Descartes’ Meditations

Suppose Descartes has proven his own existence as a thinking thing:
Can he prove anything else with absolute certainty?
Mathematics? His body? Other physical objects?
God!

Descartes’ Meditations

Traditional Arguments for God’s Existence:

John Wesley: “My heart was strangely warmed.”
But perhaps it was heartburn, rather than God.
Argument from Design: Only God could create a world this complex.
Perhaps the complexity is imaginary.

Descartes’ Third Meditation

• Can we prove the existence of anything outside ourselves, using as a basis only those things in us that we know with absolute certainty?
• How could we? The ideas might have been produced by a dream, or an evil demon....
• Do we have some ideas in us that couldn’t have been produced in those ways?

Descartes’ Argument:

• I have an idea of an infinite, perfect God.
• Nothing short of an infinite, perfect being could have come up with that idea and produced it in me.
• ∴ There must be an infinite, perfect being.
• An infinite, perfect being is (by definition) God.
• ∴ There must be a God!

Clever! But is it Sound?

Descartes’ Argument:

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Is it valid?

Are the premisses true?
Descartes’ Argument:
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Is it valid?
I have an idea of a unicorn, Therefore, there is a unicorn???

Descartes’ Argument:
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• ∴ There must be an infinite, perfect being.

Are the premisses true?

Descartes’ Argument:
• I have an idea of an infinite, perfect God.

Is that true?
Atheists don’t have that idea. That doesn’t matter as long as Descartes has it. How does Descartes know his idea is of an infinite, perfect God, rather than a really big, really impressive God?

Descartes’ Argument:
• I have an idea of an infinite, perfect God.

Is that true?
How does Descartes know his idea is of an infinite, perfect God, rather than a really big, really impressive God? How could he tell the difference?

Descartes’ Argument:
• I have an idea of an infinite, perfect God.

Is that true?
How does Descartes know his idea is of an infinite, perfect God, rather than a really big, really impressive God?
I might be wrong about things outside myself, but I know what my own ideas are!

Descartes’ Argument:
• I have an idea of an infinite, perfect God.
• Nothing short of an infinite, perfect being could have come up with that idea and produced it in me.

Descartes (p. 28): “There must be at least as much reality in the...cause as in the effect of the cause.”
Did he come up with it on his own, or did he get it from somewhere else?

Descartes’ Adequacy Hypothesis:

- Ideas with a certain amount of objective reality can only be produced by things with at least that much formal reality. (p. 28)
- What is “objective reality”?
- What is “formal reality”?

“The Great Chain of Being”

- Medieval Hierarchy of Reality
- *Formal Reality*: A measure of things according to how sophisticated the thing is:
  - God
  - Angels
  - Humans
  - Animals
  - Plants
- Matter:
  - Machines/artifacts
  - Stuff

“The Great Chain of Being”

- Medieval Hierarchy of Reality
- *Objective Reality*: A measure of ideas according to how sophisticated their object is:
  - The idea of God
  - The idea of Angels
  - The idea of Humans
  - The idea of Animals
  - The idea of Plants
  - The idea of Matter:
    - The idea of Machines/artifacts
    - The idea of Stuff

Descartes’ Adequacy Hypothesis:

- Ideas with a certain amount of objective reality can only be produced by things with at least that much formal reality.
- An idea of an infinite, perfect being could only be produced by an infinite, perfect being.
- Do you agree?

Evaluating Descartes’ Adequacy Hypothesis:

- Where did I get my idea of an infinite, perfect God?

Sigmund Freud
(1856-1939)
Evaluating Descartes’ Adequacy Hypothesis:

- Where did I get my idea of an infinite, perfect God?
- Project and idealize my own father’s characteristics:
  - Tries to love me \( \Rightarrow \) All loving.
  - Sort of helps me \( \Rightarrow \) All powerful.
  - Keeps track of me \( \Rightarrow \) All knowing.
  - Etc.

- Where did I get my mathematical idea of infinity?

- Generalize from finite things?

Descartes’ Argument:

- I have an idea of an infinite, perfect God.
- Nothing short of an infinite, perfect being could have come up with that idea and produced it in me.

\[ \therefore \text{There must be an infinite, perfect being.} \]

- Is it valid? Yes.
- Are the premisses true? Second?

Church wasn’t happy with Descartes’ Proof!

- Why not?
- Proof removes the need for:
  - faith in the Bible.
  - authority of the Church.
- Reason is powerful but dangerous.
Descartes’ Structure of Belief:
- What does he know with \textit{absolute certainty}? 

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}

\node (I) {I exist (as a thinking thing)};
\node [above of=I] (G) {God exists};
\node [above of=G] (Q) {?};

\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}