

Descartes' *Meditations*

Meditation I

Stages of doubt

- (1) Senses don't always deceive; they have in the past on occasion – when, for example, I've had to make judgment on distant or small things.
- (2) What about obvious things? E.g. that I am sitting here.
- (3) But what about the insane? Well, I "know" I'm not like them.
- (4) But, how can I tell if I am asleep or awake? [More later.] Perhaps I can't.
- (5) But even if that's the case, there seem to be obvious truths about existence – simple natures – that are indubitable (e.g. truths of mathematics).
- (6) But maybe God is a deceiver and even the most obvious truths are false.

The Dreaming Argument: A Reconstruction

- (1) I believe in the past I have dreamed that I was perceiving various physical objects at close range when it was false that I was really perceiving any such objects (when my experience was thoroughly delusory).
- (2) If I see no certain marks to distinguish waking experience of physical objects from dream experience when, I believe, I was deceived, I have reason to believe my waking experience too may be deceptive.
- (3) I see no such certain marks to distinguish waking experience from dreams.
- (4) Therefore, I have reason to suppose that waking experience too may be deceptive (thoroughly delusory).
- (5) But if I have reason to suppose my waking experience may be deceptive (thoroughly delusory), I have reason to doubt the existence of physical objects (for at present we are supposing this experience to be the best foundation for our belief in physical objects).

God as deceiver argument

- (1) I have always believed that God is good and omnipotent.
- (2) Despite his goodness, I'm deceived sometimes.
- (3) If it is consistent with his goodness and omnipotence for me to be deceived sometimes, why isn't it consistent with his goodness and omnipotence for me to be deceived all the time?
- (4) But if there is no omnipotent God, then we came to be through some imperfect means.
- (5) If through imperfection, then we can be deceived all the time.

Meditation II

The three main arguments of the second Meditation:

- (I) *cogito* (“I think”) argument: establishes the existence of the self
- (II) *sum res cogitans* (“I am a thinking thing”) argument: establishes the nature of the self
- (III) wax argument: shows that the self is known better than material objects

(I) What the *cogito* is **not**:

- (1) Whatever thinks, exists
- (2) I think
- ∴ (3) I exist

Rather, the point is that we are simply certain of the proposition “I exist” whenever we assert it or whenever we think. In that sense, it is indubitable and not because it is the conclusion of a syllogism.

(II) The *sum res cogitans* argument has gone through several stages, establishing increasingly powerful claims:

- (1) I think
- (2) I am a thinking thing
- (3) Thought is a property essential to me
- (4) Thought is the only property essential to me
- (5) I am essentially a thinking thing and not essentially material

Meditation III

Descartes' First Proof of the Existence of God:

Axiom: There is at least as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause.

Axiom: Something cannot arise from nothing.

Axiom: What is more perfect cannot arise from what is less perfect.

Definition: The nature of an idea is such that, of itself, it requires no formal reality except what it derives from my thought.

Definition: Objective mode of being belongs to ideas by their nature; formal mode of being belongs to the causes of ideas.

Definition: God is a substance that is infinite, independent, omniscient, omnipotent...

- (1) In order for a given idea to contain such and such objective reality, it must surely derive it from some cause which contains at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality in the idea.
- (2) There must be a cause which contains formally all the reality which is present objectively in the idea.
- (3) If the objective reality of an idea cannot come from me, it must come from something else.
- (4) The attributes of God are such that they could not have come from me.
- (5) They must have come from God; therefore, God exists.

Descartes' Second Proof of the Existence of God:

Axiom: The same power and action are needed to preserve something as would be needed to create something anew.

Axiom: There must be at least as much reality in the cause as in the effect.

- (1) Do I have enough power to preserve my own existence?
- (2) No – for I am simply a thinking thing; and if I had that power, I would know it. It must be a power outside me.
- (3) Since I am a thinking thing, what created me must also be a thinking thing and possess all the ideas of perfections of God.
- (4) Parents can't be responsible for creating and preserving me.
- (5) It must be God who created me and gave me the ideas of a perfect God.