

Chapter 4

Descartes, Third Meditation

4.1 Homework

Readings :

- Descartes, Meditation III
- Objections and Replies:
 - a) Third O and R: CSM II, 132; 127-8.
 - b) Fifth O and R: CSM II, 195-97, 251.
 - c) First O and R: CSM II, 66-7, 74-5.
- BGD6 (Nadler) – James and Ralston

Study Questions :

1. What is the “general rule” for finding the truth that Descartes accept? how does he argue for the validity of the rule?
2. Why does Descartes need to prove the existence of God?
3. Descartes spends a lot of time discussing the various of ideas we have? What is the point of this discussion? That is to say, how is he going to use the results of this discussion? Explain how, according to Descartes, ideas must have causes.
4. Try to reconstruct Descartes’ argument for the the existence of God based on the fact that he possesses an idea of an all perfect, infinite being.

5. What do you think of Descartes' argument in favor of the claim that the idea of God is an innate idea?

Text Analysis : From top of p.33 "I should therefore like to go further and inquire whether I myself, who have this idea, could exist, if no such being existed" to first paragraph p.35 "Altogether then, it must be concluded that the mere fact that I exist and have within me an idea of a most perfect being, that is, God, provides a very clear proof that God indeed exists."

Tips:

- Try to recognize the structure of a traditional argument for the existence of God
- Try to locate the original contribution of Descartes
- Pay special attention to the notion of preservation of being in the proof.

1. Give an analysis of the passage
 - Describe the point the author intends to make
 - Describe the argument that the author is using to establish the point (give an outline)
2. Formulate 3 questions for further discussion about the passage – The questions might be of *any* of the following types:
 - a. Clarification request: if you think the author is not clear on one claim he makes: justify your request and propose different ways in which this claim could be interpreted
 - b. Argument request: if you think the text contains an unsupported claim: justify your request and propose a way (or a direction) for a possible argument.
 - c. Objection: if you think that one of the author's claim is false: give an argument for this!

4.2 Descartes: Third Meditations

Introduction :

- Title: “The Existence of God”

—→ *Two questions: Why does Descartes need to prove the existence of God? Is he going to achieve his goal?*

A criterion of truth :

- The criterion: Clear and Distinct perceptions of the mind

- The argument:

1. I am certain that I am a thinking thing
2. There is nothing that assures of this proposition is true except a clear and distinct perception of it
3. Hence, I can be certain of everything that I perceive in the same way, that is, clearly and distinctively

- From this, I do not get the existence of the external world, but I get the rational truths back

- Question: what are clear and distinct ideas?

From the *Principle of Philosophy*, I, 45:

- clear: a perception is said to be clear if and only if it is manifest to an attentive mind – clarity is to be contrasted with obscurity

- distinct: a perception is said to be distinct if and only if it contains only one clear thing when considered by an attentive mind – distinction is to be contrasted with confusion

Need for a truthful God :

- Clear and distinct ideas: truth as long as I attend to it

- Evil genius otherwise

First proof of the existence of God :

Question: Why does Descartes take his ideas as a starting point for the demonstration of the existence of God?

- Thoughts: ideas / volitions and judgments

- Three kinds of ideas: innate / adventitious / fictitious

First Try – Ideas as modes of thought (26-27)

Can we prove the existence of something than our mind based on the fact that we possess ideas that we believe are images of external objects?

- Reasons to believe that my ideas are images of external objects:
 1. Nature's teaching /
 2. Independent of my will /
 3. Obvious likeness

- Reasons to believe that the above reasons are bad reasons:

1. Nature \neq Natural light
2. The possibility of an unknown faculty
3. Counter-evidence: some ideas do not accurately mirror their objects

→ *Thus, it is not thanks to the adventitious ideas that we are going to escape our solitary certainty of our own existence as a mind.*

Second Try – Causes of the objective reality of ideas pp. 27-32

We cannot show the existence of anything else than us as the cause of the fact that we possess ideas – *“they all appear to come from within me in the same fashion*

Could we differentiate ideas according to their object??

- Distinction: material, formal, and objective reality of ideas
- Causal Principle applied to the objective reality of ideas: “in order for a given idea to contain such and such objective reality, it must surely derive it from some cause which contains at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality in the idea.”

→ *Consequence: It will be sufficient for me to find an idea which has more objective reality than I have formal reality to be certain that something else than me exists.*

- My idea of God has more objective reality than I have formal reality: *The idea of an infinite substance*

- Therefore: God exists.

- Objections and Answers:

1. The infinite as the negation of the finite – Answer: idea of the infinite is prior
2. The idea of God could be materially false – Answer: idea of God is clear and distinct
3. The idea of God is not clear and distinct – Answer: I understand God even if I don't grasp all of it (??)
4. Potential perfection and perfectibility – Answer: actual infinite

→ *Discussion Question: The originality of Descartes' proof*

Second Proof of the existence of God :

Your job!

The idea of God is innate :

- Argument
- Question: what exactly does it involve to claim that we have innate ideas?

Conclusion :

- Clear and distinct ideas as a criterion of truths
- Assessing Descartes' proof for the existence of God
- Innate ideas
- Have we managed to get outside of the prison of the mind?