

MEDITATIONS FOUR & SIX ON WHAT WE CAN KNOW

I. THE CAUSAL PRINCIPLE

A. Something can't come from nothing

1. Taught by reason

B. The more perfect can't come from the less perfect

1. What does perfect mean?
 - a) THE CONSERVATION OF REALITY
 - b) NOW IT IS INDEED EVIDENT BY THE LIGHT OF NATURE THAT THERE MUST BE AT LEAST AS MUCH [REALITY] IN THE EFFICIENT AND TOTAL CAUSE AS THERE IS IN THE EFFECT OF THAT SAME CAUSE. (18)

C. The causal principle applies to objective reality as well

1. The cause of the idea must be as perfect as what the idea is about
2. So my idea of a stone must be caused by something at least as real as the stone
3. But that a particular idea contains this as opposed to that objective reality is surely owing to some cause in which there is at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality contained in the idea. For if we assume that something is found in the idea that was not in its cause, then the idea gets that something from nothing. (18)

D. The causal principle again

1. Formal reality causes objective reality
2. Idea of a fish
 - a) MUST BE AS MUCH REALITY IN CAUSE OF IDEA AS THERE IS IN A FISH
3. Idea of God
 - a) MUST BE AS MUCH REALITY IN THE CAUSE OF THIS IDEA AS THERE IS IN GOD

II. DESCARTES' STRATEGY

A. Use causal principle to go from idea to thing

1. I can know what ideas I have
2. But what exists other than me and my ideas

B. What is the cause of my idea?

1. In particular, can I be the cause of my ideas?
2. Do I have enough reality (perfection) to cause the idea in question?

C. The kinds of ideas

1. Ideas of corporeal things , i.e. Ideas of fish, chairs, planets
2. Ideas of spiritual things , i.e. Ideas of myself, angels, God

D. Modes vs. substances

1. Which of these ideas could I cause in myself?

- a) **CORPOREAL THINGS**
- b) **I HAVE IDEAS OF VARIOUS CORPOREAL THINGS**
- 2. Could I be the cause of these ideas?
 - a) **COLOR, ODOR, SOUND, OBSCURE AND MATERIALLY FALSE**
 - b) **VERY LITTLE PERFECTION REQUIRED TO CAUSE**
 - c) **DURATION PRESENT IN ME**
- 3. If I have a property I can cause ideas about that property
- 4. Descartes' muddle about space
 - a) **AS THINKING THING I HAVE NO SPATIAL PROPERTIES**
 - (1) Ideas of extended things
 - (2) Extended things have spatial properties
 - b) **HOW CAN I CAUSE AN IDEA OF SOMETHING HAVING A PROPERTY I DON'T HAVE?**
 - (1) I am a substance however
 - (2) And so can cause ideas of substance
- 5. Spiritual things
 - a) **MYSELF**
 - (1) Of course my idea of myself can be caused by myself
 - b) **OTHER PEOPLE**
 - (1) My idea of other people could be derived from myself
 - c) **ANGELS**
 - (1) Just like me only more so
 - (2) So idea could be caused by me
- 6. No certainty of existence
 - a) **MY IDEAS OF ALL THESE THINGS COULD DERIVE FROM MYSELF**
 - b) **THUS, THE CAUSAL PRINCIPLE DOES NOT REQUIRE THESE THINGS TO EXIST**
 - c) **SO I STILL CAN'T BE CERTAIN OF THEIR EXISTENCE**
 - d) **WHAT ABOUT MY IDEA OF GOD?**

E. The idea of God

- 1. The divine attributes
 - a) **OMNISCIENCE –KNOWS EVERYTHING**
 - b) **OMNIPOTENCE –CAN DO ANYTHING**
 - c) **AND EVERY OTHER PERFECTION**
 - d) **AND NOTHING ELSE—NOTHING FROM THE BIBLE OR OTHER TEXTS**
 - e) **I UNDERSTAND BY THE NAME "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. (30)**
- 2. What causes my idea of God?
 - a) **NOT MYSELF**

