



Undergraduate assignment feedback form (to be completed by marker)

Student Name: <u>Wendie R</u>	
Module title:	Student number:
For completion by marker:	
Comments: <u>While this essay presents a close reading of Descartes' Meditations 2 & 6, the essay tends to be quite descriptive. Secondary sources are used, but their full potential is not drawn out — Indeed, they could well be used to develop an evaluation. That said, it is clear that you have fully engaged with the primary reading & with other texts on the reading list. This has led to a piece of work that reveals knowledge & understanding of the topic, albeit via a presentation which is overly descriptive at the expense of a critical assessment.</u>	
Marker's signature: <u>RH</u>	Date: <u>6/11/20</u>
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*Closer attention to the punctuation needed throughout. This would allow for greater clarity of expression.

Wendie K

HPPH6027 Humans, Animals and Machines: Exploring the Philosophy of Mind. Essay One

Evaluate the Plausibility of Cartesian dualism.

"Descartes' overall project into which his philosophy of mind fits was to provide the foundations of a universal science based on reason."¹ Descartes wanted to breakaway from ancient philosophy, which was mainly Aristotelian, to build a fresh start in philosophy by applying doubt, systematically excluding all that could be doubted; by this method he could discover a reliable formula in the certainty of his own existence.² This essay will view the plausibility of Cartesian dualism by examining Descartes' methods in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, discussing the process which led to the famous *Cogito* in meditation two, his refutation of scepticism and his endeavours to establish that there is evidence of a fragment of knowledge that can be known beyond doubt; and from this foundation build a secure and stable structure leading to enduring knowledge. From this underpinning this essay will proceed to examine Descartes' theories on the differing substances in the mind and the body in meditation six, his ontology is of an unthinking extended substance: the body, and a thinking non-extended substance: the mind, and that the two substances are quite distinct from each other. How these distinctly different substances interact is problematic, however he does refer to something within the body where both mind and body interact through physical matter in the brain, namely the pineal gland.³

Meditation Two – The *Cogito*

Too colloquial

"Archimedes used to demand just one firm and immovable point in order to shift the entire earth."⁴ Descartes set himself the task of setting aside all that can be doubted by throwing out the proverbial baby and the bathwater; he clears his mind in a form of meditation as he sits by the fire in his dressing gown, and begins to discard all that can be doubted as one would pick out all the fruit in a basket, then examine each piece for any imperfections and replace the perfect fruit back into the basket; by this process of elimination Descartes rids his mind of all that can be doubted. The only thoughts, or fruit for digestion, to be retained is that which is free from imperfections: the true and pure, there can be no doubt in his mind as to the one firm Archimedean point of fact that would move the earth. Descartes proceeds to throw out the baby and the contaminated bath water: his

¹ David Braddon Mitchell and F. Jackson, *Philosophy of Mind and Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell 1996) p4

² ibid

³ This hypothesis, ironically, goes back to Aristotle and Descartes wrote in a letter to Mersenne in 1641: "The seat of the common sense must be very mobile, to receive all the impressions coming from the senses, but be moveable only by the spirits which transmits these impressions. Only the *conarion* [pineal gland] fits these conditions" p59

⁴ Ibid p16

own body as the baby and in the dirty water his memories and senses, to continue with this metaphor the bath is discarded also in reference to situation and place. "I have no senses. Body, shape extension, movement and place are chimeras."⁵ He regards these things as imaginary creatures not to be trusted in his pursuit for the truth of his existence. Descartes then questions whether what remains can be true, and all that remains is 'nothing is certain'. He now turns to God as he questions his own thoughts (are they his or do they come from God,⁶ from here he believes that he must be something by the very notion of his thinking, adhering to his previous point he has no body or senses, the question arises as to whether he could exist without a body and senses. The reflection of the previously throwing everything else out: bodies and minds, sky and earth to reveal nothing in the world, he poses the question "Does it not follow that I too do not exist?"⁷ No, is the answer; since he has persuaded himself that he can doubt and therefore is something that doubts, therefore convincing himself of his existence: "I am, I exist."⁸ Questioning the 'I' is the next part in the process of discovering this immutable, solid truth. What is the 'I' that exists? Descartes returns to his process of eliminating all that cannot stand up to the arguments he has previously presented. "[S]o that what is left at the end may be exactly and only what is certain and unshakeable."⁹ Descartes then questions whether man is as a rational animal, then he goes on to reference spontaneous and natural thought and discusses the mechanical structure of the body, here we begin to see reference to the body as a machine and the mind as a distinct and separate substance, attributing the actions of the body, as well as thinking and perception through the senses, to the soul, which he imagines as something etheric "which permeated my more solid parts."¹⁰ The senses and thought are as something alien to the body, and he wonders as to the fact that bodies could hold such a faculty as the mind. This leads to the dreaming argument and the existence of a malicious demon which deceives the mind.¹¹ From here he dismisses the body as not part of the thinking process, as he cannot trust his bodily senses, and arrives at yet another conclusion in that if he were to stop thinking he would cease to be, and here follows the light bulb moment that we

