

Descartes' Meditations



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!



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?**

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- ∴ There must *be* an infinite, perfect being.

Is it valid?

Are the premisses true?

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Is it valid?

I have an idea of a unicorn,
Therefore, there is a unicorn???

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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?



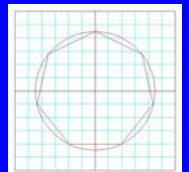
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Is that true?

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!*

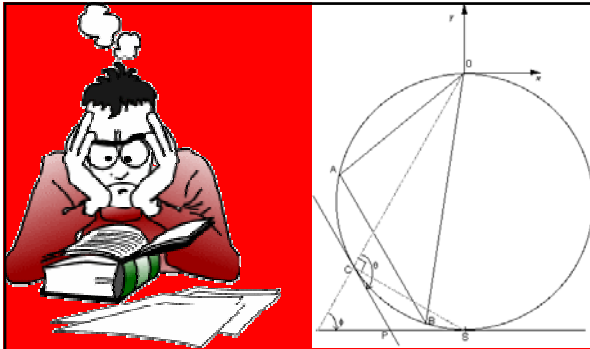
Is that right?

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:

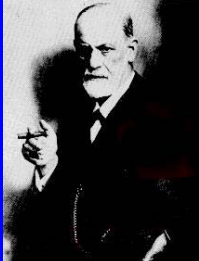
- Ideas with a certain amount of objective reality can only be produced by things with at least that much formal reality.
- An idea of an infinite, perfect being could only be produced by an infinite, perfect being.
- Do you agree?

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 $\Rightarrow \Rightarrow \Rightarrow$ *All* loving.
- Sort of helps me $\Rightarrow \Rightarrow \Rightarrow$ *All* powerful.
- Keeps track of me $\Rightarrow \Rightarrow \Rightarrow$ *All* knowing.
- Etc.

Evaluating Descartes' Adequacy Hypothesis:

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

I came up with it on my own?

Where did I get my *mathematical* idea of infinity?



Generalize from finite things?

Evaluating Descartes' Adequacy Hypothesis:

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

Can a *finite* being come up with the idea of an *infinite* thing?

Can an *imperfect* being come up with the idea of a *perfect* thing?

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- \therefore There must *be* an infinite, perfect being.

Is it valid? Yes.

Are the premisses true? Second?

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- \therefore There must be a God!

Could the evil genius be infinite & perfect?

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 *absolute certainty*?

