

4.4 God and Certainty

4.4.1 Readings and Study Questions

- Readings: Third Meditation
- Study Questions:
 1. What is the “general rule” for finding the truth that Descartes accept in the third Meditation? 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?
- Optional Reflexion Question: To what other arguments does Descartes ‘proof’ of the existence of God make you think? Do you find this kind of argument convincing? Why? Why not?

4.4.2 Introduction

What we have after the Second Meditation:

- The certainty that I exist every time I focus my attention on it and for that time only
- That my mind participates in the entirety of my knowledge: contrary to the scholastic view that knowledge comes from the senses, Descartes claims that even our sensations are products of a process of the mind – judgment of understanding.

The third Meditation's title is : "Concerning God, That He Exists". So, we should expect a proof of the existence of God in this meditation. The question we want to keep in mind is: why is Descartes so concerned about proving the existence of God? Why does it come just after the proof of my existence by the Cogito? Knowing Descartes, it is not in order to please the Church men. Instead, the *order* in which he proceeds should follow the *proper* method. It might be more important for us to understand why Descartes needs God than to figure out whether or not he has proved the existence of God.

4.4.3 A criterion of indubitable truth and the necessity to prove that God is truthful

Clear and Distinct Perceptions of the Mind

- Here is Descartes' argument for taking "as a general rule that everything that I very clearly and very distinctly perceive is true" (34):
 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

→ *So, truth takes nothing more than this: a clear and distinct perception.*

- Clear and Distinct:

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

Note that distinct perceptions are a subset of clear distinctions: a perception must be clear in order to be capable of being distinct. The converse does not hold: a perception can be clear but not distinct. For

example, my perception of some pain in my body is very clear, but confused (*Principle of Philosophy*, I, 46).

Clear and distinct ideas are characterized by:

1. their capacity to resist to doubt
 2. their cognitive “luminance” – they are “enlightning”
- What truths that were rejected in Meditation I can we hope to get back with the above criterion of truth?
 - neither the existence of particular bodies the existence of which I took from sense perception
 - nor even the idea that there are external objects (even if not as I see them)

Why are perceptions of external objects from the senses are not clear and distinct? Because, as Descartes has argued in his analysis of the piece of wax, nothing in what I know of external objects is clear except the ideas in my mind.

- Thanks to the criterion of the clear and distinct perception, Descartes hopes to get the most simple of the rational truths back:

But what about when I considered something very simple and easy in the areas of arithmetic or geometry for example that two plus three make five and the like? Did I not intuit them at least clearly enough so as to affirm them as true? (34, column 2)

- Why the most simple only? Because our criterion works as the instantaneous intuition of the certitude of a simple proposition. Anything that requires some deductive reasoning does not qualify for a clear and distinct perception (See *Rules*, 3, for the distinction between intuition and deduction).

- But how is that even possible? How come the objection of the Evil Genius would not apply here?

The need for a truthful God

- Look closely at paragraph three: it all depends on where you put your attention:
 - If you look into your self and perceive the mathematical truth, then they are as indubitable as the Cogito
 - If you turn your attention to the objection of the Evil Genius, then they become doubtful

→ *Note the extreme importance of the notion of attention for Descartes.*
- This means that:
 - we do have found a criterion of truth
 - but certainty lasts only as long as your attention is focused on the rational truth considered
 - considering then the objection of the evil genius, then a “very slight and so to speak metaphysical doubt” remains.

→ *The main point is: evident certainty is reliable just because of the actual presence of its content to the attentive mind. For this reason, it is the truth of an instant only.*
- So, from the first truth we found, we have derived a criterion of truth: anything else that I perceive in the same way is just as true as the Cogito. This imply that, just as the truth of the Cogito:
 - it will be a subjective certainty;
 - it will last just for so long as I perceive it.

→ *The conclusion is then: we need to prove that there is no evil Genius. For, up to now, all we have is that we are certain of the rational truths only for the time of our perception of them.*

If we want more than truth that are actually certain, that is, if we want *eternal truth*, then the proof that no evil Genius is deceiving us is required.

... I should at the first opportunity inquire whether or not he can be a deceiver. For if I am ignorant of this, it appears I am never capable of being completely certain about anything else. (35, first column)

Completely certain means here: certain for good, and not only at the moment of the intuition

4.4.4 Ideas

In order to reject the hypothesis that an all powerful evil genius is constantly deceiving him, Descartes wants to prove that 1. God exists; and 2. He is truthful (Note that this is sufficient to reject the existence of the Evil Genius, but not necessary: it would have been enough to prove that no all powerful god exists for example).

