

## Introduction

In this essay, I will summarize the three skepticism arguments Descartes raises in his First Meditation and try to refute the second one.

In his effort to get rid of false or uncertain beliefs from foundation and find something undoubtable, Descartes raises three considerations to argue most of our beliefs fall short of certainty.

The first consideration is illusion. Descartes thinks most of the things held as true come from senses (page 1 line 28), and therefore he starts by questioning the reliability of senses. He thinks senses are not completely trustworthy, since things can appear differently than they really are. Nevertheless, Descartes points out that certain facts perceived by senses can not be illusions, such as the place he is at, the things he is doing, and that he has a body (page 1 line 37).

The second consideration is dream. Descartes further questions the beliefs that he thinks are perceived truthfully by stating that these things can also happen in a dream, and thus are not reliable. He points out that it's impossible to distinguish between being awake and being asleep, since we can have all kinds of experience in a dream with the same clarity as in reality (page 2 line 4). Therefore, it's possible that we are in a dream while in reality we don't even have a body. Nonetheless, Descartes argues that dreams are made up of elements in the reality, just like paintings, however fictitious they are, must have something real, for example, colors and shapes. Therefore, Descartes concludes that there is truth in "the simplest and most general things" such as geometry and arithmetic (page 2 line 30).

The third consideration is the evil demon. In this part, Descartes thinks everything can be doubted. He argues that it could be that nothing exists, including those he held as truth in the previous part, and God makes everything appear to him to exist (page 2 line 38). Descartes points out that, although God is supremely good, since he is occasionally deceived, he could also be deceived all the time (page 2 line 47). Even for atheists, Descartes thinks it's likely that I am so imperfect as to be deceived all the time. To strengthen this idea and avoid former false beliefs, Descartes comes up with an evil demon that is deceiving him all the time and contrives everything. Up to this point, he thinks he can't learn any truth and what he can do is to avoid accepting possible falsehoods.

The consideration that interests me most is the dream consideration. I think this consideration should not cause us to doubt our beliefs about the world, at least not in the way Descartes does in the article.

First, if we have not always been in a dream, then at least the most basic and fundamental facts should be trustworthy, for example, the fact that I have a body. These facts have always been regarded as truth and, since we have not always been in a dream, they must have been regarded as truth when we are awake, and therefore the reliability of these facts can not be undermined by the dream consideration. Also, contrary to what Descartes argues, I

think it is possible to distinguish between dream and reality, as the experience in a dream typically lack the vividness and the voluntariness that we have in reality.

Second, if we have always been in a dream, and this dream, as Descartes assumes, just like our ordinary dreams, is made out of elements in the reality, then this dream would be much less vivid and diverse, if not just dark and void at all. Just like the fact that a person who is born blind can not dream of a picture, or that a person who is born deaf can not imagine what sound is like, if we have always been in a dream and thus have never had visual, auditory or any sensual experience, we would not be able to contrive these things in this dream. Therefore, it's unlikely that we are never truly awake.

In conclusion, although the confusion of dream and reality might lead to some false knowledge, we should not be skeptical about the foundation of our beliefs about the world.

Word count: 688 (excluding citation and this line)