

**Descartes**  
PHIL410

Meditations I-VI

See also Objections and Replies, pp. 102-106

Study Guide

1. What role does the representation/reality distinction play in Descartes's method of doubt? How does Descartes exploit this distinction in the Dream- and Evil Demon arguments?
2. Why, exactly, is the *Cogito* ("I think, therefore, I am") immune to doubt? How does this instance compare with the following: (a) that I have ten toes; (b) that  $2 + 3 = 5$ ; (c) that I am thinking of Paris?
3. What, according to Descartes, is his essence? Which things are (in Med. II; cf. Med. VI) regarded by him as non-essential to his existence?
4. What is the role of sensation in empirical knowledge? What is the role of reason? (See both Meds. II and VI.)
5. What "rule" does Descartes adduce as a sign of truth? How does Descartes propose to assure himself that this rule is correct? (See the beginnings of Meds. III and IV.)
6. What, if anything, does Descartes prove in the argument for the existence of God (Med. V)?
7. What is Descartes's argument for the existence of bodies (corporeal things)? (Med. VI)
8. What does Descartes understand to be the relationship between himself and his body? (Med. VI)
9. What is the proper role of sensation, according to Descartes? (Med. VI)
10. Is Descartes's overall argument for the reliability of reason and the senses circular? (pp. 102-106)

Some potential research topics (among others)

1. The actual structure of the *Cogito* inference
2. What Descartes knows of his essential nature (on the strength of the *Cogito*)
3. The incorrigibility of Descartes's introspection
4. The utility of the Rule of Reason
5. The Cartesian Circle
6. Descartes's debt to the Scholastics
7. The role of religion and faith in Descartes's epistemology

Overall Question: What do we learn about knowledge from Descartes's *Meditations*?