The proof of the existence of God is going to rely on the question of the nature and the origin of our ideas.

Remember that we are stuck in our selves and our subjective minds. In other words, we are stuck with our ideas. The question is whether there is anything in these ideas of ours which allow us to accept anything else that ourselves as existent. It would be nice, for example, if the fact that we have ideas of something implied that that something exist outside ourselves. We have thus to see is what can be the origin of our ideas.

So, Descartes starts with a classification of our ideas and a discussion of their possible origin(s). As usual, we start with our common beliefs (our prejudices) and apply a rational method of doubt.

Classification of ideas

- Restriction of the notion of ideas to representations, by contrast to volitions, affections and judgments
- Error: only in judgments. Ideas, volitions and affections are always true by themselves. It is only when I make a judgment that I can err. The “principal error” is to judge that my ideas are mirroring external objects.
- Three kinds of ideas:

Innate – give the understanding of a simple truth and, or so I believe, are coming from my own nature – Ex: thing, truth, thought

Adventitious – are about and, or so I believe, are coming from the external objects – Ex: noise, sun, fire

Fictitious – are about imaginary things and, or so I believe, are coming from my imagination – Ex: sirens and hyppogriffs

I have no proof that adventitious ideas are reliable images of external objects

Both innate ideas and fictitious ideas seem to come from myself: the most common hypothesis is that **adventitious ideas find their origin in external object.**

If this could be proved, then we would be able to escape the “prison of the self” in which we are stuck right now: we could derive the existence of tons of external things on the basis of the fact that we have ideas of these things.

This is, however, the hope that Descartes is going to destroy first. Here is how:

- Let see first what our justifications are for our prejudice:
I believe that adventitious ideas are images of external objects because:
 1. it seems natural to believe so – note that you do not have to teach it to kids!
 2. adventitious ideas do not depend on my will;
 3. it seems obvious that the effect of external objects are similar to these external objects
- Descartes argues against 1, 2 and 3 in the three paragraphs that follow:
 1. spontaneous inclination is not natural light but impulses which I know can make me err – for example, it might be good for you to be scared if you hear a big noise without any apparent origin, but such survival kit is no where near a criterion for knowing that something dangerous is around;
 2. I could possess an unknow faculty which does not depend on my will and produces the ideas of external objects. From the fact that they do not depend on my will it does not follow that they originate in external objects: simple counter examples are the ideas that come from the natural impulses (fear, joy etc.): they do not depend on my will, but they could originate in myself only.

3. I have many examples of ideas that do not resemble their objects. For instance, the idea I have of the sun from the sense is different from what I know the sun is (by my understanding of science).

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

Reality and causes of ideas

- Distinction: material, formal, and objective reality of ideas
 1. Material reality of ideas:

Ideas are all the same as modes of thought. Their material reality, what they are made of is just “thought”.
 2. Formal reality of ideas:

Ideas differ as for what they represent: an idea of a dog has not the same form as an idea of a man. The formal reality of an idea correspond to its content, or its object.
 3. Objective reality of ideas: the reality of their object
 - Claim: the more real are the object of an idea, the more “real” is the idea itself
 - Example: the idea of a substance (a body) has more objective reality that the idea of a accident (its color)

In what sense? The objective reality of an idea is its reality as a representation of an object.
 4. Extreme example: the idea of God is the highest degree of objective reality
- Causal Principle– appeal to natural light: “there must be at least as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that same cause”
 - Corollary: nothing more perfect can proceed from the less perfect
 - Conclusion: application of the causal principle to ideas: not only the actual stone must have a cause which has at least as much perfection as the stone, but also the idea of the stone in me must have a cause which has at least as much perfection as the stone.

- 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. In other words, all I have to do in order to prove that I am not the only thing existing is to find an idea which content has something I do not have myself. For according to the above, I cannot be the cause of such idea.

—→ *The main point in the foregoing analysis is that Descartes applies the causal principle to the objective reality of ideas. Various ideas differ in so far as they represent various things. These various represented things are not nothing. They have various degrees of reality. So, the principle of causality applies here as anywhere else: the reality of the objects represented in our ideas must have causes, and such causes must be powerful enough to produce these ideas.*

IMPORTANT NOTE: BE CAREFUL: Descartes is not saying that there exists external objects in the world corresponding to my ideas and which have different degrees of reality. The reality he talks about is the *reality of the idea*, not of the object. But it is the *objective reality of the idea*, i.e. the reality of the idea due to how much reality would have the corresponding object if it was real.

