

# Free descartes renes wax experiment essay sample

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Until his death in 1650, Descartes published philosophical ideologies and concepts with emphasis on the functioning of the universe as one. His second meditation dubbed the “ Wax Argument” finds its basis in the perceptions of reality as opposed to those of an illusion. This is due to the fact that as a person, one is not only capable of thinking and has a will but has the ability to imagine and use senses to perceive reality. These senses are in turn connected by one mind that is the center of thought. According to Descartes, despite all these facts, the senses are still untrustworthy in the logic that a person’s imagination can cripple the “ I” aspect of an individual therefore creating a puzzle in the identification of one’s person. This paper aims at identifying Descartes’ use of wax to in his second meditation to identify the makeup of a person and in turn, identify the flaws in the same. Descartes refers to a piece of wax in his hand in the meditation. At first, readers are made aware of the properties of the wax as he perceives it and manipulate it in his hand. According to the philosopher, the bit of wax has color, can be tasted as it has just been retrieved from the honeycomb, smells of the flowers’ nectar used to make it, can be touched as he is doing so in the meditation and is finally sound omitting as he strikes it and squeezes the same (67). These properties change when the wax is exposed to heat because it melts and loses the previously mentioned properties. However he as the experimenter and the readers as ware it is the same piece of wax that was in his hand before. Aside from the aforementioned attributes, Descartes

adds that the wax is flexible enough to extend and can also be moved.

His understanding of the wax is however limited to the physical attributes he discovers while holding it before exposure to fire. That entailing movement and the discovered flexibility as wax take a different shape depending on its environment is however elusive to his knowledge. Descartes claims that since it cannot be determined on what shape the wax will take or the place to which it can be moved then his senses and imagination cannot perceive the wax any more. It can be argued that the wax possesses a form of perpetuity in the possible nature and location it can take. In addition, the dimensions of wax change as its state of matter alters. It possesses greater capacity when in liquid than when in solid form.

With regard to his perception of the infinity properties of the wax, Descartes writes that, “ I realize that the perception of the wax is neither a seeing, nor a touching, nor an imagining. Nor has it ever been even though it previously seemed so rather it is an inspection on the part of the mind alone” (68). His argument finds basis in the fact that his imagination cannot grasp the true concepts of perpetuity or infinity as the mind can clearly confirm this through reason. The use of reason is at this point the only confirmation to his argument as the readers’ very grasp of understanding originates from the mind’s reasoning. In other words, unlike the use of senses that can be altered and deceived, the mind’s judgment of the situation helps one reach certainty. It can be argued that, Descartes’ drawing on the use of mind to observe the wax is applicable to other physical factors in life as humans are better placed to understand through reason than they are through their senses.

The first flaw in the wax experiment finds premises in the wax itself.

Descartes' description of the wax at the beginning of the meditation (67) differs from his findings after exposing it to fire (68). As the arguments on the flexibility and indefinite shape the bit of wax takes upon melting are made, it is evident that the mediator has a different form of wax by the end of his experiment. It is safe to state that with the wax losing its physical properties the substance that originated after exposure to the fire was in fact not the same as the original version. In addition, in its liquid form, the wax could have merged with other substances that lay on the surface therefore completely distorting the physical attributes that were first observed in the same. Therefore is it the same wax in this case depends on what the readers understanding of wax is at this point of meditation.

His ideas of disregarding the physical properties of the heated wax only leaves the questions posed in the previous paragraph unanswered. Yes the wax had physical properties at the beginning of mediation but it still had some physical attributes at the end though they were different. It is safe to state that the aspect of this flaw finds basis in the fact that Descartes assumes that the wax remains the same by the end of the experiment. In addition, as he realizes that the wax becomes flexible and has an indefinite shape, he had put his senses to use. Otherwise how else would he have realized that the wax no longer had a sweet smell or that it had lost its shape? The mind reaches the conclusion but the senses formed the right assertions for it to reach said conclusion.

Next is his perception of the mind to which he refers to as "I". According to the mediator, one cannot be certain of the existence of "I" but through ones

senses, thought is generated and in turn confirms the existence of the “ I”. In other words, through the perceptions of the senses, a person ratifies the presence of the mind as thought gives existence of the same (63). As a result, Descartes argues that the mind is better known than the body. This is evidenced by his argument that, “ I now know that even bodies are not, properly speaking, perceived by the senses or by the faculty of imagination, but by the intellect alone and that they are not perceived through being touched or seen” (69). In other words, it is according to him, easier to ascertain the presence of the mind than that of the body.

The flaw in this part of the argument finds basis in the nature of the mind and that of the body in the eyes of Descartes. It can be argued that the mediator’s main argument here lies in the fact that “ I” can better understand the mind than the world outside the mind, a world that would require senses to perceive and understand. While the perception of the world through senses allows knowledge on something new about the body, the “ I” has yet to tell something new about the mind other than its existence. Therefore, according to the Cogito that dictates the ideologies of “ I”, it is only possible for the mind to tell that one does indeed exist as a person and can think. It would be better if Descartes took time to elaborate on the concepts of the mind being better known than the body.

Finally yet importantly, in his years as a philosopher, Descartes and his equivalents emphasized on the use of mathematics and statistics to draw conclusions in theories and made observations. The wax experiment is merely based on the observations made by one person who in turn went ahead to publish his views without back up from any plausible data. In fact,

this went against Descartes' ideologies that gave emphasis on numerical verification as evidence to knowledge. It can be argued that the experiment is in itself an attempt to explain the unexplainable and was in addition the entry point to the other meditations published by the philosopher.

In conclusion, it is safe to say that the wax experiment and the arguments entailed in the second mediation do have faults. This can be attributed to the lack of irrefutable evidence to the claims made in the same. In turn, it can be argued that the use of wax to describe the awareness of reality by the human body and mind was ill founded as after all while humans do breath and think, wax lacks these qualities.

## **Work Cited**

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