Descartes’ Meditations

Descartes’ Structure of Belief

What does he know with absolute certainty?

God exists

I exist (as a thinking thing)

Why try to prove God exists?

• Intellectual interest.
• Divine Epistemological Certifier:
  – Are any of my beliefs accurate?
  – God wouldn’t let me be radically deceived.

Divine Epistemological Certifier

• If God wouldn’t let me be radically deceived, then how come I make mistakes in my perceptions?
• The mistakes are my fault, not God’s (p. 39).
• They are not mistakes of perception, but of jumping to a conclusion.

Divine Epistemological Certifier

• God certifies my perceptions when I don’t jump to conclusions:
• If I “clearly and distinctly perceive” that something is so, then it necessarily is so (pp. 46 & 24!).
• What does it mean to “clearly and distinctly perceive”?

Descartes’ Second Proof of God’s Existence:

• Why a second proof?
• The concept of God includes all perfections.
• Existence is a perfection.
• ∴ God has existence.
The “Ontological” Argument

St. Anselm
(1033-1109)

Descartes’ *Second* Proof of God’s Existence:
- The concept of God includes all *perfections*.
- Existence is a perfection.
- ∴ God has existence.

Is this a good argument?

Descartes’ *Second* Proof of God’s Existence:
- The concept of God includes all *perfections*.
- Existence is a perfection.
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What does “perfections” mean?
A positive quality to a maximal degree.

Descartes’ *Second* Proof of God’s Existence:
- The concept of God includes all *perfections*.
- Existence is a perfection.
- ∴ God has existence.

Is it a valid argument?
Are the premisses both true?

Descartes’ *Second* Proof of God’s Existence:
- The concept of God includes all *perfections*.
- Existence is a perfection.
- ∴ God has existence.

The concept of God includes existence. =
God exists?

Descartes’ *Second* Proof of God’s Existence:
- The concept of God includes all *perfections*.
- Existence is a perfection.
- ∴ God has existence.

Does the concept of God include all perfections?
That’s what we mean by “God”.


Descartes’ Second Proof of God’s Existence:

• The concept of God includes all perfections.
• Existence is a perfection.

∴ God has existence.

Is existence a perfection?
What does that mean?

Perfect Vacation Spot

• Does this prove the perfect vacation spot exists?
• No: Since the “perfect” vacation spot doesn’t have all perfections.
• Only God has all perfections, so this only works to prove that God exists.
• Rats!

Descartes’ Second Proof of God’s Existence:

• The concept of God includes all perfections.
• Existence is a perfection.

∴ God has existence.

A perfection is a positive quality to a maximal degree.
But is existence a quality?

Perfect Vacation Spot

• Warm, breezy
• Not crowded
• Inexpensive
• It exists

What does that add to the picture?

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)
Existence is not a quality:

- “There is a small, red ball.”
- In Logic: $(\exists x)(Sx \& Rx \& Bx)$.
- $S$ (small), $R$ (red), and $B$ (being a ball) are all qualities, but not $\exists$ (existence) is not.

Descartes’ Second Proof of God’s Existence:

- The concept of God includes all perfections.
- Existence is a perfection.
- $\therefore$ God has existence.

Is this a good argument?

Why did Descartes give this second proof? Doesn’t need the Adequacy Hypothesis.

Divine Epistemological Certifier

- Having established the existence of God, the divine epistemological certifier, we can then go on to establish the existence of other things that we clearly and distinctly perceive.
- Such as???
- Perhaps mathematics? Logic?
- What about the proofs of God’s existence?

Can we be confident of the proofs of God’s existence?

- The Problem of Evil:
  - God is all-powerful (Omnipotent)
  - God is all-loving (Omnibenevolent)
  - God is all-knowing (Omniscient)
  - There is evil in the world.
  - (Those can’t all be true at the same time.)
  - $\therefore$ A perfect (“Omni”) God does not exist!

Can we be confident of the proofs of God’s existence?

- Why should we be confident of the proofs?
- Because I can clearly and distinctly perceive that they are sound.
- But that is an assurance of their accuracy only once we’ve established that a perfect God exists.
- We don’t know that a perfect God exists until we’ve given the proof.
- The Cartesian Circle.

Can we be confident of the proofs of God’s existence?

- We can be sure of the accuracy of our clear and distinct perceptions once we’ve proven God exists.
- But we can’t prove that God exists without relying on the accuracy of our clear and distinct perceptions.
- Perhaps we really can’t get beyond our own existence as a thinking thing when we set such stringent requirements for ourselves.
Divine Epistemological Certifier

- You need a divine certifier to establish the proof that there is a divine certifier.
- It looks like we’re spinning our wheels!

"Buy low and sell high!"

But...
How do I know when it’s low, and when it’s high?
Useless advice.

Divine Epistemological Certifier

- If I “clearly and distinctly perceive” that something is so, then it necessarily is so (p. 46).
- More problems:
  - Do I always know with absolute certainty when I have clearly and distinctly perceived something?
  - Dow Financial Certifier: “Buy low and sell high!”

No! Pp. 24-5, & 47.