This could seem like a very strange idea. But let's bear with Descartes.

4.4.5 God is the cause of my idea of God

God only can be the cause of my idea of God

- Catalog of my ideas:
 1. idea of God
 2. corporeal and inanimate things
 3. angels, animals or men
- Of which of these can I be the cause?
 1. I can be the cause of my ideas of angels, animal or men, by composition;
 2. I can be the cause of my ideas of corporeal things – of both the unclear and the clear and distinct parts of these ideas;

3. In passing: notion of material falsity: ideas are not formally false (as such, they are just what they are, neither true or false), but they can be materially false, that is, they can represent as existent something which is not;
4. It remains only the idea of God.

- The idea of God:

I understand by the name of “God” a certain substance that is infinite independent, supremely intelligent, and supremely powerful, and that created me along with everything else that exists – if anything else exists. (38, col. 1)

- none of these characteristics could be proceeding from me alone: *a finite substance (me) cannot have created the idea of an infinite substance.:*

For although the idea of substance is in me by virtue of the fact that I am a substance, that fact is not sufficient to explain my having the idea of an infinite substance, since I am finite, unless this idea proceeded from some substance which really was infinite (38, col. 1)

- Conclusion: “Thus, from what has been said, I must conclude that God necessarily exists”

Objections and Answers

- Objection 1: I produce the idea of the infinite as a negation of the finite
Answer: it goes the other way: it is because I can conceive of the infinite, that, by comparison, I understand my finitude.

Thus the perception of the infinite is somehow prior in me to the perception of the finite; that is, my perception of God is prior to my perception of myself. (38, col. 1)

- Objection 2: the idea of God is materially false (it does not represent anything), so that it can be produced out of nothing
Answer: no materially false ideas are clear and distinct, but the idea of God is clear and distinct

- Objection 3: the idea of god is not clear and distinct, for I cannot comprehend the infinite

Answer: it is enough to conceive God as possessing all perfections to have a clear and distinct idea

- Objection 4: I am perfectible: I could be more perfect than I think and have *potentially* all the perfections that I conceive being actually in God. Indeed: I already notice that I am perfectible (my knowledge grows) and I cannot see any limit to it. This potentiality to infinity could be the origin of my idea of the infinite.

Answer: my potential perfections are not the perfections I conceive in God

1. that my perfections increase is already a proof of my imperfection
2. from the fact that my perfections can indefinitely increase, it does not follow that they can ever be actually infinite
3. re-formulation of the causal principle for the objective reality of an idea: cannot be caused by potential reality in the cause

→ *The idea of God is the idea which allows me to get out of my lonely subjectivity. The idea of God is the idea of the actual infinite, of which I cannot be the source, since I am myself infinite. This argument relies on an important distinction between the actual infinite and the potential infinite.*

NOTE: the distinction between the *actual infinite* and the *potential infinite* is important in mathematics. Even if it has been somewhat forgotten today, the notion of actual infinite has been difficult to deal with. It is only with Cantor (beginning 20th) that mathematics manage to deal with it. It remained a matter of controversy for the constructivists. For more details, see for example: <http://www.math.vanderbilt.edu/~schectex/courses/thereals/potential.html>, or the articles “Constructive Mathematics” and “Intuitionism in the Philosophy of Mathematics” in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy”.

4.4.6 God is cause of my existence

Descartes’ cosmological argument

From whom if not from God could I derive my existence?

- Candidates:
 1. myself
 2. my parents or something less perfect than God
- Myself: No, for otherwise I could not conceive that I am imperfect
 Objection: I have always existed: it takes as much power to be brought into existence as it does to remain existent at every instant
 The existence of God only assures that I keep existing through time
- Something less perfect than God: regression to infinite: need for an ultimate cause
- Several causes together, each of which possesses some of the perfections that I conceive together in God: no for I have the idea of the unity of these perfections

—→ *Descartes offers here a version of a classical argument, the so-called “cosmological argument”, which derives the existence of God as the first, necessary, cause of a chain of secondary, contingent causes. More can be said about cosmological arguments*

Cosmological arguments: Main idea

Reference: Bruce Reichenbach, “Cosmological argument”, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

The main idea of cosmological arguments is to answer the typical metaphysical question: **Why is there something rather than nothing?**

These arguments stem from humans’s **wonder about the very existence of the universe**. Contrast this with the wonder about the world’s order, as in the design argument.

