

Josiah Kim

Professor Abaci

PHIL 202

February 23, 2021

### Homework Assignment #1

Upon writing Meditation VI, Descartes is convinced that material things “can exist... since [he] clearly and distinctly perceive[s] them” because they are “the subject matter of pure mathematics” (pg. 109). Descartes seems to doubt God saying that there are some things that “may be incompatible with [him] perceiving it directly” (pg. 109). Then, he aims to distinguish “imagination” from “pure intellection,” or reason. Through the examples of the triangle and the chiliagon, he concludes that imagination requires more effort than intellect by saying that “[he] is in need of a peculiar sort of effort on the part of the mind in order to imagine” (pg. 109).

Even more importantly, Descartes says that we have the capabilities to understand things without being able to imagine them. For example, we can understand the concept of a chiliagon, but we cannot imagine what it looks like in distinction to a myriagon. These two things are simply just geometric concepts with an unfathomable number of sides.

What is the significance of imagination? Descartes makes the argument that imagination is actually not significant at all. Imagination is not required for his own essence - the essence of his mind (pg. 110). Alluding to the wax figure argument, things have essences that are unshakable and separate from their physical qualities. For Descartes, the essence of the mind, as a thinking thing, is reason. By taking away imagination, he claims that we are still able to reason; therefore, the essence of our mind is not dependent on imagination. Going further with exploring the essence of the mind, Descartes says that “the use of the senses antedated the use of reason”

(pg. 111). Since we know reason is the essence of the mind, he is saying that sensory perception is not a part of the mind's essence either. To conclude his argument about the essence of the mind, Descartes says that, as a thinking thing, "[he] is distinct from [his] body, and can exist without it" (pg. 113). Therefore, he is purely just intellection – just a thinking thing.

Descartes now has a foundation to prove his argument for the existence of material things. He has proved that imagination is something totally different from him as a thinking thing, so he aims to find the sources of imagination. The faculty of imagination, to Descartes, "clearly presupposes no act of understanding" (pg. 113). Understanding allows the mind to explore itself and the ideas within it. Imagination allows the mind to match ideas by sensory perception or to match ideas in itself.

Imagination and sensory perception are only ways for him to receive sensory things. Therefore, there must be something creating sensory things that we can receive. However, since these sensory things are not part of the essence of his mind and comes to the senses against his will, they cannot be found within him. This is what he called the "active faculty" (pg. 113).

Going even further, Descartes says that the ideas created by this faculty are from some other substance which he says are either by bodies, by God, or something with as much objective reality as it produces (114). Again, God is no deceiver so anything that would be given to him by God, would be directly from him. Therefore, he clearly and distinctly perceives that these ideas are coming from material things (bodies).

This argument is similar to his argument that God exists in the third meditation. Going back, he proves God's existence by saying that God is perfect and since he, himself, is imperfect, there is no way that he could have generated the idea of God himself. In other words, I clearly and distinctly perceive God. In the case of material things, God would be a deceiver if I clearly

and distinctly perceive material things and if they did not exist. The proofs are consistent with the clear and distinct principle, so they are good.