

24.01 Classics of Western Philosophy

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SECOND SHORT EXERCISE

Due Date: Two days after Lec #17

First, I know that everything which I clearly and distinctly understand is capable of being created by God so as to correspond exactly with my understanding of it. Hence the fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another is enough to make me certain that the two things are distinct, since they are capable of being separated, at least by God... Thus, simply by know that I exist and seeing at the same time that absolutely nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I can infer correctly that my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing. It is true that I may have... a body that is very closely joined to me. But nevertheless, on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it. (Descartes, *Meditation 6*, p. 519 of *Classics*)

Write **2 pages** analysing this argument. Feel free to use a different wording in your version than that given by Descartes. See if you can find a way to put the argument in the form of numbered premises, and conclusion(s). After stating the argument, briefly explain it in your own words. Comment on its significance: what is the point of arguing for this conclusion? Comment on its cogency: which premises are true or plausible, which are false or implausible? Is the inference, as you've described it, a valid one?

In this kind of task, you won't need to use every sentence in the passage in reconstructing the argument. Occasionally you need to supply a premise, or a conclusion, that is not explicitly stated. Occasionally you need to briefly draw on what was said in a previous passage. Sometimes there can be more than one defensible interpretation.