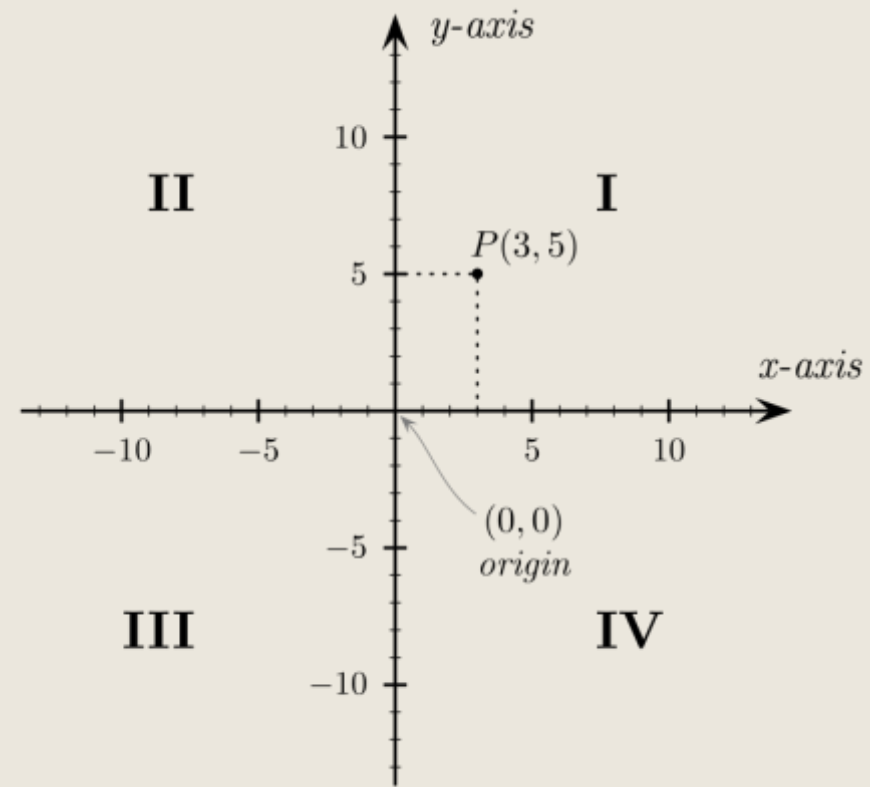


# PHILOSOPHY FOR BEGINNERS



**Week 10. Descartes' Dualism**  
**21<sup>st</sup> November 2018**

# Class recap



# Class recap

- Descartes and his philosophical and historical contexts: new science, mathematics, uncertainty
- The problem of scepticism and Descartes' response
- Scepticism about the senses, dreams, and whether there is an evil deceiver
- *Cogito ergo sum*

# Class aims

- Understand what Descartes means by *cogito ergo sum* and being a thinking thing
- Grasp why Descartes considers minds and bodies as two separate substances – dualism
- Explain Descartes' ontological argument for God, and why some consider it a circular argument
- Evaluate Descartes' explanation of human knowledge, intellect and will

APPENDIX,  
*Continens*  
OBJECTIONES  
QVINTAS & SEPTIMAS  
*In*  
RENATI DES-CARTES  
MEDITATIONES  
De Primâ Philosophiâ,

*Cum ejusdem ad illas Responsionibus & duabus Epistolis,*

Vna ad Patrem DINET Societatis Iesu Præpositum  
Provincialem per Franciam,

*Altera ad celeberrimum Virum*

D. GISEBERTVM VOETIVM.



AMSTELÆDAMI.  
Apud Ludovicum Elzevirium,  
MDCLXIV.





‘SEVERAL years have now elapsed since I first became aware that I had accepted, even from my youth, many false opinions for true, and that consequently what I afterward based on such principles was highly doubtful; and from that time I was convinced of the necessity of undertaking once in my life to rid myself of all the opinions I had adopted, and of commencing anew the work of building from the foundation, if I desired to establish a firm and abiding superstructure in the sciences.’

