

# Rationalism and Empiricism

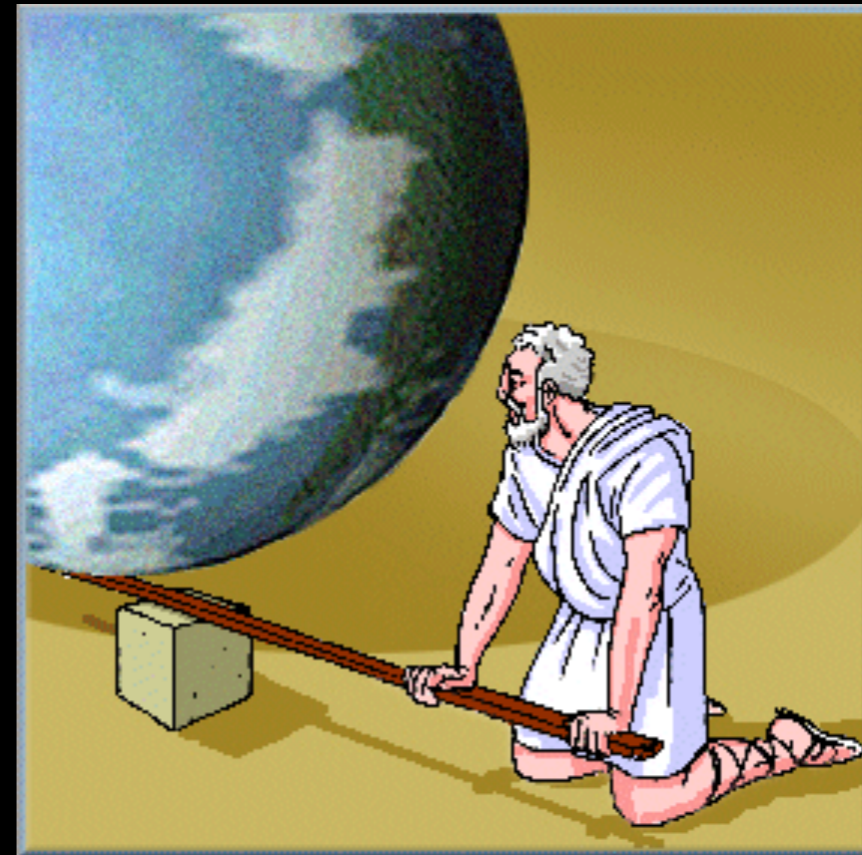
Cal State Fullerton  
Instructor: Jason Sheley

# Meditation 2

- What is Descartes' condition at the beginning of Meditation 2? How is he feeling about his investigation?

- I will accomplish this by putting aside everything that admits of the least doubt, **as if I had discovered it to be completely false.**
- I will stay on this course until I know something certain, or if nothing else, until I at least know for certain that nothing is certain.

- “Archimedes sought but one firm and immovable point in order to move the entire earth from one place to another. Just so, great things are also to be hoped for if I succeed in finding just one thing, however slight, that is certain and unshaken.



# Finding Principles

- Notice that our earlier "why" game gives us a clue here, and we can learn something important.
- In order to do philosophy, you need to know where to stop.
- But it is important to realize that the stopping place for the game can also be a starting point for something else.

- Descartes now pretends that everything he knows is false.
- On the next page, he arrives at this:
  - “Thus, after everything has been most carefully weighed, it must finally be established that this pronouncement, “I am, I exist” is necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive it in my mind.”
  - How does Descartes arrive at this point?

# The evil genius, again

“ $2+3 = 6$ ,  
muahaha”



$$2+3 = 6$$

$$2+3 = 5$$

# The evil genius, again

“You do not  
exist.  
Muahahaha”



“I do not  
exist.”

Exist?



- Sometimes, people interpret Descartes as giving the following argument:
  - P - I think
  - (Mystery premise: Anything that thinks, also must exist.)
  - C - Therefore, I exist
- What's wrong with this way of interpreting things? (hint: Sam the skeptic, again)

- Remember the title of Meditation 2:  
“Concerning the Nature of the Human Mind: That it is Better Known than the Body.”
- After establishing that his thinking exists, Descartes next turns his attention to what sort of thing his thinking might be.

- “But what am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, and that also imagines and senses.”

- The next step is to show that the mind is better known than the body.
- Remember, according to Descartes, we normally think that bodies are known best of all. But Descartes thinks this is a mistake.
- He performs a kind of thought experiment in order to show this. Consider the piece of wax...



First, Descartes asks us to consider how the wax appears.  
What qualities does it have?

- Let's try this experiment for ourselves...

# Step 2

- Descartes brings the wax near the fire.
- What happens now?

- What does Descartes think the experiment shows?



- Step 3:
  - Ask, is it the same wax as before?
  - If yes, how do we come to know this?

What is the outcome of  
the wax experiment?

Hint: two outcomes...



