Descartes’ Third *Meditation*

- His aim is to offer an argument for the existence of God, based simply on what (after the first two *Meditations*) he knows with certainty.

- He begins by reviewing:
  - His doubts, and
  - What he now knows, and
  - What he need not doubt.
“I will now shut my eyes, block my ears, cut off all my senses. I will regard all my mental images of bodily things as empty, false and worthless .... I will ... examine myself more deeply, and try ... to know myself more intimately. 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.”
  – This means a thing that has conscious mental states. Descartes uses the word “thinks” very broadly, to cover all kinds of consciousness.
• I know I also have “sensory perceptions,” even if the “objects” of these experiences do not exist “outside me.”
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 or thoughts of those things 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.
“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.’
What I really knew vs. what I thought I knew

• I know that my ideas (or “sensations”) exist
  – Whether of “the earth,” “goats.” or mere “chimera” (i.e., non-existent beings).
  – I know these ideas (“mental contents”) exist because I directly (Immediately) perceive them.

• But I simply assume that my ideas “come from” things outside me, and that they “resemble” those things “in all respects.”
  – This is what makes “mistakes” possible.
Descartes’ Analysis of Sense Experience

"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.
What do I know?

- I know that I exist.
  - I know that I am a “thinking thing,” a “mind.”
    - i.e., the subject of conscious experiences.
      - Med. 2 and 6 argue that this “mind” is non-material.

- I know I have ideas or sensations “in” my mind.
  - These “mental contents” are what I “directly” or “immediately” perceive.

- I “judge” (i.e., infer) that these mental contents are caused by things that exist outside my mind, and that my ideas “resemble them.”
  - This is what Med. 4-6 attempt to prove.
Descartes’ (Locke’s too) Theory of Perception: The mind perceives ideas which are caused by and represent real objects.
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).
Terminology

- **Empiricism:**
  - *All* knowledge ultimately rests upon sense experience.
  - Our justification for claiming we *know* something must always end up with something we perceive with our senses.
    - “Seeing is believing.”

- **Rationalism:**
  - *Not* all knowledge ultimately rests upon sense experience.
  - At least some (maybe all!) knowledge can be justified without appealing to sense perception.
    - E.g., $2 + 2 = 4$. 
“Whose on Third?”

• **Descartes is a rationalist.**
  – He believes that there are some things we can know—some beliefs that we can justify—without appealing to sense experience.

• **Locke and Berkeley are empiricists.**
  – They think all knowledge arises from sense experience.
  – But they accept Descartes’ claim that what we directly know, via the senses, are merely “ideas” or “sensations” that exist in the mind.