William Willett

Dr. Jonathan Peeters

<p style="text-align:center">Key Issue in the Reasoning of Descartes First Meditation</p>

René Descartes First Meditation is a truly fascinating piece of work that is easy to grasp and is often used in low level philosophy classes. This presentation will delve into the intricacies of Descartes' claim and focus on calling into question one of the assumptions he uses to reach his conclusion. Descartes' First Meditation is an attempt to prove what the world can and can't be certain of, this was in hopes to find a base of knowledge we can build all further knowledge on top of. To do this he uses a sound scientific approach and tries to disprove the certainty of information we have. The main reason Descartes believes we can't be certain of information is that we could be in a dream state. This meditation concludes that we can only be certain of our perceptions. This conclusion makes a lot of very sound assumptions. One assumption however, is very weak, the assumption that people can't be certain of anything that is experienced in a dream state. The goal of this presentation is not to disprove that we can't tell the difference between a dream state and reality, but rather to prove that this plays little to no role in the certainty of information. Descartes argument relies crucially on the concept that dreams can replicate anything that could happen in everyday life. These are the dreams that we concern ourselves with because, they are so close to reality it is reasonable to believe we can't tell the difference, Descartes meditation doesn't concern fantastical dreams. The argument being made about certainty requires the same type of dream that Descartes theory requires. The argument is simple, if the dream is so close to reality that there is no discernable difference then we can be certain of the information we observe. The idea is that if two things are so similar that one can't tell the difference, but one example is the original and another example is a copy, either would serve the same purpose. There is no need to be certain that you aren't being tricked if you are only being tricked because there is no difference from what it should be. There are countless examples that can be used to demonstrate there is no need for certainty to develop certainty, some of these examples will be addressed. The presentation will also talk about possible objections to its own argument and work to disprove them to strengthen itself. In conclusion the

argument leads us to see that we don't need to be certain we are awake to be certain of more than just our perceptions. Certainty doesn't have to be built on top of total certainty.