“I am, I exist.”

• This is the “epistemic foundation” that Descartes discovers in the Second Meditation.

• He knows with certainty that he exists as a subject of conscious experience (as a “thinking thing”), and he knows the “contents” of his own mind, even if he still has doubts about an “external world.”
What comes next?

• Having demonstrated *that* he is, Descartes goes on to question *what* he is—i.e., what it means to be a “thinking thing.”
  – We will come back to this issue next chapter.

• He then provides a long argument that there is a world outside his mind. (Many find this argument unconvincing.)
Descartes’ Third Meditation

• His aim is to offer an argument for the existence of God, based only on what he knows with certainty.

• Along the way, he makes comments which imply a general understanding of sense perception.

• Parts of this general understanding will be accepted by Locke and Berkeley.
Descartes’ Understanding of Sense Perception

• Descartes has doubts about the reliability of what we think we know through sense perception.

• In the background we find a general overview of what happens in sense perception, and where the possibility of error creeps in.
“I am a thing that thinks, i.e. that doubts, affirms, denies, ... [etc.]. This thing also ... has sensory perceptions; ... even if the objects of my sensory experience ... don’t exist outside me, still sensory perception ..., considered simply as mental events, certainly do occur in me.”
What this means

• I can no longer (for now) trust my senses.

• But I know that I am “a thing that thinks.”
  – I know that I am a thing that has conscious experiences.

• I know I have sensations, even if the objects of these experiences do not exist “outside me.”
  – I can be mistaken about the objects, but I cannot be mistaken about the sensations because they exist in my mind.
I previously accepted as perfectly certain and evident many things ...—the earth, sky, stars, and everything else that I took in through the senses—but in those cases what I perceived clearly were merely the ideas ... that came into my mind .... But I used also to believe that my ideas came from things outside that resembled them in all respects. .... [This] was false; or anyway if it was true it was not thanks to the strength of my perceptions.
I only *infer* objects

- What I directly perceive are merely my *ideas* or *sensations* of objects.
  - These ideas or sensations are known directly because they exist in my mind, whether I am actually perceiving or merely hallucinating. I cannot be mistaken about the ideas in my mind.

- I only *infer* the existence of objects outside my mind as the cause of these sensations.
  - This inferences can be mistaken.
“When ideas are considered solely in themselves and not taken to be connected to anything else, they can’t be false; for whether it is a goat that I am imagining or a chimera, either way it is true that I do imagine it. .... All that is left—the only kind of thought where I must watch out for mistakes—are judgments. And the mistake they most commonly involve is to judge that my ideas resemble things outside me.’
Where Error is Possible

• I know that my *ideas* or sensations exist.
  – I directly perceive them inside my mind. I cannot be mistaken about this.

• I *infer* that 1) my ideas are caused by things outside me, and 2) that these ideas “resemble” those things “in all respects.”
  – I don’t directly perceive this “resemblance,” and so this is what makes error possible.
Descartes: 
*(What he says in 3rd Med.)*

- What we directly or immediately know in sense experience is merely an “idea” or sensation that exists only “in our minds.”

- In hallucination, these ideas do not (correctly) resemble any external object.

- In perception (as opposed to hallucination) they do.
Descartes’ Analysis of Sense Experience

- "Mind's Eye": What I really see
- "Idea" or "Sensation"
- "Outside" the mind, i.e., reality
- What I "Judge" (infer) exists
  - that it causes my ideas
  - that my ideas resemble it.
- This is what makes mistakes possible.
Sensations vs. Material Objects

• According to Descartes, ideas or sensations exist only “in our minds,” and they are what we immediately or directly know in sense experience.

• Material objects (“real things”) exist “outside our minds.” They are not (at least not for Descartes, Locke, or Berkeley) what we immediately experience. Rather, they are (for Descartes and Locke) the causes of what we immediately experience (viz., of the ideas or sensations that exist only in our minds).
Descartes, Locke, Berkeley

- All three accept (without much argument) that what we directly or immediately know are only “ideas” or other “mental contents.”
- Descartes argues (in Med. 3-6) that there is a world outside our mind.
- Locke accepts (without argument) that there is such a world, but claims that our sensations do not always resemble it.
- Berkeley argues that there is no world outside mind (yours, mine, and God’s).
John Locke

An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
Ideas vs. Qualities
John Locke

• “Whatever the mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding, that I call idea; and the power to produce any idea in our mind, I call quality of the subject [object] wherein that power is.” [Paragraph 8]
• “Whatsoever the mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding, that I call idea;”
  – i.e., what we immediately and directly perceive are the ideas our sensations in our mind.
  – We perceive ideas in our minds that represent objects in the real world that exists outside of our minds.
“and the power to produce any idea in our mind, I call quality of the subject [object] wherein that power is.”

– The objects that exist outside our minds have various *qualities* (or properties) by which they can *cause* us to sensations.

– Different qualities in the objects cause us to have different kinds of sensation of them.
Ideas vs. Qualities

• **Ideas:**
  – Exist in our minds.
  – They are the sensations we are directly aware of.

• **Qualities:**
  – Exist in objects that exist outside of our minds.
  – They are the properties in the objects that cause us to have various kinds of sensations.
Locke’s Causal Theory of Perception:

**Idea:**
"Whatsoever the mind perceives in itself ... is the immediate object of perception ...."

**Quality:**
"The power [in an object] to produce any ideas in our mind...."
Qualities (in objects) cause ideas (in our minds)

Our ideas (of objects) include ideas of these qualities.

Objects have “qualities” that cause the ideas we have of them.
A Question from Descartes
Do our sensations resemble their objects?

- Recall that Descartes’ big worry was whether or not there were any objects outside our minds.

- But he said we also make mistakes in thinking that our ideas always resembled the objects in the real world that caused us to have those sensations.
Why should we believe that the ideas in our minds actually resemble the objects outside our minds that caused them?
In Locke’s Terms

• Even if we accept that the ideas in our mind are caused by real objects that exist outside our minds
  – (Locke never really questions this)

• Is it true that our ideas always resemble the qualities in the objects that caused us to have those ideas?
Locke’s Answer

• Only sometimes. Some of our ideas do resemble qualities in the objects, but some of them do not.

• Our ideas of “primary qualities” do resemble those qualities.

• Our ideas of “secondary qualities” do not.
A Question for next time
Falling Trees

• *If a tree falls in the forest with no one there to hear it, does it make any sound?*

• How do you think Locke would answer this question.
• Think about the difference between a sensation and what causes it.
• Keep this question in mind when you read what Locke says about primary and secondary qualities.