- The **main assumption** underlying such wonder is that **the world’s existence is not necessary**: it is **contingent**. Things can be or not be. Nothing exists necessarily in our universe.
- **A second assumption** for most of these arguments, is that **change is ruled by causality**. In simple words, things change because of the cause of the change. If we apply this principle to the passage from ”not

be” to ”be”, or the ”coming to be”, then, anything that comes to be come to be from a cause.

—→ *Thus, two main assumptions:*

1. The world is contingent – it does not exist necessarily
2. Causal Principle: every contingent being has a cause of its being.

Cosmological arguments: History

The cosmological arguments have a long history. Descartes is by no means original here. And he is not the last one to use it either !

Aristotle: unmoved mover necessary to explain constant movement of the universe

Religious tradition: Christian or Islamic:

“**Aquinas**” **argument** (Thomas Aquinas (1225 - 1274) formulates it later): impossibility of an essentially ordered infinite regress: the world must have a **first cause**

Kālam argument: temporal impossibility of infinite regress (the world must have had a **beginning**)

Enlightenment: Leibniz and Clarke: add to this the Principle of Sufficient Reason (The world have a **sufficient cause**). For example in Leibniz’ *Monadology*:

32. [Our reasonings are grounded upon the principle] of sufficient reason, in virtue of which we hold that there can be no fact real or existing, no statement true, unless there be a sufficient reason, why it should be so and not otherwise, although these reasons usually cannot be known by us.

Criticism by Hume and Kant in the 18th century – mainly because these arguments are based on an illegitimate use of reason, that is, a use of reason beyond the secured realm of experience.

Still a matter of controversy in the 20th century.

Cosmological arguments: Structure

Reichenbach's sketch of the argument:

1. **From experience:** A contingent being exists (a contingent being is such that if it exists, it can not-exist)
2. **Causal Principle:** (Principle of Causation or Principle of Sufficient Reason): This contingent being has a cause or explanation of its existence.
3. The cause or explanation of its existence is something other than the contingent being itself.
4. **Principle of Excluded Middle:** What causes or explains the existence of this contingent being must either be solely other contingent beings or include a non-contingent (necessary) being.
5. **Contingent beings alone cannot cause or explain the existence of a contingent being.**
6. Therefore, what causes or explains the existence of this contingent being must include a non-contingent (necessary) being.
7. Therefore, a necessary being (a being which, if it exists, cannot not exist) exists.

Possible "beings" to fill in Premise 1:

- things in motion (Aristotle)
- caused events (Aquinas)
- contingent existing things (Aquinas)
- whole series of effects (Duns Scotus: this is Demea's)

The key to failure or success of the argument: Premise 5. Premise 5 states what counts as a good explanation or cause for contingent being. If the requirement is strengthened to a requirement of a sufficient reason, and if the contingent being we are talking about is the universe, then the cause must be:

- **outside** the contingent universe, and distinct from any part of the universe.
- **supernatural** (no natural cause is satisfactory) – intentional for example

Cosmological arguments are subjects to many criticisms. Besides Premise 5, one obvious target is the Causal Principle.

4.4.7 The idea of God is innate

It will be recalled that we have distinguished three possible origins for our ideas: innate, adventitious, or fiction. Now the idea of God is:

- not adventitious: it never presents itself to me unexpectedly
- not a fiction: I cannot do whatever I want with it
- so it must be innate – mark of the author in me

It remains to see whether God is a deceiver or not. Given that He is all perfect, that should not be possible, but we might need further argument.

4.4.8 Conclusion

The third meditation gave us:

- A general rule for immediate truth: clear and distinct ideas
- “Proofs” that God exists, which only ensures that these ideas remain true when I am not focusses all the force of my attention on them
- We’ve had two proofs:
 1. From the objective reality of ideas and the causal principle: the objective reality of the idea of the infinite cannot originate in anything else than something infinite
 2. From my contingent existence and the causal principle: the chain of existing contingent beings requires a first, non-contingent cause – call it God.

Now, if we can show that God is not a deceiver, we’ll be assured that our clear and distinct ideas remain true even when we don’t focus our attention on them.

4.5 God and Error

4.5.1 Readings and Study Questions

- Readings: Descartes, Fourth Meditation
- Study Questions:
 1. What is the cause of our errors according to Descartes?
 2. How does Descartes reconcile the two ideas that 1. we can make mistakes and 2. God is not a deceiver.
 3. What is the sure method for finding the truth according to Descartes?
- Optional Reflexion Question: What do you think of Descartes' claims that "the indifference that I experience when there is no reason moving me more in one direction than in another is the lowest grade of freedom"?

