PHIL 1200—Notes

In Meditation II, Descartes attempts to recover from the skeptical doubts introduced in Meditation I. We will focus on his reasoning in pgh. 3, where he introduces the idea that he can know for certain that he exists. We will consider two interpretations of his reasoning which we call “The Cogito Reasoning”. (Cogito is Latin for “I think”)

I. The Inferential Reading—According to this reading, Descartes is making a logical inference.

1. If I think, I exist.

2. I think.

3. Therefore, I exist.

Objections?

II. The Intuitionist Reading—To understand this interpretation we need the idea of a performative utterance.

Performative Utterance—an utterance that makes the thing that is stated true.

Examples:

I promise to boost marks for students who participate.

I now pronounce you husband and wife. (when said by a minister)

So, the idea is that when Descartes thinks he exists that makes it so. It’s a performative thought rather than a performative utterance.

Objections?