⁵ ibid

⁶ The matter of God and this influence on the plausibility of dualism will be returned to later in the essay, I did not want to develop it at this time as it is more pivotal to the argument than Descartes alludes to at this time in his meditating on himself as a thinking thing. ✓

⁷ Descartes p16

⁸ Ibid p17

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ If he is dreaming his beliefs and experiences may be untrue, he questions if he knows that he is in a dream state or not and concludes that his experiences may be false, and similarly with the malicious demon: he cannot be sure that a malicious demon is not deceiving him in his experiences and that in which he believes to be true, and again concludes that his experiences and beliefs may be false.

ed the history of ideas?

know to be forever etched in the mind of philosophy that he is a thinking thing that exists: *Cogito ergo sum*.

In questioning the 'I' in 'I exist' he now knows the 'I' exists and dismisses anything birthed within the imagination, where bodily things are invented, and he equates the 'nature of the body' to dreams and dreaming states which can deceive us; there is no knowledge of the 'I' to be found in the dreaming or the imagination. ✓

"But what then am I? Acting that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling and also imagines and has sensory perceptions."¹²

Letting his imagination wander in a sea of sense perceptions in which he can grasp the unknown, indulging his mind in this unrestrained action, he then tames his mind into submission and gives us the analogy of wax and how it takes on a differing shape and substance when melted. The structure and that which we know of wax through our senses is changed by applying heat, the wax is not as it was before. However, there is something of the wax which must remain: it is still wax. It is not in the imagination that we grasp the innumerable changes, the mind perceives the wax in all its forms. It is in this mental scrutiny of the wax he realises his language is what informs him, language as a mental concept. The analogy of people as automatons in hats and coats is now presented, how is he to know that the people walking by his window are not just robots in the disguise of humans? "And so something which I thought I was seeing with my eyes is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgement which is in the mind."¹³ "[P]erception now requires a human mind."¹⁴ Descartes takes the leap into the realisation that he is nothing but a mind. Distinct evidence has presented itself to him of the awareness of what is himself.

"I now know that even bodies are not strictly perceived by the senses or the faculty of imagination but by the intellect alone, and that this perception derives not from being touched or seen but from their being understood;"¹⁵

It is by his understanding of things that they can be known to him, not the feel or the sight, it is through this concept that Descartes defines that he can know his own mind more than anything else he can know.

Importance of reason / the rational faculty

¹² Ibid p19

¹³ Ibid p21

¹⁴ Ibid p22 ✓

¹⁵ Ibid

Could you use a quote that better supports what you say?

Meditation Six – The Distinction Between Mind and Body

Descartes, having now defined himself as a mind, ~~he now~~ goes on to examine the existence of material things as conceivable and distinct; it would be a contradiction of God's capabilities of creation if that which he perceives is not distinct and that the existence of material things is as a product of the imagination. "[A]n application of the cognitive faculty to a body which is ultimately present to it, and which therefore exists."¹⁶ Descartes recognises the imagination as a perception of that which God is capable of creating; he then proceeds to make a distinction between pure understanding and imagination using examples of shapes, which is similar to his example of the wax, and the limits of the imagination. He cannot construct countless or higher number sided things, such as a chiliagon, in his imagination yet can understand a thing of a thousand angles in his mind. The imagination is limited to constructing, say, a pentagon. "And in doing this I notice clearly that imagination requires a peculiar effort of mind which is not required for understanding."¹⁷ That is the difference between that which he can imagine and that which is known by pure reason, the imagination is seen as something limited within the physical constraints of the body and not a faculty of the mind. Descartes concludes that the body, probably, does exist as it holds the imagination and the senses by which it perceives, and by the assistance of memory that which is perceived arrives at the imagination. He proceeds to use the concept of sensory perception to establish the existence of corporeal things. With reference to that which he was taught by nature he refers to emotions, sensations, the sense of a body as in the vicinity to other bodies and the feeling of substances by touch, it is reasonable to think that these are distinguishable from thoughts: that they come from the effect of other things and not from within. Descartes does not hold confidence in that which he learns from nature, and that he should equally not fully doubt or fully accept that which he gleans from his senses.¹⁸ "I can infer correctly that my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing"¹⁹ admitting that this thinking thing is conjoined to a body, thinking of the body as "an extended, non-thinking thing"²⁰ and the conclusion is "[I]t is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it."²¹ The 'I' in this last quote is to be understood as the mind, or the soul. Here we see the idea that the body has no other function than to house the soul/mind, all that the body perceives derives from the fact that it holds the mind within it. Without

