

1 Foundations of knowledge

Descartes wants to find a certain ground for knowledge. Thus, he casts every belief he had into doubt that he can, and discovers that there is at least one belief that he cannot doubt. In the rest of the Meditations, he builds up from there.

Foundationalism: All justified beliefs are either foundational beliefs, or justified by a (chain of) foundational belief(s).

- What are the other options?
- The inverted pyramid of knowledge
 - Emphasis on certainty is so that the foundational beliefs properly support the nonfoundational beliefs
 - If foundational beliefs were uncertain, nonfoundational beliefs would be as well
 - But according to Descartes, we need certainty for knowledge

We learned in Meditation II that we can know with certainty all the contents of our consciousness. But these were only things like “I *seem* to be seeing a red thing”...

The Problem of Perception: How do we get from the contents of consciousness to things in the world? How do we know there’s an external world at all?

- The only things that we directly perceive are our own perceptual experiences (or “sense data”)
 - We all believe that our perceptions (usually) resemble the things in the external world that we are perceiving.
 - But how can this belief be justified?
- Tacit assumption: a **representational theory of perception** (or “indirect realism”)
 - There are these things called ideas that we directly perceive; ideas represent things in the world.
 - But then the skeptical worry arises.
- Descartes fills in this gap by arguing for the existence of God in Meditation III, in order to show that our clear and distinct ideas are veridical.

2 Arguing for God

Clear and distinct perception principle: Everything one clearly and distinctly perceives is true.

- Applied to external things?
- Applied to truth of mathematics, etc.?

Setting up the argument for God:

- Truth and falsity
 - Of ideas: properly speaking, it doesn’t make sense to call these mistaken or “false”
 - Of volitions or affects: likewise
 - Of judgments: these can be properly true or false

- "...the principal and most frequent error to be found in judgments consists in the fact that I judge that the ideas which are in me are similar to or in conformity with certain things outside me." (p.48)
- Formal versus objective reality
 - Formal reality is the reality a thing has in virtue of the sort of thing it is.
 - It can come in degrees.
 - For example, ideas have a small degree of formal reality, substances have the most.
 - Objective reality is the reality an idea has in virtue of the thing it represents.
 - In particular, an idea has just as much objective reality as the formal reality had by the thing it represents.
- Principle: There must be at least as much reality in the cause as there is in the effect.
- Formal versus material falsity
 - Formal falsity applies to false judgments.
 - Material falsity applies to ideas that represent non-things as things.

The argument for God has to do with the principle mentioned above, and the idea that there must be a cause of our ideas. Descartes thinks he can explain the cause of most of our ideas: of corporeal bodies, of duration and number, of angels, animals and men. But this leaves the idea of God.

First argument for God:

1. There must be at least as much reality in a cause as in its effect.
2. In particular, there must be at least as much reality in the cause of any of my ideas than in the idea itself.
3. If my idea has more reality than I have, then I cannot be its cause.
4. So there will be something distinct from me, that is the cause of my idea.
5. My idea of God is of an infinite being.
6. Since I am finite, my idea of God has more reality than I have.
7. Therefore, my idea of God is caused by something distinct from me, which must itself be infinite.

Second (?) argument for God:

1. I exist.
2. I don't have the power to sustain my existence.
3. Therefore something distinct from me must be the cause of my sustained existence.
4. This thing must either derive its existence from itself or from another.
5. If it derives it from itself, it must be God.
6. If it derives it from another, then consider 4 again, etc.
7. An infinite regress in causes (of my sustained existence) is impossible.
8. Therefore, there must be some ultimate cause that is God, for the reasons in 5.

Claim: The idea of God must be innate in me.

The Cartesian Circle