

Since intellectuals were being engulfed by a skeptical crisis challenging all their basic assumptions & beliefs in philosophy, science, & theology in view of the wealth of new ideas, new discoveries, changing life-situations (Renaissance, Reformation, & co, & Counter-Reformation, & growing interest in skepticism (Montaigne cf. Sextus Empiricus), Descartes sought to build a secure foundation for knowledge and one that is compatible with the two main claims of religion: existence of God & human soul. So, he uses skeptical argument as an instrument of analysis.

“Clear” means “that which is present & apparent to an attentive mind” (in the same way that objects are clear to our eyes); (2) “Distinct” refers to “that which is so precise & different from all other objects that it contains within itself nothing but what is clear.” “Natural Light” is a kind of inner illuminator that seems to reveal intellectual truths when we turn our attention to them: Cartesian circle in *Meditation 3*: I’m sure God exists, so...I’m sure my clear and distinct perceptions are truth, so... the circle is avoided simply by recognizing that the apprehension of the infinite (God’s existence) is contained in the intuition of one’s own existence as finite (ex. concave/convex).

1st Meditation:

Resolution to systematically doubt everything I can possibly doubt in order to see whether anything may then be left which will resist doubt. If there is, then I may be able to proceed to find other certainties & thus construct a system on solid foundations.

Withholding Policy: Sort out opinions & assent to (believe) opinions that are not dubious & uncertain while withholding assent from dubious, uncertain opinions.

Descartes breaks with the past to give philosophy a fresh start; a radical approach:

“I should abstain from the beliefs in things which are not entirely certain and indubitable no less carefully than from the belief in those which appear to be manifestly false.”

2 Features of method stand out:

- (1) Heuristic device: It proceeds to answer problem by resolving the situation into a number of constituent elements or ideas; (2) Intended as method for any rational inquiry.

The Argument for Universal Doubt: 3 Stages of Systematic Skepticism:

- (1) Doubt sensory experience: individual sense perception for they have misled me in the past;
- (2) Dream Argument casts doubt on collectivesense of reality for when we sleep, we thinkwe are awake. There are no “conclusive indications” by which sleep & wakefulness can be distinguished.
- (3) Deceiver Argument cast down on our thought process; he can even deceive mathematical knowledge.

Belief-set at end of Meditation 1:
No assent to indubitable beliefs & doubt: (a) A Good god exists; (b) all propositions of sensory experience, physics, astronomy, medicine, arithmetic, & geometry.

2nd Meditation:

Cogito ergo Sum:
A. Discovery of a certain & unshakable truth.

After discarding traditional Scholastic-Aristotelian concept of a human being as a rational animal due to the inherent difficulties of defining “rational” & “animal,” he concludes that he is a thinking thing, a mind: “A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sense perception.”

Even a malicious demon can't deceive me into falsely believing that I do not exist. I can't doubt that I exist without also supposing that I really do exist. Therefore, I can be certain of my own existence merely from the fact that I'm doubting.

B. Wax Example:

- (1) Central point is that the mind is better known than body; (2) Issue is senses perceive qualities like its hardness, smell, & so forth. But as it is moved closer to fire, all these sensible qualities change:

“Look: residual taste is eliminated, the smell goes away, the color changes, the shape is lost, the size increases, it becomes liquid, and hot” (VII. 30).”

However, despite these changes, we perceive wax; it is still judged to be the same wax as before. To warrant this judgment, something that does not change must have perceived in the wax.

- (3) Three points established: (a) all sensation involves some sort of judgment (which is a mental mode); (b) what is unchangeable in wax is its extension, length, breadth, & depth are not perceivable by senses, but mind alone; (c) immaterial mental things are better sources of knowledge than extended things; don't rely on sense images as source for, or an aid, to knowledge.

Belief-set at end of *Meditation 2*:
Assent to (a) I exist; (b) I think, i.e., I doubt, will, imagine, perceive, etc; (c) intellectual priority; (d) mind priority. I doubt (a) a good God exists; (b) There are corporal [matter] things external to me; (c) I have a body; (d) I have a vapory soul; (e) sensory experience; (f) physics, astronomy, medicine, arithmetic, & geometry.

Third Meditation:

God exists & is not a deceiver. Thus, we are not deceived when we perceive things clearly & distinctly.

A. Summary:

(1) I am certain that I am a thinking thing; (2) I still doubt senses & intuition concerning math since God may have designed me so as to be deceived even about things which I seem most certain (3) Therefore before I can be certain of anything else I must investigate & discover whether God is a deceiver.