4.5.2 A clear road to the knowledge of the universe?

- We have argued that:
 - God exists as an all powerful all perfect Being
 - God is the cause of the ideas that I can conceive clearly and distinctly
- As said at the end of the previous meditation, it only remains to say that God is not a deceiver. Here is Descartes' argument for this:
 - God has all the perfections
 - To deceive is a sign of an imperfection
 - Hence God is not a deceiver
- So, we have finally restored the eternal truth of everything that we can conceive clearly and distinctly: God has put the truth in our minds.
- *But how come that we can make mistakes then?* Should not we have found these beautiful truths in our mind right away when we were kids? How come that we found ourself full of unjustified prejudices at the beginning of the first Meditation?

What is at stake: Descartes' theory could be reduced to absurdity!!!

- This Meditation is thus about this: how can we consistently hold that
 1. God is the all powerful all good cause of our ideas;
 2. We can make errors.
- NOTE: Descartes is going to be extremely cautious here because of the potential reaction of the Church. It is clear that these precautions are not the most important part of Descartes' reasoning. So, we will not pay too much attention to it. That said, if you read closely, you should notice that he never uses the classical arguments of the scholastic tradition directly: he uses them in order to introduce his own, more philosophical, arguments.

4.5.3 Errors as mere defect?

First option: errors as mere defects?

Descartes consider the scholastic explanation for error, only to reject it as unsatisfactory. Here is how the classical argument from the scholastic tradition goes:

- I have not only the idea of the infinite perfection, but also of the negation of it: nothingness. But this is not a positive idea: only the idea of me not being as perfect as God, the idea of my finitude.
Because I am finite, I just do not have all the perfections there are. In short: I am not God.
- My ability to err thence does not come from a “faculty of error” which God would have put in me, but from the fact that I am not all perfect. So, that I can err just comes from the fact that I am not all perfect, not all knowing.
- To complain about it would be similar to complaining about the fact that I do not have wings. But there is nothing wrong with not having wings, it is just that, as a finite creature, I do not have every perfection.

Errors are not mere defects

Main point: This is unsatisfactory: errors are not a mere defect, there are privations.

- Descartes makes the distinction between:
 1. **defect**: something I do not have just because it is my nature not to have it (e.g. wings)
 2. **privation**: something I should have but I do not have
- The fact that I can err is not only a defect, a lack of something which does not pertain to me, it is a privation: a lack of something that I should have.

It is something not to have a faculty (the faculty to fly for example), it is another thing to have a defective faculty (imagine a bird whose abilities to fly would not always work well - say its wings would get jammed)

—→ *Descartes maintain that, since we possess the faculty of knowledge, we should have it in a perfect way: either it works perfectly, or God would not have given it to us.*

It is an important distinction for the following: the challenge of the 3rd Meditation is to prove that *we are not deprived because we can err.*

- The basis of the argument is that: *a perfect creator does a perfect work in whatever he decides to craft.*

SO: It would be contradictory to hold that a perfect creator gave me an imperfect faculty.

Refutation of other scholastic arguments

The two following paragraphs contain some very classical arguments from the Church:

1. The ways of God are incomprehensible;
2. You have to look at the big picture: what seems imperfect from our point of view might be more perfect from the point of view of the whole.

- But notice how Descartes uses these arguments: he does not consider them as compelling or satisfactory – for the discussion does not end here – but instead, he concludes from them that *we should never look for final causes in proper scientific method*: this is an attack against the Aristotelian science and a defense of the new scientific method.

—→ *Descartes has rejected the traditional explanation of human errors as unsatisfactory. There is a real problem about whether God has provided me with an imperfect faculty. If that's true, then we're back in square one: clear and distinct ideas are not a sure way to reach the truth. The remaining of Descartes' theory of error is the theory of the mechanics of error. The stakes are high. His point will be to show that: our errors do not come from imperfect faculties but from our misuse of perfect faculties.*

4.5.4 The understanding and the will are not cause of error by themselves

Here come the serious arguments. Descartes maintains that errors originate in a “combination of two causes”: understanding and will. Which means that each of them, by themselves, are not causes of error

- Two powers in me:
 1. understanding – power of knowledge
 2. will – power of free choice
- The understanding by itself is not cause of errors:
 - ideas by themselves are true (It will be recalled from the 3rd Meditation that only judgments bring error: ideas, as such, are beyond truth and falsehood)
 - my understanding never deceives me: whatever is clear manifests itself as clear to me, whatever is confused manifests itself as confused to me;
 - my understanding is limited, but not faulty: I may not ideas about every thing in the world, but all the ideas I possess are true.
- The will by itself is not a cause of errors:
 - the will is the most perfect part of myself