- (1) I'm finite and God's attributes are infinite
- (2) The infinite objective reality cannot come from my finite formal reality
- (3) Moreover even if I'm potentially infinite God is actually infinite
- b) HAS TO BE GOD**
- c) INDEED ALL THESE ARE SUCH THAT, THE MORE CAREFULLY I FOCUS MY ATTENTION ON THEM, THE LESS POSSIBLE IT SEEMS THEY COULD HAVE ARISEN FROM MYSELF ALONE. THUS, FROM WHAT HAS BEEN SAID, I MUST CONCLUDE THAT GOD NECESSARILY EXISTS. (30-31)**

III. REVIEW OF THE ARGUMENT

- 1. There must be as much formal reality in the cause as objective reality in the idea**
- 2. My idea of God is objectively infinitely perfect in every way**
- 3. Only God is formally infinitely perfect in every way**
- ∴ God must cause my idea of God**
- ∴ God exists**

A. Some objections

- 1. Can a finite creature really have an idea of an infinite thing?
 - a) INFINITY REQUIRED FOR RECOGNITION OF IMPERFECTION**
- 2. Is the idea of God materially false?
 - a) IT IS THE MOST CLEAR AND DISTINCT IDEA WE HAVE**
 - b) BECAUSE IT IS MOST PERFECT**

B. Another argument

- 1. What is the cause of my existence?
 - a) NOT MY IDEA OF ANYTHING BUT MY EXISTENCE**
- 2. I didn't cause my own existence
- 3. I would have given myself more perfection
- 4. Some other being caused me
 - a) WHAT CAUSED THAT BEING**
 - b) ETC, ETC.**
- 5. The only self-caused being must be perfect, i.e. God

C. Summing up: God exists

IV. THE CARTESIAN CIRCLE

A. Cartesian Circle I – A Problem

- 1. Starts Meditation Three with the assumption that clear and distinct perceptions are true
 - a) AND THUS I NOW SEEM ABLE TO POSIT AS A GENERAL RULE THAT EVERYTHING I VERY CLEARLY AND DISTINCTLY PERCEIVE IS TRUE. (24)**
- 2. Uses this assumption in justifying the causal principle

- a) **NOW IT IS INDEED EVIDENT BY THE LIGHT OF NATURE ...(28)**
- 3. So Premise 1 of our argument for the existence of God seems to be true only in the case that God exists.
 - a) **OUR CLEAR AND DISTINCT PERCEPTION COULD BE CORRUPTED IF THERE IS AN EVIL DEMON**
 - b) **A PERFECT GOD IS THE ONLY WAY TO UNIVERSALLY DEFEAT THE EVIL DEMON**

B. The Cartesian circle II – A Solution?

- 1. The existence of a benevolent God guarantees the truth of our c&d ideas
- 2. But our assurance of God's existence depends on the truth of our c&d ideas
- 3. Assuming what you set out to prove is a bad thing

C&D \emptyset God \emptyset C&D

- 4. Another approach to God's role in Descartes' system
 - a) **YOU CAN'T DOUBT WHAT YOU C&D PERCEIVE AT THE TIME YOU PERCEIVE IT**
 - (1) Can't rationally doubt
 - (2) But you can doubt the truth of c&d perception in general
 - (a) *Maybe reason will lead you to contradict yourself*
 - (b) *Maybe an evil demon is tricking you*
- 5. Reason is self-validating
- 6. That the light of nature shows you that God exists gives you a guarantee of the **coherence** of what reason tells you
- 7. Attempt to certify that **you will never have to change your mind** if you always trust your c&d perceptions
- 8. But what does certainty have to do with truth
 - a) **NEVER HAVING TO CHANGE YOU MIND IS NOT THE SAME AS ALWAYS BEING RIGHT**
 - b) **WHAT MATTERS IS STABILITY AND COHERENCE NOT "ABSOLUTE TRUTH"**
 - c) **DON'T WANT TO BELIEVE ANYTHING THAT COULD BE FOUND OUT TO BE FALSE**

What is it to us if someone should perhaps imagine that the very thing of whose truth we have been so firmly persuaded appears false to God or to an angel and that as a consequence it is false speaking absolutely? What do we care about this absolute falsity, since we by no means believe in it or even have the least suspicion of it? For we are supposing a persuasion so firm that it can in no way be removed—a persuasion, therefore, that is exactly the same as the most perfect certainty

- 9. The circle disappears if all we get out of our argument is no reason to doubt our belief in the existence in God. If, it turns out by chance, that the conclusion of our argument corresponds to a perfect being in the world, then we have a guarantee about all clear and distinct perception as well.