¹⁶ Ibid p50

¹⁷ Ibid p51

¹⁸ We are aware of a different reality when dreaming than that of the real world, just as we are aware that our senses may deceive us: as when we see a straw in a glass which looks bent, or the example Descartes uses is when objects take on a different size depending on how far they are located from us. In present day we see examples in photographs taken of people holding up the moon.

¹⁹ Ibid p54

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

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the mind there could be no bodily existence, the body is animated and sensible of all things through the mind which is the living force and without which the body would be as a corpse: dead matter. "For knowledge of the truth about such things seems to belong to the mind alone not the combination of mind and body."²² Sense perceptions do have a function within the body, as Descartes proposes these perceptions^S were given by nature to inform the 'I' of danger or of beneficial experience for the composite of which the mind is clearly distinct from, but informed through the senses. It is from this point that Descartes begins to think of the body as a machine, which could carry on its duties automatically according to its nature, although he does say that the 'I' is not present within the body as a pilot which drives the body as if operating a machine²³, this is the image he is beginning to paint, regarding the loss of a limb as no loss to the mind. Descartes finds the body to be entirely divisible and the mind as something complete.

Galileo, God, Plato and Reason

J.H

Galileo, the seventeenth century physicist, failed to sway his rivals using arguments from natural philosophy, so Descartes took up the challenge to develop the metaphysical arguments pertaining to the truth of existence and the first causes; had Galileo's voice not been crushed by those who believed him a heretic Descartes may not have taken up the baton.²⁴ However, the persecution that Galileo had suffered at the hands of the Inquisition would no doubt have been a vast influence on Descartes' philosophical argument, a belief in God was pivotal to all that he would reveal; it would be that 'one immovable point' from which to move the world. Descartes' world view was built upon the foundation of a belief, and a belief however plausible is not always firmly based in reason, it is not an objective truth, but a subjective belief formed by folk. The plausibility of Cartesian Dualism rests on the belief in God as a supreme being who perceives and creates the world, and the supremacy of the mind over the body. Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher, also believed in an eternal soul and that "the god-like rational soul should rule over the slave-like mortal body."²⁵ In her book *The Man of Reason*, Genevieve Lloyd posits that for Descartes the division of mind and body was based on earlier beliefs that the soul had higher and lower faculties, his ideas resonate with Plato's "the non-rational was no longer part of the soul but pertained entirely to body."²⁶ That Reason and the

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²² Ibid p57

²³ Ibid p56

²⁴ Blake D. Dutton, 'Physics and metaphysics in Descartes and Galileo', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*; Baltimore 37:1 (Jan 1999):p 49

²⁵ Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason, 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy*, (London: Methuen, 1984) p6

²⁶ Ibid p45

Explain

rational exists in the domain of the soul as a mind is Descartes' dualism, and this mind must dominate the body for his theory to work. The mind must operate the machine-like body, and this is seen in the practice of modern western medicine and our treatment of lowly creatures that man regards as without reason. It is not the purpose of this essay to establish the plausibility of arguments for or against these matters, however suffice to say Descartes' dualism has led a lasting legacy in the influence of how we treat our bodies and the beasts he considered to be without reason.

Here we have as complete a picture of Descartes dualism as can be painted, from a rough sketch to a finished piece of work. His arguments and reasoning are clear and in our own interactions with the outside world his reasoning is seen. However, looking inside and meditating on the interaction within that which I call myself, I can only conclude that his thinking of the mind and body as something quite distinct is not as plausible as is evident by his own processes. I am aware of a living intelligence within my body and my senses and imagination are very present within my mind. On discussing Descartes' *Cogito* Merleau-Ponty writes "as it is my mind itself which places itself in the world, it is *not* there, and the self-positing is an illusion."²⁷ I can never get out of my own head to look at the world objectively, even when I don my comfy slippers and relax by my fire with the purpose of deep meditation, or sit upon a mountain in the Himalayas, I cannot get out of my own mind and this is the only perspective I can truly know.

Could you discuss/develop this as an objection above?

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²⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge, 1962)

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been used, be sure
to reference them.
Eg. Hamlyn -
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