- the will is what makes me similar to God (*Not the understanding, despite what the tradition would have us believe*) – that is, even if the domain on which and the power with which God can apply his will is much bigger than mine, my will and his remains essentially of the same nature

- true freedom is *not* mere indifference – indifference is the lowest degree of liberty

- on the contrary, freedom is increased and stronger whenever my choice is enlightened either by natural knowledge or divine grace

—→ *True freedom requires no arbitrariness:*

This is paradoxical: Descartes maintains that to be leaning toward one option out of two because of what you know makes you more free than to choose outside of any other consideration. For him, that your choice depends on your understanding does not diminish your freedom. By contrast, it is when you are indifferent, that is, when you have no rational reason to lean over one choice instead of the other, that you are not free: because then the slightest external circumstance will decide for yourself.

—→ *We are the most free whenever we truly want to follow a knowledgeable decision.*

We could think that evidence and reasons are constraints on our freedom. But it is not, according to Descartes: we always have the choice to not do what we know should be done. True freedom comes on top of mere indifference, it is enlightened, it is to choose whatever we know is best.

- Conclusion: being perfect and making me God-like, the will is not cause of error

- Conclusion: Neither the will nor the understanding are by themselves causes of error.

4.5.5 We err whenever we apply our will beyond our understanding

- Descartes' main claim: Errors arise from a misuse of our will, that is, our using our will to choose – to affirm or to deny – outside the limited bounds of our understanding.
 1. Our understanding is limited in its domain: we do not possess ideas about everything
 2. Our will is unlimited in its domain: we can choose to assent or to reject anything, however knowledgeable we are in the matter. No bounds.
 3. Whenever you find yourself to choose – to assent or to deny – outside the domain of your understanding, you are likely to fall into error.
 4. More precisely, whenever you find yourself in a state of indifference, you are likely to make the wrong choice
- So, we have a map of human's mind and the possibility of error:
 1. It is sufficient for me to consider only clear and distinct ideas in order to never risk to fall into error
 2. NOTE that 1 is not NECESSARY because there could be other ways for me to find the truth than clear and distinct conception
 3. It is necessary and sufficient for me to use my power to assent and deny over other things than what I conceive very clearly and distinctly to be at risk of fall into error

4.5.6 God is not responsible for our errors

- Descartes concludes from the above that my imperfection – my ability to err – does not depend on God:
 1. I cannot complain about a finite understanding

It is just part of my nature that my understanding has a limited domain. That said, within its legitimate domain of application, my understanding works perfectly

2. I cannot complain about my will

That it is infinite is a perfection. Plus it is essential to the will: there is no way the will can be diminished or made bigger: it is one and one single thing.

3. My imperfection, i.e. my ability to err, is not coming from God, who gave two perfect faculty, each perfectly working in their domains.

- He considers then an objection: God could have made me more perfect than I am in giving me the means to avoid mistakes (implement a rule in my mind: do not use your will outside the domain of your understanding for example)

His answer : a diverse word is more perfect than a word in which all the creature are the same

Does this stand?

Not so much as stated above of course: something with imperfect parts is not more perfect than the same thing with all his parts perfect.

- One way to understand:
 - If God has limited my freedom, then I would have lost my highest perfection
 - Freedom goes in one piece: you cannot take parts of it without taking it out altogether
 - I am more perfect if I get the chance to choose the right thing to do than if I was doing it just by my nature.

→ *In that sense, my infinite freedom, even if it may cause me to err, allows me to be responsible of my perfection – arguably a higher perfection than natural perfection of animals who do just what their nature dictates to do.*

4.5.7 Conclusion: A definite method to true knowledge

With the theory of error, the fourth Meditation has offered us a sure path to truth:

- The “method”, literally the “road”, to certain knowledge:

Today I have learned not merely what I must avoid so as never to make a mistake but at the same time what I must do to attain the truth. For I will indeed attain it, if only I pay enough attention to all the things that I perfectly understand, and separate them off from the rest, which I apprehend more confusedly and more obscurely. I will be conscientious about this in the future

- Note that all depends on our will : we have to “firmly adhere to the resolution never to give judgment on matters whose truth is not clearly known to me”
- The main point is thus: I have now the means to discover all the truths that are within the reach of my understanding.