

Descartes: God, the Rule of Truth, and the Existence of Bodies

Background:

- metaphysical vs. epistemic possibilities, necessities (p is metaphysically necessary if it is not metaphysically possible for p to be false), contingencies (p is a contingent matter if it is metaphysically possible for p to be true and if it is metaphysically possible for p to be false; p is contingently true if p is true but it is metaphysically possible for p to be false): contrast the possibility of one's own non-existence vs. the possibility that Goldbach's Conjecture is false
- arguments for (proofs of) God's existence
- the Problem of Evil
- the Free Will Defense

Descartes's M3 Causal Proof of God's Existence par's 14-15, 22-27 (pp. 28.1-29.1, 30.8-32.5)

- Degrees of Reality – independence and perfection
- Formal Reality and Objective Reality (28.3)
- CPI: Any idea must have a cause that has at least as much formal reality as the idea has objective reality (at & around 28.5)
- The Proof 30.8-32.5
- Why the Proof doesn't work in other cases (why you can't generally prove that things exist merely from the fact that you have ideas of them)

From God to the Rule of Truth (M4)

- God a non-deceiver 36.3
- The basic argument
 1. God (exists &) is not a deceiver
 2. If my c&d p's were false, God would be a deceiverSo, 3. My c&d p's are true (RoT)
- Key to 2: The Problem of Error (36.7) and the Problem of Evil – the problem of error as the problem of epistemic evil
- The Free Will Defense (37.9-39.6)
- The Rule of Truth 41.9-42.0

Proof of the Existence of “Corporeal Things” 10th par. of M6

-The heart of the argument is at 52.7-8. It is driven by what I like to call the “Rule of Some Truth” (this name comes from 53.2, in the 11th par). The argument for RoST seems to be:

1. God (exists &) is not a deceiver (already argued for)
2. If I have a great natural inclination to believe that p, but p is false and I have no faculty by which to learn that p is false, then God is a deceiver (key premise)

∴ RoST: If I have a great natural inclination to believe that p, and I have no faculty by which I might learn that p is false, then p is true. (from 1,2)

-It's clear what premises need to be added to the above principle to yield the desired argument:

3. I have a great natural inclination to believe that some of my ideas are caused by external bodies (premise)
 4. I have no faculty by which I might learn that it is false that some of my ideas are caused by external bodies (premise)
- ∴ 5. Some of my ideas are caused by external bodies (from RoST,3,4)
- ∴ 6. External bodies exist (from 5)

-I believe this argument is supposed to be applicable to some cases of particular perceptual judgments, as well as to the general issue of the existence of a corporeal world

-But, among other problems, it requires the very dubious (at least it seems it should be dubious, by Descartes's standards) negative claim that one has no way of finding out one is wrong, if one is wrong. Indeed, none of the premises of this “proof” (2, 3, nor 4) seem to me to be at all certain, much less certain enough for Descartes's purposes.

-Here the quip from Hume seems to me very much called for, and should be applied to the various premises of this “proof,” comparing them to conclusion: “To have recourse to the veracity of the Supreme Being, in order to prove the veracity of our senses, is surely making a very unexpected circuit.” – Hume, *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, sect. 12, 4th-to-last par. of Part I

-A good exercise (but in calling it an “exercise,” I don't mean to imply that there's a clearly correct answer, or that it's easy): Try running this argument on the aspect of ordinary thought that Descartes wants to reject (so, e.g., that wrt secondary qualities, objects resemble our ideas of them). Here, Descartes wants the argument to fail. But how does it fail? Is it the analogue of (3), or (4), that goes false, according to Descartes, and why? What distinguishes the cases so that God's goodness verifies ordinary thought about corporeal objects existing, but not about what these objects are like?