

Chapter 5

Descartes, Fourth Meditation

5.1 Homework

Readings :

- Descartes, Meditation IV
- Objections and Replies:
 - a) Fifth O and R: CSM II, 218-9, 259 – point 3
 - b) Sixth O and R: CSM II, 280-1, 291-2 – sixth difficulty.
- BGD9 (Della Rocca) – Amy and Ben

Study Questions :

1. Why does Descartes need a theory of error?
2. What is the cause of our errors according to Descartes?
3. How does Descartes reconcile the two ideas that 1. we can make mistakes and 2. God is not a deceiver.
4. What is the sure method for finding the truth according to Descartes?

Text Analysis : pp.291-2 – reply to sixth difficulty, from beginning to “Hence the indifference which belongs to human freedom is very different from that which belongs to divine freedom”.

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!

5.2 Descartes: Fourth Meditations

The need for a theory of error :

A clear road to the knowledge of the universe? :

- God not a deceiver
- Hence, my faculties are reliable, and the road true knowledge is open to me
- *Mission accomplished?*

The problem of the possibility of error :

How can we consistently hold that

1. God is the all powerful all good cause of our ideas;
2. We can make errors?

Traditional arguments quickly rehearsed / rejected : Descartes' take on traditional arguments

Errors are not mere defects : distinction defect / privation

The ways of God are incomprehensible : a surprising conclusion!

The big picture : how satisfactory for Descartes?

The understanding and the will are not cause of error :

- 2 faculties involved in my errors: will and intellect
- The understanding by itself is not cause of errors
- The will by itself is not a cause of errors

Conclusion: Neither the will nor the understanding are by themselves causes of error. My faculties are perfect in themselves.

We err whenever we apply our will beyond our understanding :

- Mechanism of error
- Rule for avoiding error and finding truth

God not responsible for my errors :

- no complaint about finite understanding
- no complaint about infinite power of the will
- Could have God made me better? Is Descartes' reply convincing?

Freedom, indifference and autonomy :

“the more I incline in one direction, ..., the freer is my choice.”

“indifference ... is the lowest grade of freedom”

→ *What do you think??*