# Sceptical method

- Parts 1 and 2 of the *Discourse* and *Meditation* 1 both present a new sceptical method
- His goal: to withhold his assent from any beliefs that lack a clear and indubitable foundation, so as to establish a new firm foundation for the sciences
- This means doubting anything that ***could*** be doubted.
- 'I had to raze everything to the ground and begin again from the original foundations' (*Med.* 1)
- Instead he wants a single, totally indubitable, absolutely certain truth upon which to build his philosophy.
- Descartes will seek out clear and distinct ideas on which to base his new theory of knowledge

# *Cogito ergo sum*

- In *Meditation 2* and *Discourse Part 4*, Descartes offers his first proof against his sceptical method
- *I think therefore I am* (*Discourse*), and his claim that he is a ‘thinking thing’ (*Meditations*) share the same premise:
- In order to doubt or be deceived, there must be a thing that doubts or is deceived
- This proves at least that he necessarily exists
- It also proves that he exists as a thinking, doubting thing



Am I not so bound up with a body and with senses that I cannot exist without them? But I have convinced myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Does it now follow that I too do not exist?

No: if I convinced myself of something then I certainly existed. But there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that case I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me; and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something.

So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.

- Meditation 2

# Potential problems

- *I think therefore I am*: what problems might there be?
- Just because one has a set of thoughts, doesn't prove that one is a particular thinker (Gassendi)
- He moves too quickly from proving that he thinks, to that he exists: the identity of 'I' isn't proven (Kant)
- He relies on the presupposition that an 'I' already exists, to which he attaches himself (Kierkegaard)
- All this doubting, affirming etc. simply proves that something is merely a 'bundle of impressions', not a self (Hume)
- It presupposes that there is an 'I', that there is an activity of 'thinking', and that 'I' know what 'thinking' is (Nietzsche)



# MIND-BODY DUALISM

# Knowledge belongs to the mind

- Given the certainty with which he perceives himself, compared to the errors of his senses, Descartes separates his mind from body
- His existence as a *thinking thing* is of a separate kind, or substance, than that of his body
- The mind and body are capable of interacting or ‘commingling’ through the pineal gland in the brain
- However the body itself cannot be said to think, and self-consciousness, intelligence, reason and other attributes belong to the immaterial mind

# A thinking thing...

But what then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, and that also imagines and senses.

Is it not the very same “I” who now doubts almost everything, who nevertheless understands something, who affirms that this one thing is true, who denies other things, who desires to know more, who wishes not to be deceived, who imagines many things even against my will, who also notices many things which appear to come from the senses?



# Mind-body dualism

- He observes how a piece of wax changes its form, smell, temperature etc. when it is burned
- How do we know it to be the same piece of wax?
- *In groups of 2-3 again, read through the argument and work out what Descartes' answer is...*



# Mind-body dualism

- He observes how a piece of wax changes its form, smell, temperature etc. when it is burned
- How do we know it to be the same piece of wax?
- Our senses and our imagination are inaccurate guides, for they perceive a new object
- Only his mind's judgement can determine this, through perceiving generic properties
- Knowledge of bodies is constructed in the intellect, therefore – not the senses or imagination



# Problems

- *What problems can you come up with? Discuss the strengths and weaknesses in groups of 2/3*
- How do minds and bodies interact, if they are totally different substances?
- How does Descartes explain the formation of memories in our consciousness, given they are reliant on sense?
- What about personality change as a result of brain injury?
- How can Descartes claim to know anything about the wax, or anything else about the world for that matter, except through the information of his senses?
- Surely we would reject the idea that the mind has a store of absolutely universal, intellectual knowledge?
- Above all, isn't it simpler and more coherent to argue that the mind and body are in fact of one substance?



Rembrandt, *The Philosopher in Meditation*, 1632

# Spinoza

- Spinoza argued instead for monism: minds and bodies are two parallel attributes of one singular, infinite and universal Substance
- This substance comprises both God and Nature, and includes the entirety of all reality
- Whilst the content of ideas is first delivered to us by the senses, Spinoza argues that they become organised as *common notions*, which are determined and agreed upon as true...
- Then *intuitive truths*, which are known to be universal and necessary in all situations, e.g. mathematics





# Malebranche and Leibniz

- Descartes' disciple Malebranche argued for Occasionalism
- The link between minds and bodies is guaranteed by the constant causal action of God, with living things providing the 'occasion' for divine action – only God causes actions
- Leibniz, a later Rationalist philosopher, argued not dissimilarly that minds and bodies are two separate substances that exist in perfect synchronicity or *pre-established harmony*
- Neither the mind nor the body can cause effects in the other – instead they are programmed to coordinate
- Next week, we will look at how Empiricists like John Locke and David Hume offered a more simple explanation of knowledge as rooted in the human senses – Empiricism



# ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT



# Ontological argument

- In *Meditation* 3, Descartes offers a foundation for his clear and distinct ideas
- Descartes is able to conceive of *perfection*...
- Existence is more perfect than non-existence...
- Perfect ideas can only have a perfect cause, as there is no perfection in nature
- Hence the origin of the idea of a perfect being must come from God who produced it in me
- As a perfect, benevolent, omniscient being, God would not will to deceive him – hence the evil demon is a fallacy

‘something cannot arise from nothing, and also that what is more perfect—that is, contains in itself more reality—cannot arise from what is less perfect.’

