

Introduction to Philosophy Outline of Descartes' *Meditations*¹

- I. **First Meditation:** concerning those things that can be called into doubt
 - A. Stages of skepticism
 1. doubtfulness of composite things: sensory experience
 - a. dreaming as instance
 2. seeming indubitability of:
 - a. simple things: disciplines of arithmetic, geometry, etc.
 - b. omnipotent, supremely good God
 3. assertion of my imperfection and thus my deception regarding these seemingly indubitable things
 4. realization of habit of assenting to things dubitable in principle
 - a. supposition of supremely powerful evil genius whose aim is to deceive me at every moment
 - B. Resolution to withhold assent to what is (possibly) false

- II. **Second Meditation:** concerning the nature of the human mind
 - A. Cogito ergo sum: discovery of a certain and unshakeable truth
 - B. What am I?
 1. a rational animal?
 - a. No: uncertainty regarding meaning of "rational" & "animal"
 2. a bodied soul?
 - a. No: indistinct apprehension of my bodily existence
 3. I am (finite) substance: mind.
 - a. principal attribute of mind: thinking
 - b. modes of thinking: doubting, understanding, affirming, denying, willing, refusing, imagining, sensing
 - C. Intuition of the piece of wax: what can be clearly and distinctly grasped?
 1. nothing by sensing the wax: a flux of changing impressions
 - a. the wax remains singular, the appearances change fluidly
 2. through the imagination?
 - a. the wax "takes on an even greater variety of dimensions than I could ever grasp with the imagination" (22)
 - b. the wax remains singular in all the innumerable representations
 3. Is the wax perceived by the mind alone? – apprehending the unchanging substance underlying variegated appearances
 - a. an inspection on the part of the mind alone
 - (1) can be an imperfect and confused judging
 - (2) can be a clear and distinct judging
 - b. "what I thought I had seen with my eyes, I actually grasped solely with the faculty of judgment, which is in my mind" (22)

- III. **Third Meditation:** concerning God
 - A. Analysis of the mind
 1. Classes of thoughts: inspection of the contents of thinking:

¹ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 3rd edition. Translated from the Latin by Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993.

- a. thoughts like images: ideas
 - (1) e.g., a man, a chimera, the sky, an angel, God
 - b. volitions or affects
 - (1) e.g., a willing, a fearing
 - c. judgments
 - (1) e.g., an affirming, a denying
2. Ideas:
- a. Origin of ideas
 - (1) innate
 - (2) adventitious
 - (3) produced by me
 - b. Sources for belief
 - (1) spontaneous impulse to belief what I have been taught by nature:
 - (a) fallible belief originating in experience
 - (b) infallible reason: "light of nature"
 - c. Objective reality (i.e., representational value) of ideas
 - (1) truth or falsity of judgments depends on their representational value, i.e., conformity with things outside me
 - (a) "'Idea' can be taken either materially for an operation of the intellect (in which case it cannot be said to be more perfect than me), or objectively for the thing represented by means of that operation" (5)
 - (2) representation of substance = greater objective reality
 - (3) representation of modes or accidents = lesser objective reality
- B. 1st Causal Proof for God's existence: from the idea of God
- 1. Ideas are caused by something with at least as much formal reality as represented in the idea
 - a. for distinction between formal reality and objective reality of idea, see III.A.2.
 - 2. Catalog of my ideas:
 - a. idea of myself *qua* mind
 - (1) clear and distinct perception thereof: substance, duration, number
 - b. idea(s) of corporeal and inanimate things
 - (1) "need not assign to these ideas an author distinct from myself" *qua* mind (30)
 - (a) clear and distinct perception thereof: extension, shape, position, motion
 - (b) confused and indistinct perception thereof: color, sounds, odors, tastes, heat and other tactile or sensory qualities
 - c. [idea(s) of animals, men, and angels]
 - d. idea of God
 - 3. all ideas except the idea of God could originate from myself
 - a. idea of God = idea of an infinite substance, independent, supremely intelligent and powerful
 - (1) I am an imperfect being
 - (2) I have the (prior) perception of the infinite in me by which I comprehend imperfection
 - (a) the idea of God true in the highest degree: absolutely clear and distinct
 - i) Cf. III.A.2.c.(2).
 - (3) the idea of God must have come from a source other than me
 - (a) "For although the idea of substance is in my 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, since I am finite, unless this idea proceeded from something which really was infinite." (31)

(4) hence, God necessarily exists

(a) "If the objective reality of any of my ideas is found to be so great that I am certain that the same reality was not in me, either formally or eminently, and that therefore I myself cannot be the cause of the ideas, then it necessarily follows that I am not alone in the world, but that something else, which is the cause of this idea, also exists." (29)

C. 2nd Causal Proof for God's existence: from the my own existence

1. My own existence could be derived from myself, my parents, a being less perfect than God, or God

a. my existence not derived from myself

(1) I would lack no perfection

(a) Yet I am imperfect, see I.A.

