

MODERN PHILOSOPHY: SECOND MEDITATION

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1 The Cogito

There are two distinct formulations of THE COGITO in Descartes' work:

1. "I am thinking, therefore I exist"

Discourse (1637): je pense, donc je suis

Principles (1644): ego cogito, ergo sum

2. "I am, I exist"

Meditations (1641): ego sum, ego exist

2 Inferential Reading

V1:

1. I think

∴ I exist

But **V1** doesn't work, the conclusion actually doesn't follow. So, it needs to be supplemented:

V2:

1. Everything which thinks exists

2. I think

∴ I exist

V2 does work as an inference, but here's the problem. Descartes clearly says he's not doing anything like **V2**:

When someone says “I am thinking, therefore I am, or I exist”, he does not deduce existence from thought by means of a syllogism, but recognizes it as something self-evident by a simple intuition of the mind. This is clear from the fact that if he were deducing it by means of a syllogism, he would have to have had previous knowledge of the major premiss “Everything which thinks is, or exists”; yet in fact he learns it from experiencing in his own case that it is impossible that he should think without existing. (*Second Replies*, AT VII: 140/CSM II: 100)

3 Non-Inferential Reading

THE COGITO is non-inferential, and should be read as an intuition, thought-act, or performance. One cannot believe the statement “I do not exist” and conversely one must believe the statement “I exist”—one cannot think it without believing it.

Hintikka’s Non-Inferential Interpretation:

A simple example will make the situation clear. The sentences “De Gaulle does not exist” and “Descartes does not exist” are not inconsistent or otherwise objectionable any more than the moot sentence “Homer does not exist.” None of them is false for logical reasons alone. What would be (existentially) inconsistent would be the attempt of a certain man (De Gaulle, Descartes, or Homer, respectively) to use one of these sentences to make a statement. Uttered by somebody else, the sentences in question need not have anything wrong or even strange about them. (1962: 12)

Existential Inconsistency:

1. let a refer to the Subject, S , uttering a proposition p
2. Existential inconsistency obtains when the following statement is *inconsistent*: “ p ; and a exists”
3. We can re-write (2) more formally as: “ $p \ \& \ (\exists x)(x=a)$ ”