pythagoras's-Theorem*. For the former perception is coherent, while the latter is not.

Having made his point with the analogy, Arnauld then switches back to the case at hand. Descartes, he says, can -- as he does in the Second Meditation -- have a clear and distinct perception of himself simply as a thinking thing, a perception which *does not address* the issue of whether he is extended or not. But to perceive himself in this way, stresses Arnauld, is not to perceive himself as *having* the property of thought and *lacking* the property of extension. That is, the clear and distinct perception that Descartes *thinks* does not amount to the clear and distinct perception that Descartes *thinks-and-is-not-extended*. And hence, Arnauld concludes, Descartes's claim in the Sixth Meditation that he clearly and distinctly perceives himself to be a *non-extended* thinking thing is unwarranted:

Now although the man in the [triangle] example clearly and

⁵ In what follows I paraphrase Arnauld's comments on pp. 141-142 of CSM II. In actual fact, I think Arnauld is suggesting *three* things to Descartes here (although he does not seem to be aware that they are separate issues): (1) that Descartes's clear and distinct perception that he thinks does not amount to a clear and distinct perception that he thinks-and-is-not-extended; (2) that clear and distinct perceptions are not reliable guides to truth anyway; and (3) that if clear and distinct perceptions *are* reliable guides to truth, then Descartes has no way of identifying them. I am discussing (1) only.

distinctly knows that the triangle is right-angled, he is wrong in thinking that the [Pythagorean] relationship between the squares on the sides does not belong to the nature of the triangle. Similarly, although I clearly and distinctly know my nature to be something that thinks, may I, too, not perhaps be wrong in thinking that nothing else belongs to my nature apart from the fact that I am a thinking thing? Perhaps the fact that I am an extended thing may also belong to my nature. (Fourth Set of Objections, CSM II, pp. 142-143)

BEVAN: I see. And what does Descartes have to say about all this?

KEVIN: Well, with regard to the triangle example, Descartes agrees completely with Arnauld. The triangle can very well be perceived to be right-angled, he says,

. . . even though we do not think of the ratio which obtains between the square on the hypotenuse and the squares on the other sides; but it is not intelligible that this ratio should be denied of the triangle. (Fourth Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 159)

BEVAN: Well then, Descartes does seem to be aware that transforming 'I clearly and distinctly perceive that X has property *p*' directly into 'I clearly and distinctly perceive that X has property *p* but not property *q*' is a mistake, doesn't he.

KEVIN: Yes indeed.

BEVAN: So how does Descartes respond to Arnauld's charge that he has made exactly this transformation with his idea of himself?

KEVIN: He flat-out denies that this is so! He more or less indicates that he has *never* gone from the clear and distinct perception that he *thinks* to the clear and distinct perception that he *thinks-and-is-not-extended*. Rather, he says he has had the latter perception right from the outset:

Now the mind can be perceived distinctly and completely (that is, sufficiently for it to be considered as a complete thing) without any of the forms or attributes by which we recognize that body is a substance, *as I think I showed quite adequately in the Second Meditation*. (Fourth Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 157, my emphasis)

BEVAN: Oh, I see. Descartes avoids Arnauld's charge by trotting out the incorrect evaluation he has of the Second Meditation. He says it's in *that Meditation* that the clear and distinct perception of himself as a thing that thinks-and-is-not-extended surfaces.

KEVIN: Yes. Descartes says to Arnauld that the only thing that prevented him from concluding in the Second Meditation that he really is a thing that thinks-and-is-not-extended was that he had yet to prove that God exists and is not a deceiver (which was needed in order to confirm that the clear and distinct perception he had of himself there, as a thing that thinks-and-is-not-extended, was a *true* perception). The problem was *not* that he didn't *have* a clear and distinct perception of himself as a thing that thinks-and-is-not-extended in the Second Meditation:

. . . had I not been looking for greater than ordinary certainty, I should have been content to have shown in the Second Meditation that the mind can be understood as a subsisting thing despite the fact that nothing belonging to the body is attributed to it, and that, conversely, the body can be understood as a subsisting thing despite the fact that nothing belonging to the mind is attributed to it. I should have added nothing more in order to demonstrate that there is a real distinction between the mind and the body, since we commonly judge that the order in which things are mutually related in our perception of them corresponds to the order in which they are related in actual reality. But one of the exaggerated doubts which I put forward in the First Meditation went so far as to make it impossible for me to be certain of this very point (namely whether things do in reality correspond to our perception of them), so long as I was supposing myself to be ignorant of the author of my being. And this is why everything I wrote on the subject of God and truth in the Third, Fourth and Fifth Meditations contributes to the conclusion that there is a real distinction between the mind and the body, which I finally established in the Sixth Meditation. (Fourth Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 159)

BEVAN: So Descartes is basically saying that the triangle case is quite disanalogous with the mind case. He says that transforming 'I clearly and distinctly perceive that the triangle is right-angled' into 'I clearly and distinctly perceive that the triangle is right-angled-and-does-not-conform-to-Pythagoras's-Theorem' is indeed wrong. But he insists that no such transformation ever takes *place* in the mind case.