(2) I depend on God to preserve me in every moment of my existence

b. my existence not derived from my parents

(1) otherwise an infinite regress and thus no explanation

(2) what caused me is also a thinking thing

c. my existence not derived from a being less perfect than God

(1) no explanation for the idea of God as perfect, unitary, simple being in me

d. my existence must be derived from God

e. hence, God exists

D. Origin of the idea of God

1. mark of the craftsman

IV. **Fourth Meditation:** concerning the true and the false

A. It is impossible for God to ever deceive me

B. There is in me a faculty of judgment that I received from God

1. insofar as this is a gift from God, the faculty of judging is incapable of error

2. I err

a. my faculty of judging not infinite

b. error is a privation or a lack of some knowledge

C. Error depends on the simultaneous concurrence of two causes

1. faculty of judging or knowing

2. faculty of choosing (will)

a. my will is the basis of my likeness to God (not my faculty of judging)

b. willing not itself the cause of error

3. Because the will is indifferent to the things of the intellect, it turns away and extends itself to things I don't understand

D. I should never judge anything that I do not clearly and distinctly understand

1. "every clear and distinct perception is surely something, and hence it cannot come from nothing. On the contrary, it must necessarily have God for its author." (42)

V. **Fifth Meditation:** concerning the essence corporeal reality and the existence of God

A. The essence of material things (not their existence) are the properties listed in III.B.2.b.(1).(a).

1. I do not create the ideas which I clearly and distinctly perceive

B. The idea of God as a supremely perfect being is clear and distinct

1. Existence cannot be distinguished from God's essence

(translation: *that* God is cannot be distinguished from *what* God is)

- a. existence is a perfection
 - b. What God is – a being of total perfection(s)
 - c. Thus, God enjoys the perfection of existence
- C. "And thus I see plainly that the certainty and truth of every science depends exclusively upon the knowledge of the true God, to the extent, that prior to my becoming aware of him, I was incapable of achieving perfect knowledge about anything else. But now it is possible for me to achieve full and certain knowledge about countless things, both about God and other intellectual matters, as well as about the entirety of that corporeal nature which is the object of pure mathematics."(47)

VI. **Sixth Meditation:** concerning the existence of corporeal reality and the mind/body relation

- A. Imagination versus Pure Intellection
 1. Imagination depends on something distinct from me
 2. Intellection depends only on innate ideas
- B. Review of things whose belief is founded on sensation
 1. spontaneity and vivacity of ideas perceived by sense
 2. use of the senses antedates use of reason
 3. "my" body unlike all other bodies
- C. Assessment of the cause for doubt about things whose belief is founded on sensation
 1. I should not doubt every idea from sensation
 - a. there is in me a passive faculty receptive of ideas of sensation
 - b. I could not use this passive faculty without an active faculty capable of producing or bringing about these ideas of sensation
 - c. This faculty must be in a substance: in me, in God, or in corporeal things
 - (1) it is not in me
 - (a) it presupposes no act of understanding
 - (b) ideas are produced without my consent
 - (2) it is not in God as he is no deceiver
 - (3) hence, it is in body
 - d. therefore corporeal things really exist external to me
 - (1) I have a strong inclination to believe ideas arise from corporeal objects
 - (a) perception by senses often confused and indistinct
 - (b) what I clearly and distinctly perceive as in them really exists
- D. Conclusion regarding what I can believe
 1. nothing taught by nature so strongly than that I have a body
 - a. I and body constitute one thing
 - b. nature teaches me to avoid objects of pain and pursue objects of pleasure
 - (1) body is a kind of mechanism (like a clock)
 - (a) four observations
 2. Senses indicate external objects of harm or benefit
 - a. "Senses set for what is true more frequently than what is false concerning the welfare of the body"(58)
 3. God is no deceiver
 4. hyperbolic doubts above should be rejected
 - a. we must acknowledge the infirmity of our nature