

In *Meditation Six*, there is a passage which can be seen (more or less) as the culmination of Descartes' views in the *Meditations*. The text I have in mind runs as follows:

...my ability clearly and distinctly to understand one thing without another suffices to make me certain that the one thing is different from the other, since they can be separated from each other, at least by God... For this reason, from the fact that I know I exist, and that at the same time I judge that obviously nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I rightly conclude that my essence consists entirely in my being a thinking thing. And although perhaps (or rather, as I shall soon say, assuredly) I have a body that is very closely joined to me, nevertheless, because on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, insofar as I am merely a thinking thing and not an extended thing, and because on the other hand I have a distinct idea of a body, insofar as it is merely an extended thing and not a thinking thing, it is certain that *I am really distinct from my body and can exist without it*.
(p. 51, emphasis added).

Not only does this passage announce a central conclusion in Cartesian philosophy (the line in italics above), but also, the argument depends on several key ideas presented earlier in the *Meditations*. In particular, the argument for so-called *mind-body dualism* supposes that I can clearly and distinctly perceive that I am essentially a thinking thing, hence that my body is not essential to me (see Meditation Two)—and that whatever I clearly and distinctly conceive is true (see Meditation Four), given that a non-deceiving God created my faculty of judgment (see Meditations Three and Five).

In a paper of no more than five pages, I would like you to:

- (1) Reconstruct *thoroughly and in detail* this argument for dualism in *Meditation Six*. This means identifying the premises in the argument, and also explaining, when appropriate, the rationale behind those premises. **This does NOT mean recapping the entire *Meditations*!** Rather, it means explaining *the dualism argument* step by step, yet for that purpose, you may need to refer back to earlier parts of the book as appropriate.
Rest assured, there isn't an answer here that is clearly *the* correct answer as to how Descartes' argument goes. But it is also clear that some answers are better than others (for example: some argument-reconstructions are more consistent with the text than others, some are more charitable to Descartes than others, etc.)
- (2) After you have given the *most charitable reconstruction* of the argument you can, please raise the *strongest objection* you can think of to Descartes' dualist argument. Explain this objection *thoroughly and in detail*. (This can be an objection we discussed in class, or one of your own objections.)
- (3) Then, explain *thoroughly and in detail* whether you think the objection you have raised is successful or not.
 - a. If you think the objection is successful, *defend it* from the strongest rejoinder that Descartes could make. Or,

- b. If you think the objection is unsuccessful, explain exactly how the objection goes wrong.

Did I mention that you should explain your points *thoroughly and in detail*???

Note: This is not a research paper. In fact I *discourage* the use of outside readings for this class, as they can cause more confusion than enlightenment. However, I *encourage* you to try out your ideas on your fellow students before you write up a final draft. But make sure that if you use someone else's idea, you give them proper credit.

Let me also emphasize that this is NOT a "book report" type paper. Rather, I'm asking you to explain certain philosophical points *for the purpose of critically evaluating them*. Accordingly, part (3) should be the *largest part* of the paper! Your own ideas should be the focus, and they should be presented as clearly and in as much detail as you would present others people's ideas.

Don't be disheartened if you find part (3) particularly difficult. I'm asking you to come up with your *own arguments*, which requires a bit of thought and ingenuity on your part. I'm *not* asking for a *decisive* arguments; in fact, the best philosophical papers often argue both sides of an issue, and consequently thus fail to come up with a straightforward conclusion.

In part (3), I'm primarily looking to see that you can engage the issue *on your own* philosophically. Concurrently, I'm not grading you on the answer you give, but on the *reasoning* you deploy when discussing the issue. To help you out here, I've posted on the course website some writing tips, as well as a list of argument fallacies. (In making your arguments, make sure you don't commit any of these fallacies!)

This assignment is due **Apr. 18th** at classtime. (This is later than the due date that was originally listed on the syllabus.) Make sure to submit BOTH a hard copy of your assignment, AND an electronic version as email attachment (parentt@vt.edu). Also, to ensure fair grading, PLEASE IDENTIFY YOUR HARD COPY *ONLY* WITH YOUR VIRGINIA TECH ID#.