KEVIN: Yes, that's right. As Descartes puts it,

It is true that the triangle is intelligible even though we do not think of the ratio which obtains between the square on the hypotenuse and the squares on the other sides; but it is not intelligible that this ratio should be denied of the triangle. In the case of the mind, by contrast, not only do we understand it to exist without the body, but, what is more, all the attributes which

belong to a body can be denied of it. (Fourth Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 159)

BEVAN: Well, this is all rather convenient for Descartes, isn't it -- having two different stories about the Second Meditation to alternate between.

KEVIN: Yes, it is . . . though I don't think he's actually *aware* that he's doing this. I think he genuinely believes he's sticking to the same story throughout. And you know, I can sort of see how he might come to have this belief. For whenever he looks at things from the vantage point of the Sixth Meditation he can think to himself, 'Well, I've got this premise in my Cartesian mind proof that I clearly and distinctly perceive that I am a non-extended thinking thing (Premise (3)). But I'm not making this up on the spot, am I. I got it down on paper way back in the Second Meditation. It's been firmly established for some time now.' And whenever he looks at things from the vantage point of the Second Meditation, he can think to himself, 'Well, really, all I clearly and distinctly perceive here in the *sum res cogitans* passage is that I think, not that I think-and-am-not-extended. But that's all right -- I'll leave the whole 'extension' issue till the Sixth Meditation.' And because the vantage points are far enough apart, these two conflicting stories just slide right by each other, like ships in the night.

BEVAN: So Descartes is in effect pointing in two directions, though he doesn't realize it. When he's in the Second Meditation he points to the Sixth Meditation, and when he's in the Sixth Meditation he points to the Second Meditation, and each time he says that the Meditation *he's pointing to* is where all the hard work gets done. And it's this, you feel, that leaves Descartes unable to see that he illegitimately transforms 'I clearly and distinctly perceive that I think' into 'I clearly and distinctly perceive that I think-and-am-not-extended'. For whenever cracks begin to appear, Descartes starts pointing madly at a far-off Meditation, saying everything is sorted out there. And in the end this convinces him that, really, there isn't an illegitimate transformation at all!

KEVIN: Yes, that's exactly it. But make no mistake, Descartes is wrong about this. There *is* a transformation in the Meditations, and it *is* illegitimate.

7.4 Conclusion.

BEVAN: One thing still puzzles me. Exactly what is it that makes

Descartes mistakenly believe sometimes that in the Second Meditation he clearly and distinctly perceives himself to be a *non-extended* thinking thing?

KEVIN: Well, I think that having two Scenarios, and two meanings for 'mind' etc., just makes Descartes's enquiry far too complicated and messy at times. Not that he would *admit* to this though. But if he's going to (1) pretend that no extended things exist, (2) realize that he thinks, and (3) call himself a 'mind' pretty much all in the same breath -- which is what he does in the *sum res cogitans* passage -- then it's hardly surprising that sometimes he sees more in the passage than is really there. Sure, sometimes he looks at it and thinks (correctly) that the perception he has of himself there is one of a *thought-haver*. But other times he looks at it and thinks (incorrectly) that the perception he has of himself there is one of a *Cartesian mind*.

I suppose Descartes could glean a general idea of what a Cartesian mind is *like* from the *sum res cogitans* passage. After all, the basic ingredients of a Cartesian mind are all mentioned there -- non-extension, thinking etc. So I guess Descartes is entitled to say that in the Second Meditation he clearly and distinctly perceives what a Cartesian mind is like, *just in case one exists*. But he most definitely isn't entitled to say that he clearly and distinctly perceives that one *does* exist, and in particular that *he* has one. That is, in the Second Meditation he hasn't got a clear and distinct perception of a Cartesian mind that has *existential implications*.⁶

The perception that *does* have existential implications for Descartes in the Second Meditation is the perception of a *thought-haver*. Descartes discovers there that he exists and thinks. But there's no deliberation as to whether this thinking substance, this thought-haver, is or isn't extended. So the bottom line is: the Second Meditation only contains the notion of an existing substance that *thinks*. And as Gassendi rightly points out, think-talk is only task-talk. It is *not* nuts-and-bolts-talk. Gassendi beautifully captures this insight, and the implications it has for Descartes, in the following passage:

As far as your idea of yourself is concerned, there is nothing to add to what I have already said, especially regarding the Second Meditation. For what emerges there is that, far from having a

⁶ I introduced the notion of an idea that has no existential implications earlier, in Chapter 6, pp. 85-86.

clear and distinct idea of yourself you have no idea of yourself at all. This is because although you recognize that you are thinking, you still do not know what kind of thing you, who are thinking, are. And since it is only this operation that you are aware of, the most important element is still hidden from you, namely the substance which performs this operation. This leads me to suggest that you may be compared to a blind man who, on feeling heat and being told that it comes from the sun, thinks he has a clear and distinct idea of the sun in that, if anyone asks him what the sun is, he can reply: 'It is a heating thing.' (Fifth Set of Objections, CSM II, pp. 234-235)

I am in complete agreement with Gassendi here. Descartes never gets beyond the level of task-talk. He never proves anything more than that he thinks. So he never proves that part of him is a substance which thinks *and is not extended*. That is, he never proves he has a Cartesian mind.

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