

Meditation III

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

REVIEW- What is Descartes certain of so far?

- ▶ *Methodological Doubt*: If x is *doubtable* treat x as if it were false. This method is being used to ensure that foundation for beliefs and the new science will be *absolutely certain*.
- ▶ Sense data: *doubtable*. (The Dream Argument)
- ▶ The *a priori*: *doubtable*. (The Great Deceiver Argument)
- ▶ "I exist": *not doubtable*
- ▶ "I am a thinking thing": *not doubtable*

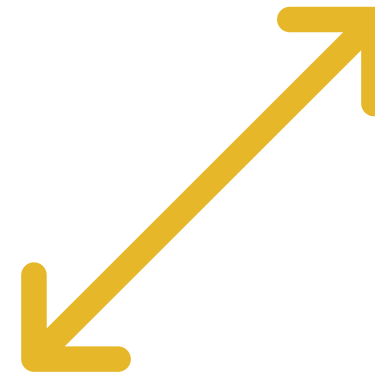
REVIEW- What am I?

- ▶ So, what is a thinking thing? “A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions.”
- ▶ So we are certain we *have* sense data, even if we aren't sure this corresponds to anything else.
- ▶ We are fundamentally *immaterial minds*. Our minds are known immediately (i.e. we have direct access to them)
- ▶ The *wax example* at the end of Meditation II demonstrates that to even have the idea of material stuff/substance, I need a mind to come up with the idea of material stuff/substance.

The “retreat into the mind”

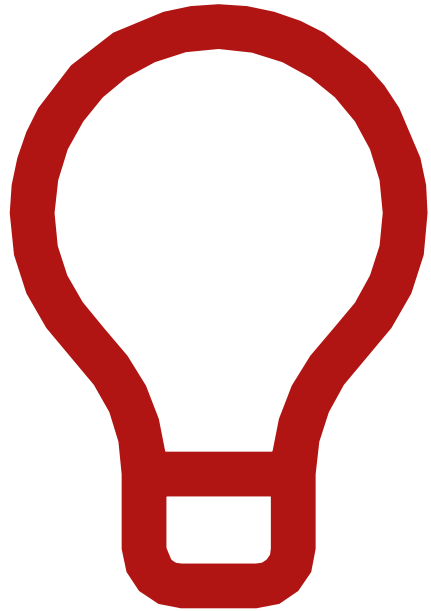


Descartes has, in a sense, “retreated into his own mind” to find something he can be certain of (i.e. that he exists and has perceptions.)



This sets up perhaps the fundamental problem in Western philosophy since the time of Descartes: What is the *relationship between our minds and the “external world”*?

Descartes' New Rule- *Clear and Distinct Perceptions*



- ▶ What does it mean to *know* something? Well, we had the rule of methodological doubt which guaranteed certainty, but Descartes is going to adjust this now in Meditation III now that we have a foundation.
- ▶ That is, Descartes says that if he certain about something (he is at this point), he must also know what it means to be certain about something!
- ▶ Descartes says that when something is certain, we have a *clear and distinct perception of it*. So, whatever we have a clear and distinct perception of must be true.

Where Do My Ideas Come From?



So, consider my idea of my copy of the *Meditations* on my desk. That is, my perception of it (notice my perception is located not “out there” where my book is, but rather in my brain (or *mind* if you are Descartes or a dualist!)).



Where did this come from, or in other words, what is the source of this perception?

Uh ... from the object I'm perceiving?

- ▶ So, the obvious answer to this question is that my “book” idea comes from ... the material object itself (i.e. the book out there).
- ▶ But, couldn't have come from my own mind? That's what happens when we are dreaming for example.

The Possible Sources of Ideas



Bottom of page 30 (CSM 38): “Among my ideas, some appear to be innate, some to be adventitious, other to have been invented by me.”



Innate ideas- “factory installed” ideas. We are born with these. For Descartes, which will include “I exist”. (Notice we may not be always aware of all of our innate ideas.



“adventitious”- “added to us” or ideas that come from the outside. So, my knowledge of geography, etc. wasn’t something I was born with.



“invented ideas”- when I take some ideas I already have and combine them to form a new idea.

Could I have invented material objects?

- ▶ That is, why do I believe that there are material objects “out there” that more or less resemble the ideas I have of them? (i.e. that the book “out there” is like my book *idea* in my mind).
- ▶ “Nature has taught me this.” But really, this amounts to what David Hume will call (as we will see) *habit* or *custom*. (Descartes calls this here a “spontaneous impulse”).
- ▶ It isn’t *certain* that there is a material object out there that is the source of my “book” idea or that resembles or is like that idea.
- ▶ So “nature has taught us” in the sense of habit, etc. is different than “revealed by natural light”– i.e. by the “light of reason”– so “I exist”, etc. aren’t matters of spontaneous impulse, but of certainty.



So Much for Material Objects for Certain Being the Source of our Ideas

- ▶ Middle of page 32 (CSM 40): “All these considerations are enough to establish that it is not reliable judgment but merely some blind impulse that has made me believe up till now that there exist things distinct from myself which transmit to me ideas or images of themselves through the sense organs or in some other way.”
- ▶ So, we are still stuck in our minds, not certain that there is anything “out there.” We could have come up with ideas of the things “out there” in the world, as we do when we are dreaming.
- ▶ Descartes intends to keep looking for something outside of his own mind he can be sure exists, and to do this, he will continue to examine his ideas to see where they came from— can we find an idea that couldn't have come from ourselves?