

# [In by understanding or ‘pure intellection’, and](https://assignbuster.com/in-by-understanding-or-pure-intellection-and/)

Inthis paper, I will extract an argument from a passage in Descartes’sSixth Meditation, in which he distinguishes imagination fromintellect by the consideration of various geometric shapes with hismain conclusion being that imagination requires more mental effortthan intellect. His argument is as follows.

First, he asks us to consider a triangle. We can think of a triangle as amental image or we can discern its properties by ‘ pureintellection’ or understanding. We can think of a triangle not onlyas a three-sided shape enclosing space, but also by its properties; as a thing that has three sides. Hence, there are things that we canimagine and things that we can understand- this is his first premise. Onthe other hand, when I think of a chiliagon (a thousand-sidedfigure), I can understand it by its properties, just as easily as Ican understand a triangle by its properties. However, I cannot createa mental image of it; I cannot imagine it.

We can imagine triangles, but can only understand chiliagons. Hence, there are things, like thechiliagon, that we can understand, yet cannot imagine. Descartesstates it is by habit alone that we, at times, confound understandingwith imagination. We may confuse imagination with intellect in thethinking of shapes like a chiliagon, but in cases like the chiliagon, our imagination sees no difference between it or a myriagon forexample; thus, it is purely by our intellect that we can discernbetween the two.

Hence, there are things, that can only bedistinguished by understanding or ‘ pure intellection’, and not byimagination. Wesee that it takes us more effort to produce the image of shape in ourhead- be it a pentagon or a chiliagon-, than simply understanding itsproperties. Imagining their mental images, if at all possible, takesa lot of effort. And this is another major distinction betweenimagination and intellect; imagination requires more mental effort toproduce than intellect.

Thus, there are things that take usconsiderable mental effort to imagine, yet little to no effort tounderstand. Insummary, imagination and understanding are different. There arethings that can be understood, but not imagined. There are thingsthat can only be distinguished by understanding, but not byimagination. And of those things that, we believe, can be imaginedand understood, imagining them is much more difficult thanunderstanding them.

After establishing these premises andconclusions, we can anticipate the next argument Descartes will makeconcerning imagination and intellect.