‘There remains only the idea of God; and I must consider whether there is anything in the idea which could not have originated in myself. By the word ‘God’ I understand a substance that is infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, and which created both myself and everything else (if anything else there be) that exists. All these attributes are such that, the more carefully I concentrate on them, the less possible it seems that they could have originated from me alone. So from what has been said it must be concluded that God necessarily exists.’

*Over to you – what do you think of Descartes’ argument?*

It is no surprise that God, in creating me, should have placed this idea [of himself] within me, to be, as it were, the mark of the craftsman stamped on his work... The mere fact that God created me is a very strong basis for believing that I am somehow made in his image and likeness, and that I perceive that likeness, which includes the idea of God, by the same faculty which enables me to perceive myself.

But before examining this point more carefully and investigating other truths which may be derived from it, I should like to pause here and spend some time in the contemplation of God; to reflect on his attributes, and to gaze with wonder and adoration on the beauty of this immense light, so far as the eye of my darkened intellect can bear it. For just as we believe through faith that the supreme happiness of the next life consists solely in the contemplation of the divine majesty, so experience tells us that this same contemplation, albeit much less perfect, enables us to know the greatest joy of which we are capable in this life.

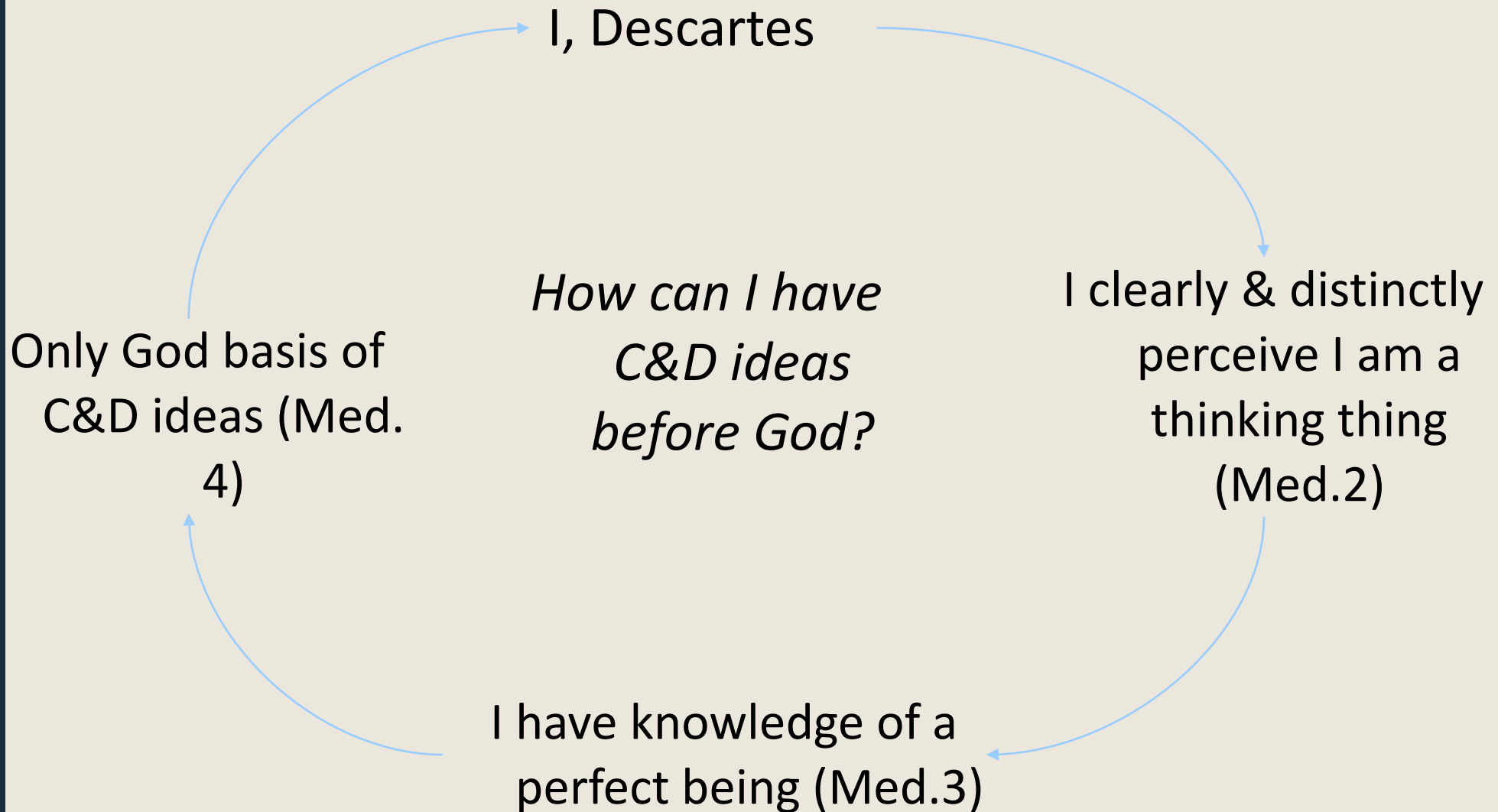


# God the basis of C&D ideas

'because it is the most clear and distinct and because it contains more objective reality than any other idea, no idea is in and of itself truer and has less of a basis for being suspected of falsehood. I maintain that this idea of a being that is supremely perfect and infinite is true in the highest degree.'

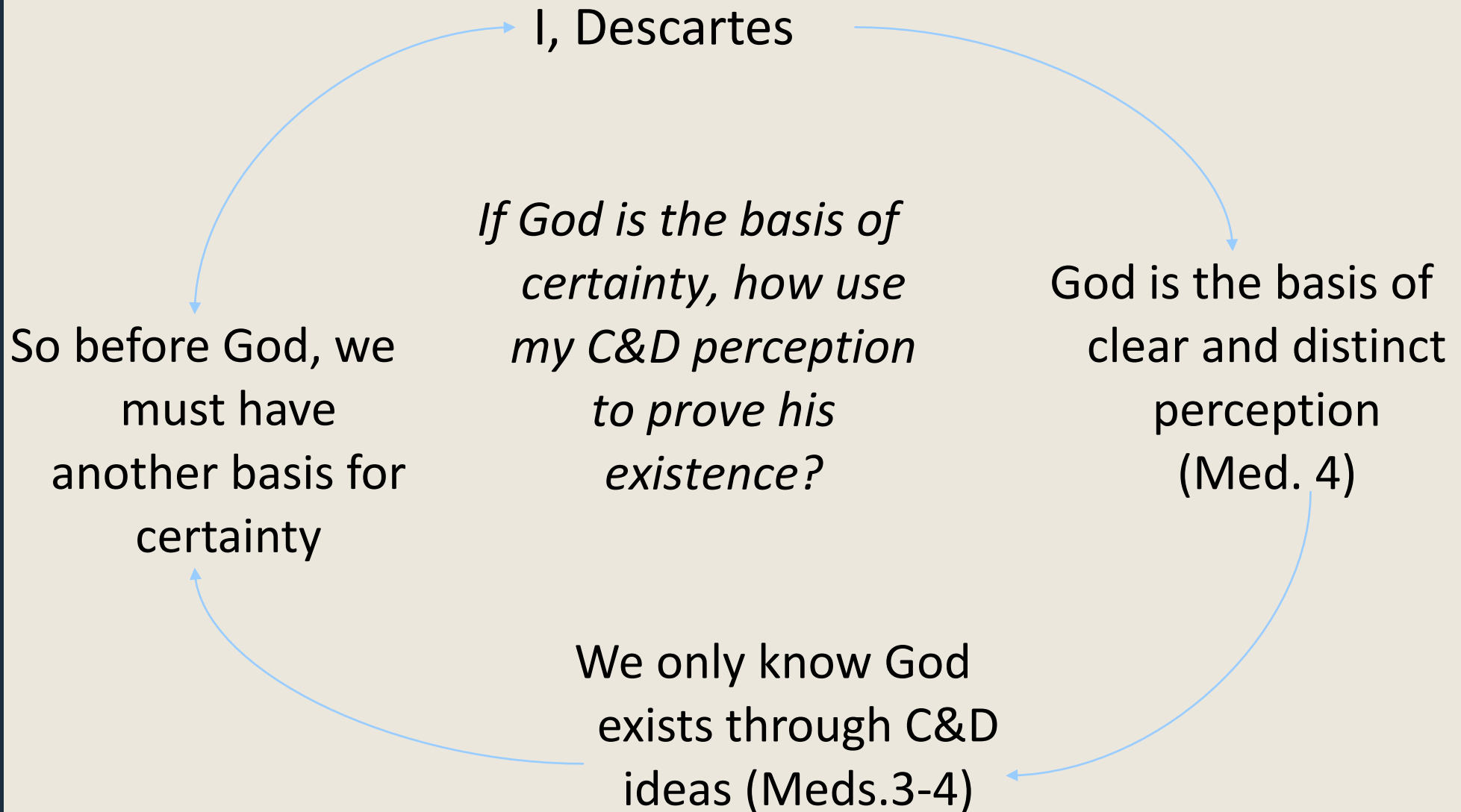
... 'for whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive to be real and true and to involve some perfection is wholly contained in that idea.' (From Med. 4)