B. Preliminary Discussion of Ideas:

(1) I have ideas that are like images of things. The most common cause of error is the judgment that these ideas are similar to things that exist outside of me; (2) 3 types of ideas: Innate (ideas that originate in myself); planted in mind by God, can be examined, & set aside by will, but internal content can't be manipulated; Self-invented ideas or Fabricated ideas (ideas fabricated by my mind): mind not only invents them, but can control them so they can be examined & set aside at will; internal content can be changed; Adventitious Ideas: produced by something external to my mind). Unlike fabrications, they can't be examined, set aside, or manipulated by mind (e.g., sensory idea of heat next to fire).

C. 1st Causal Proof for God's existence from the fact that I have an idea of Him: I have an idea of aninfinite substance, independent, supremely intelligent, & powerful:

a. I am an imperfect being; b. I have the (prior) perception of the infinite in me by which I comprehend perfection; c. The idea of God true in the highest degree is absolutelyclear & distinct; d. The idea of God must have come from a source other than me; e. Thus, God exists. “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. I am a finite, unless this idea proceeded from something which really is infinite (31).”

Ideas are caused by something with at least as much formal reality [what X actually is], as represented in the idea for distinction between formal reality & objective reality [how X appears to us]. Descartes believes that a certain degree of objective reality must ultimately be caused by something with that degree of formal reality. If we trace the causal chain of being far enough we will find a cause with as much formal reality as the idea has objective reality.

Hierarchy of Being: Ideas of Substances: God, angels, humans, animals, plants, minerals, earth. At top of scale are considered more perfect than items toward bottom of scale. Ideas of things less perfect than myself can be wholly invented by me but ideas of things more perfect than myself cannot be wholly invented by me.

Substance: A think capable of existing independently, such as a rock or a person; **Accident:** a feature of substance, such as greenness, blueness, sweetness, heaviness, or warmth; **Mode:** Another attribute of substance, such as extension, movement, finite perception, or imagination.

D. 2nd Causal Proof for God's existence: The argument from my own existence. A cause more perfect than myself must be assumed to explain my coming into being & mycontinued existence. This cause must be God:

1. My own existence could be derived from myself, my parents, a being less perfect than God: (a) my existence is not derived from myself for I would lack no perfection yet I'm imperfect; (b) I depend on God to preserve me in every moment of my existence; (c) my existence is not derived from my parents, otherwise an infinite regress & thus no explanation; what cause me is also a thinking thing; (2) my existence is not derived from a being less perfectthan God for no explanation for the idea of God as a perfect, unitary, simple being in me; (3) My existencemust be derived from God. (4) Thus, God exists.

Fourth Meditation:

The Possibility of Error:

A. I know that God is not a deceiver & God created me along with all my capacities. I also know that I'm often in error. The error cannot be due to the correct operation of any faculty which God has created in me, for this would make God a deceiver. I must inquire, therefore, into how it is possible that I can error even though I'm the product of a benevolent God.

(1). Error is due to the concurrent operation of the will & intellect; (2) Error consists in the will, in its judgments, going beyond what the intellect clearly & distinctlyperceives to be the case; (3) God cannot be blamed for giving us a free or unlimited will which it is possible for us to abuse, & thereby, fall into error.

B. Thus, the way to avoid error is to refrain from judgment until our intellect sees the truth clearly & distinctly. Only make judgments that are clear and distinct. If you don't, then you will make mistakes when you choose to pass judgment on things what you do not fully understand. So the will should be restrained within the bounds of what the mind understands in order to avoid error. Refrain from making dubious judgments.

Belief-set at end of Meditation 4:

(1) I doubt (a) there are corporeal [matter] external to me; (b) I have a body & (c) a vapory soul; (d) sensory experience; (e) physics; (f) astronomy; (g) medicine; (h) arithmetic; (i) geometry. (2) I assent to the following: (a) I exist; (b) I think; (c) God exists; (d) God is not a deceiver; (e) clearly & distinctly perceive propositions are true; (f) restrain the will; (g) various metaphysical principles; I conclude (3) that what is false is (a) malevolent demon exists & deceives me; (b) God is a mere idea; (c) my knowledge potential is limited.

“I have reason to give thank to him [God] who has never owed me anything for the great bounty he has shown me, rather than thinking myself deprived or robbed of any of the gifts he did not bestow.”

Fifth Meditation:

A. Reflection on experiences of math & abstract concepts:

While the demon can make me hallucinate any sort of object that is not there at all, the demon can't make me see color, taste, texture, warmth, & scent without making me see size, shape, motion, & place. Thus, I find properties concerned with extension & duration: length, breadth, depth, size, shape, position, & movement.

