

Handout #4
Meditations 3 and 4
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Meditation 3: Descartes' Proof of the Existence of the External World & God

- **Descartes Argument for the existence of a Real Object & God: Introduction**
 - Descartes has already established that “I exist” with his cogito ergo sum (Med.2) but is left with uncertainty about whether (1) he is the only thing that exists (*solipsism*) and (2) whether the external world has any resemblance to how it appears (*skepticism*).
 - The **first** major conclusion of Meditation 3 will be “I am not alone in the world, but that something else, which is the cause of this idea, also exists” (AT VIII:42)
 - This undermines solipsism
 - The **second** major conclusion of Meditation 3 will be “God necessarily exists” (AT VIII 45) and that God “cannot be a deceiver, for it is manifest by the light of nature that all fraud and deception depend on some defect” (AT VIII 52)
 - This undermines skepticism that was produced by the even demon

Descartes Argument for the existence of a Real Object (God)	
P1	I think therefore I am (Med.2)
P2	I cannot be mistaken about my ideas, although can be mistaken about the source of them.
P3	There can never be more <i>objective reality</i> in the effect (i.e. the idea) than there is <i>formal reality</i> in the cause (i.e. object of the idea). ¹
P4	I have an idea of an infinite substance that is perfect.
P5	My idea of an infinite substance is the most objectively real idea that I have
P6	The idea of an infinite substance cannot be caused by nothing, by reflection on my own nature (a finite substance), or upon the nature of other finite substances.
C	The only possible cause of the idea of an infinite substance is the existence of the infinite substance

A second argument is proposed to show that God is not an evil demon, i.e. God does not deceive us.

Argument that God is not a Trickster: Against Skepticism of the Evil Demon	
P1	God exists and God is defined as an infinite substance that is supremely perfect
P2	Only non-perfect beings intentionally deceive finite beings ²
C	Therefore, God is not an evil demon

¹ What Descartes means by “formal” and “objective” reality is somewhat of an issue. One way to think about it is *formal* reality refers to actual or existing things while *objective* reality refers to our representation or idea of things. Any idea that *can* actually be thought (so not contradictions) has objective reality. Some ideas can have more objective reality than others because **some ideas depend upon other ideas (accidents depend on the substance)**. For example, the idea of the number 1 has less objective reality than the idea of *number in general* since the former depends upon the latter. One principal thesis that Descartes advances is “there must be at least as much [reality] in the efficient and total cause as there is in the effect of that same cause” (AT VIII 40). This means that **all ideas** have a cause but **some** of these ideas will be caused by other ideas (e.g. ideas about the material world).

² We also might need to add the caveat that “only a non-perfect being would allow finite beings to be deceived by a being greater than them”. This would ensure that God would prevent us from being tricked by evil demons.

Meditation 4: Truth, Falsity, the Proper Use of the Intellect

Faculty of Judgment is Not Worthless	
P1	If God created us, then God gave us a faculty for judgment
P2	If we have a faculty for judgment given to us by God, then it cannot be the type of faculty that will always end in deception (for God is not a trickster)
C	Therefore, the proper use of our faculty for judgment will not result in deception

For P2, Descartes writes,

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 attests to maliciousness or weakness. Accordingly, deception is incompatible with God (AT VII, 53).

Given that Descartes thinks that there is a proper use of the intellect, explain why human beings make mistakes and what he proposes is the proper use of the intellect (see AT VII, 56-59; AT VII 15)