

## 1 Objections to Meditations III

## From the Meditations

- The perfections I'm attributing to God are in me potentially. (p.52)
- My idea of God is caused by several partial causes – perhaps different perfections from different beings. (p.53)

## Caterus, from the First Objections

My question is this: what sort of cause does an idea need? To answer that properly, we need first to answer another question: what *is* an idea? It is a thing that is thought of, considered as *existing representatively in the intellect*. But what does *that* mean? According to what I was taught, for x to 'exist representatively in the intellect' is simply for some act of the intellect to be shaped up in the manner of x. And this is merely an extraneous label that tells us nothing about x itself. Just as x's 'being seen' is someone's performing an act of vision, so also x's 'being thought of', or having representative being in the intellect, is some mind's having a thought – it is *just* a thought *in that mind*, and stops there. It can occur without any movement or change in x itself, and indeed without there being any such thing as x being represented. So why should I look for a cause of something that isn't actual, something that is simply an empty label, a non-entity?

## Descartes' Reply

Notice that he refers to 'x itself', as though x were located outside the intellect; and when 'x exists representatively in the intellect' is taken in *this* way, it certainly *is* an extraneous label pinned on x; because in *this* sense 'The sun exists representatively in Henri's intellect' says something purely about Henri, implying nothing about the sun. But that isn't at all what I meant. I was speaking of *the idea*, which is never outside the intellect; and in this sense 'existing representatively' simply means being in the intellect in the way that objects normally *are* there. For example, if someone asks me 'What happens to the sun when it comes to exist representatively in my intellect?', the best answer is that the only thing that happens to it is that it comes to fit an extraneous label ... and this *is* indeed a mere matter of some act of the intellect's being shaped up in the manner of an object. But when I am asked 'What is the idea of the sun?' and I answer that it is, the sun considered as existing representatively in the intellect, no-one will take this to mean the sun itself considered as having an extraneous label pinned to it. And now 'the sun exists representatively in the intellect' won't mean 'some act of the intellect is shaped up in the manner of the sun'; rather, it will signify the sun's being in the intellect in the way that its objects are normally there. I mean that the idea of the sun is *the sun itself existing in the intellect* – not of course existing there as a real blazing star, as it exists in the heavens, but existing representatively, i.e. in the way in which objects normally exist in the intellect. This way of existing is of course much less perfect than the way of existing of things that exist outside the intellect; but, as I did explain, that doesn't make it simply *nothing*.

## Hobbes, Third Objections (p.79-80)

## 2 Meditation IV: Truth and Error

"To begin with, I acknowledge that it is impossible for God ever to deceive me, for trickery or deception are always indicative of some imperfection. And although the ability to deceive

seems to be an indication of cleverness or power, the will to deceive undoubtedly attest to maliciousness or weakness. Accordingly, the deception is incompatible with God." (p.54)

Descartes thinks that because God is not a deceiver, he (Descartes) has a faculty of judgment that cannot be mistaken when used properly.

- This raises a problem, namely that many times he *is* mistaken.
- So of course Descartes says that those times, he is not using it properly.
  - Error is not something "real" that God is responsible for – that is, God is not the cause of error. Rather, it is a result of a *finite* faculty of judgment.
  - But why would God give man an imperfect faculty when he could give him a perfect one?
    - God is mysterious.
    - What's best isn't determined for an individual alone, but the entire world.
    - Biggest reason: free will

"Through the intellect alone I merely perceive ideas, about which I can render a judgment. Strictly speaking, no error is to be found in the intellect when properly viewed in this manner. For although perhaps there may exist countless things about which I have no idea, nevertheless it must not be said that, strictly speaking, I am deprived of these ideas but only that I lack them in a negative sense." (p.55)

- So first, we have an imperfect faculty of judgment that can be flawed when we judge our ideas.
- Second, since we have a perfectly free will, our choices lead us to have certain ideas but not others.
  - We're more free when we're moved towards one direction of action or judgment.

What is the source of our errors then?

- "...since the will extends further than the intellect, I do not contain the will within the same boundaries; rather, I also extend it to things I do not understand. Because the will is indifferent in regard to such matters, it easily turns away from the true and the good; and in this way I am deceived and I sin." (p.56)
- "...it is manifest by the light of nature that a perception on the part of the intellect must always precede a determination on the part of the will." (p.57)
- So, error consists in overextending the will to make a judgment when the intellect has not yet shown something to be the case one way or the other.
  - Descartes prescribes a way to avoid error, by remembering not to make a judgment on something that is not yet apparent.

### 3 Meditation V

Descartes: There are many things I can imagine clearly that are not dependent upon my mind, like what parts a thing has, or the nature of a triangle.

Third argument for God:

1. (I clearly perceive that) God is a being with infinite perfections.
2. Necessarily existence is a perfection.
3. Therefore (I clearly perceive that) God necessarily exists.

Objections?

- Mountain and valley (p.59)
- Hypothetical existence (p.60)

4 Back to the Cartesian Circle

So remember, the circle is this:

1. Descartes uses clearly and distinctly perceived premises to argue for the existence of God.
2. But he also uses the notion that God is not a deceiver to justify that whatever he clearly and distinctly perceives is true.

“...once I perceived that there is a God, and also understood at the same time that everything else depends on him, and that he is not a deceiver, I then concluded that everything that I clearly and distinctly perceive is necessarily true.”

Is there really a vicious circle?

- There is if Descartes uses a broad C&D principle to justify his premises in Meditation III – that is, if he relies on the truth of the general principle for the truth of the specific premises in question.
- But there are two non-circular interpretations favored in the literature:
  - The premises that are clearly and distinctly perceived are assented to because of our cognitive nature, even though they are dubitable.
    - This route escapes the circle because no general principle is being used in the Third Meditations.
  - The premises that are clearly and distinctly perceived are assented to because they are in a special class of propositions that even the atheist can be certain of.