(a) When I discover particular things about these properties, it seems as if I'm recalling something I already knew, something already within me; (b) although they seem to be already in me, I am not the source of these ideas: they have their own immutable natures which would be the same whether or not I existed, or whether there existssany object that corresponds to these ideas.

B. Ontological Proof for God's Existence:

1. We have a general principle that when I consider an idea, all that I perceive clearly & distinctly as pertaining to the things really does pertain to it. (2) I understand clearly & distinctly that necessary existence belongs to the essence of God; (3) Thus, existencereally does belong to the essence of God & thus, God exists.

Sixth Meditation:

I'm attached to a particular human body but my body is nevertheless distinct & separable, so that immortality is possible even though body is perishable.

Belief-Set at beginning of Meditation:
(a) I have a vapory soul; (b) there is a body that specifically belongs to me; (c) I could never be separated from this body; (d) all my ideas came from my senses; (e) objects resemble my ideas of them; (f) The senses instruct me as to the real characteristics of corporal things; (g) physics; (h) astronomy; (i) medicine.

A. Visual Imagination: VII: 72-8:

“It remains for me to examine whether material things exist... I know they are capable of existing, in so far as they are the subject matter of pure mathematics, since I perceive them clearly and distinctly” (VII:71).

(1) It is the visual imagination, not intellectual understanding that makes him aware of corporeal things... When he thinks of a triangle, he doesn't merely understand what a triangle is-a figure bounded by 3 lines. The Meditator sees in his mind's eyes the 3 lines as if they were present before me... A pentagon too can be both understood through its definitions as a five-sided regular polygon & visualized in the imagination. Some can be understood but not imagined- a chiliagon, a thousand-sided figure. An additional effort of the mind beyond that required in order to understand intellectual concepts is required in order for us visually to imagine objects. Thus, the fact that I can imagine many of these figures, that something exists in addition to my mind that is nonessential part of me, i.e., a body to which my mind is joined: VII:73.

The fact that I can visually imagine triangles, for ex., doesn't imply that that there exist something apart from my mind that enables me to experience mathematical imagery. While I can experience sensory images, sensations, etc., they are still doubtful. But before trying to decide definitively whether there are extra-mental bodies, he considers the soul's morality as a distinct existence, & its separability of mind & body (VII:78).

He decides imagination & sensory perception are not essential to him, as thinking is. If mind survives death of body, subsequent immortality will not involve imagination & perception but only intellectual understanding.

Mind is attached to a his body but are nevertheless distinct & separable. Thus, immortality is possible even if bodies in general are imperishable:

I know that everything which I clearly & distinctly understand is capable of being created by God so as to correspond exactly with my understanding of it. Hence the fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another is enough to make me certain that the two things are distinct... One the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it (VII:78).

B. Extramental corporeal things definitely exist, confirms that he has a personal body to which he is united, & learns that neither his sensations nor perceptions resemble their causes in external world (VII: 78-80).

C. Learns how body is organized, & discovers why his illness, like his errors, suggest that God is benevolent, & determines that he can proceed confidently in all the sciences (VII. 84-9).

D. The End of Doubt (VII: 89-90):

(1) The senses are generally to be trusted since they belong to a standardized signaling system; (2) Where a message is unclear or misleading, another sense can be brought to the aid of first (touch, for ex. can dispel optical illusions); (3) Memory must be fairly reliable, for I know that God has not made me a seriously defective epistem. project; (4) my intellect, when it doesn't jump to conclusions concerning what it doesn't perceive clearly & distinctly, is an admirable & trustworthy instrument.

The whole edifice of knowledge is built upon the foundation of Intuition and deduction:

(1) **Intuition:** “an intellectual activity or vision of such clarity that it leaves no doubt in the mind.” Whereas fluctuating testimony of our senses & imperfect creations of our imaginations leave us confused, intuition provides “the conception which an unclouded and attentive mind gives us so readily and distinctly that we are wholly freed from doubt about that which we understand.” Intuition gives us not only clear notions but also some truths about reality (e.g., I think, that I exist; sphere has a single surface truths that are basic simple, & irreducible. It is by intuition that we grasp the connection between one truth to another.

(2) **Deduction** is “all necessary inference from facts that are known with certainty.” Deductions are similar to intuition because they both involve truth. By deduction we arrive at a truth by a process, a “continuous and uninterrupted action of the mind.” By tying deduction so closely with intuition, which is a simple truth we grasp immediately and completely, deduction indicates the relation of truths to each other. Reasoning from a fact (not from a syllogistic premise) is at stake. So, remote conclusions are furnished only by deduction.