V. WHERE WE STAND

A. I think, therefore I exist.

B. God Exists

1. I'm not perfect enough to have caused my idea of him.
2. What is my cause? Something greater than me. What's the cause of that? Something greater than it. And so on...? Until the Perfect Infinite which is uncaused or its own cause.

C. God is incapable of deception

D. God would also not have given me a fault faculty.

E. So why do I make mistakes

VI. THE PROBLEM OF ERROR

A. Method, Reality and Error

1. Reason and the final answer to scepticism
2. The problem of error
 - a) **IF GOD IS NOT A DECEIVER WHY DO WE MAKE SO MANY MISTAKES?**
 - (1) Can't deny that we make mistakes
 - b) **MISTAKES ARE BAD**
 - (1) God is good
 - (2) God is powerful
 - (3) How could a good and powerful god allow bad things to happen
 - c) **THE LIMITS OF UNDERSTANDING**
 - (1) The range of our will exceeds our understanding
 - (2) Our judgement (will) is unlimited
 - (a) *We can form opinions on the truth of anything*
 - (b) *A kind of perfection*
 - (3) Our understanding is limited
 - (a) *There are things we cannot c & d perceive*
 - d) **FREE WILL IS THE SOURCE OF ERROR**
 - (1) Error results when we make judgements regarding matters beyond the limits of understanding
 - (a) *We form judgements about things we cannot clearly and distinctly perceive*
 - (2) God has given us a method to uncover the limits of understanding
 - e) **SO OUR ERRORS ARE NOT HIS FAULT**
3. God's plan is mysterious
 - a) **GOD COULD HAVE MADE US SO WE NEVER MAKES MISTAKES**
 - b) **WE DO MAKE MISTAKES**
 - c) **GOD IS GOOD**
 - d) **SO OUR WEAKNESS MUST BE A PART OF A GREATER PERFECTION IN THE UNIVERSE AS A WHOLE**

B. Descartes Method

1. Trust only what reason tells you to believe
 - a) **DON'T RELY ON THE SENSES**
2. Throw out whatever can be doubted
 - a) **CERTAINTY IS ALWAYS THE GOAL**
3. Believe only what you clearly and distinctly perceive
 - a) **OTHER RULES AN AID TO THIS**

VII. MIND AND BODY ARE DISTINCT /THE NATURE OF MIND AND MATTER

A. The essence of matter is extension

1. Material objects have only spatial properties
2. Matter is by nature divisible

B. The essence of mind is thought

1. Mental stuff is not extended
2. Mind is by nature indivisible

C. Mind and matter are wholly distinct

D. The Relation between Mind and Body

1. We are essentially thinking things
 - a) **WE CAN CONCEIVE OURSELVES EXISTING WITHOUT OUR BODIES**
 - b) **WHAT WE CAN CLEARLY AND DISTINCTLY CONCEIVE IS POSSIBLE**
2. We do have bodies
 - a) **MANY OF OUR FACULTIES INVOLVE EXTENSION**
 - b) **OUR BODIES AND MINDS INFLUENCE EACH OTHER**

E. Descartes Legacy

1. Dualism
 - a) **MIND AND BODY ARE DISTINCT AND WHOLLY DIFFERENT**
2. Rationalism
 - a) **REASON AND NOT THE SENSES ARE THE ROUTE TO KNOWLEDGE**
3. Mechanism
 - a) **MATTER CAN BE UNDERSTOOD COMPLETELY IN TERMS OF EXTENSION AND MOTION**

VIII. AN END TO DOUBT

A. I exist I am a thinking thing

B. God exists

1. God is not a deceiver

C. Matter exists

D. The External World

1. The causal argument again
 - a) **SENSORY IDEAS ARE NOT SUBJECT TO MY WILL**
 - b) **I DO NOT CAUSE THEM**
 - c) **GOD IS NOT A DECEIVER**