# Cartesian circle



**Version 1** (from the “Second Set of Objections”, in R. Descartes: *Meditations, Objects, and Replies*, ed. and trans. R. Ariew and D. Cress (Hackett, 2006).

# Cartesian circle



**Version 2** (from the “Fourth Set of Objections” by Arnauld, in R. Descartes: *Meditations, Objects, and Replies*, ed. and trans. R. Ariew and D. Cress (Hackett, 2006)).

INTELLECT AND WILL

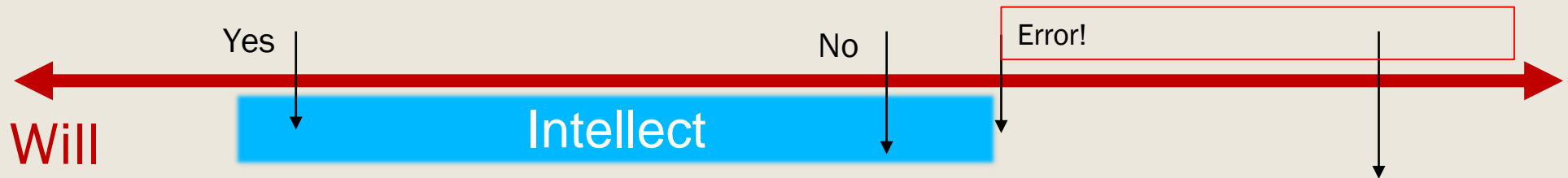


# Error and knowledge – Med. 4

- Error is a privation of knowledge
- Will is unlimited, intellect is limited. Error occurs when will affirms what it cannot clearly and distinctly perceive
- We are capable of clear and distinct perception (thinking thing, Med. 2)
- If God is not a deceiver, then clear and distinct perceptions are necessarily true



# Will and intellect (*Med. 4*)



- Intellect perceives ideas, will assents
- Will feels unbounded, but leads to error
- Better to suspend judgement, and affirm only what we have clear and distinct perceptions of

'But once I perceived that there is a God, and also understood at the same time that everything else depends on him and that he is not a deceiver, I then concluded that everything that I clearly and distinctly perceive is necessarily true.' (Med. 5)

*How does Descartes arrive at this view? What problems are there with this assertion?*

# I and the body commingle

'By means of these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst, and so on, nature also teaches that I am present in my body not merely in the way a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am most tightly joined and, so to speak, commingled with it, so much so that I and the body constitute one single thing.'  
(Meditation 6)

# Class recap

- Understand what Descartes means by *cogito ergo sum* and being a thinking thing
- Grasp why Descartes considers minds and bodies as two separate substances – dualism
- Explain Descartes' ontological argument for God, and why some consider it a circular argument
- Evaluate Descartes' explanation of human knowledge, intellect and will



# Next week...

- We will turn to David Hume and British Empiricism
- We will explore why Hume isn't entirely sure that the sun will rise tomorrow
- Please aim to find out more about David Hume's thought before the next class
- In particular we'll focus on his account of custom, causality and why the senses are the source of human knowledge