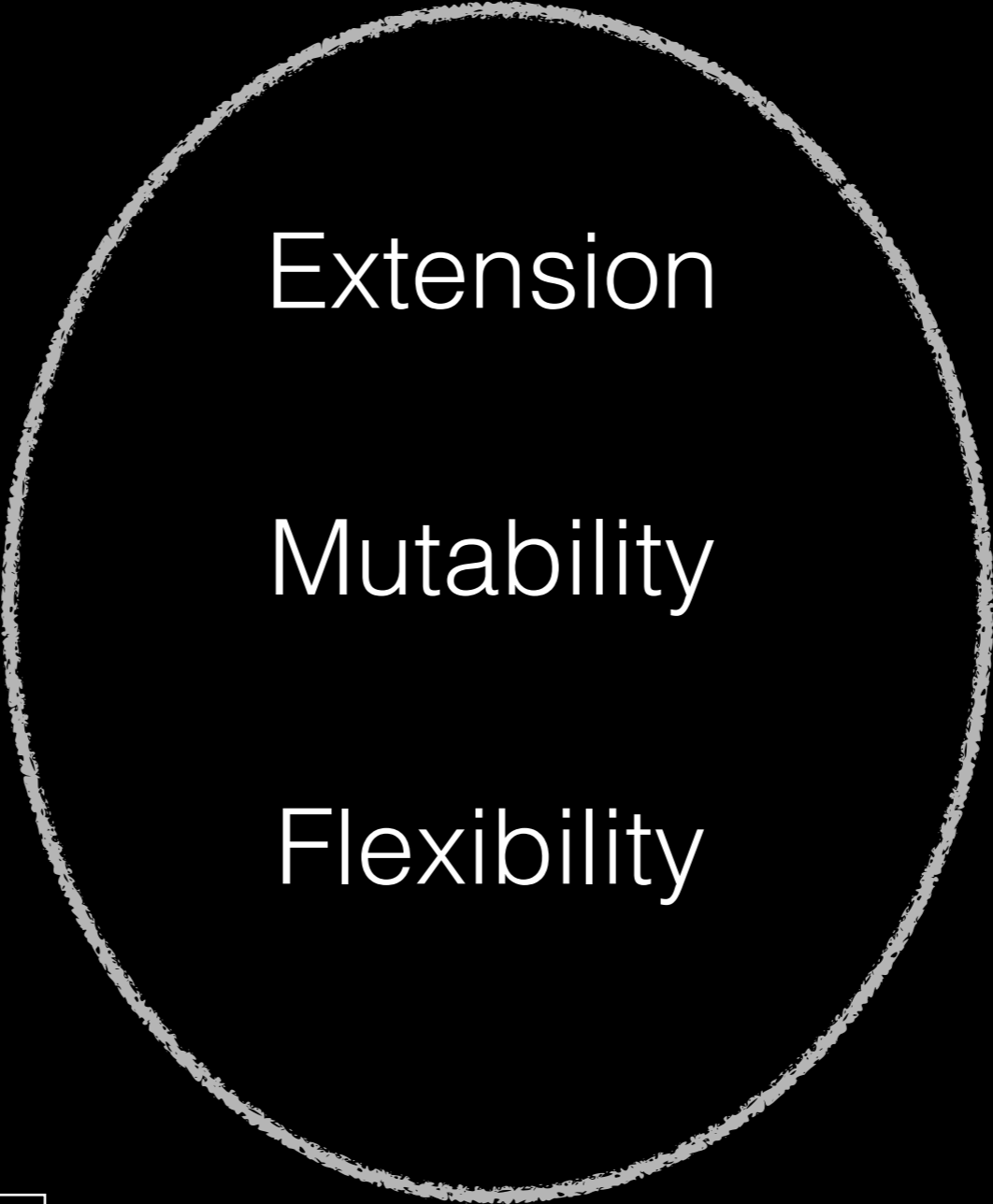


Shape, Texture,  
Color, Transparency

Shape

Color

Sound



Scent

Texture

# Two Outcomes

- 1) Descartes has learned to trust his power of reason, rather than the senses, to give him an idea of what the wax really is.
- 2) Descartes now understands his own thinking even better than before.

# Let's review:

- Apply the wax example to a new case (some item of food, or your chair). Go through the steps, and see what results you get.
- Bonus: see if you can reproduce the reasoning which concludes that we are not able to tell whether we are dreaming or not.

# Quiz — True or False?

(if false, explain why)

- 1. Descartes believes that the possibility of veridical dreams undermines our faith in our senses.
- 2. Descartes believes that the possibility of veridical dreams undermines our faith in reason.
- 3. Descartes finds it easy to control his will so that it won't assent to falsehoods.
- 4. Whenever Descartes entertains the possibility that he is being deceived, this counts as further evidence that he is thinking.
- 5. It is best to interpret Descartes as giving an argument to the effect that: Premise I - he is thinking; Conclusion - therefore, he exists.
- 8. The point of the piece of wax example is to prove conclusively that both God and the Wax exists independently of Descartes.
- 9. Descartes believes that he knows the wax best by means of the senses.



# One final question...

- Do we have “principles,” or “archimedean starting points” in our own thought today?
- (In other words, are there beliefs you have that you don’t know how you got, you assume they are true, and these somehow guide the rest of your thinking?)
- (Common sense, perhaps?)
- (**Warning:** if you think about this issue too much, it may just become an easter egg.)

Revisionary  
Vs  
Descriptive

# Now, let's take stock

- Let's look at some of the objections to the first two meditations...

- First, I wanted to take a look at the objections by Hobbes against Meditation 1 and 2.
- More info on Hobbes: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hobbes/>
- Also, does anyone have objections of their own? (or others you have noticed?)