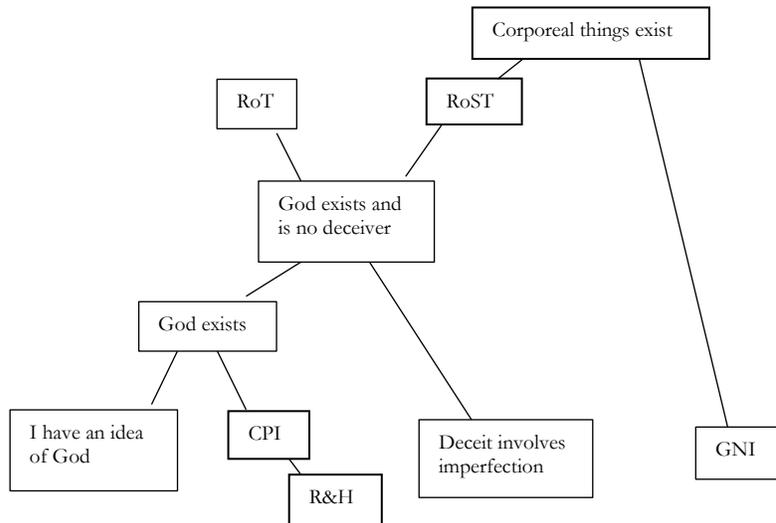


Descartes: God, the Rule of Truth, and the Existence of Bodies

Highlights of Descartes's Proofs, in Chart Form:



Proofs/Arguments for God's Existence:

-I will count Descartes as offering two arguments for God's existence in the Meditations, a Causal Proof in M3, and an Ontological argument in M5. We will focus on the former (& that's the one represented on our chart).

-Background: Ontological, Cosmological, and Teleological/Design Arguments, and why the latter two types are not suited to Descartes's purposes, both because of their starting points, and their conclusions (Descartes needs a perfect being)

-Descartes seems to have sought starting points of two kinds: self-evident metaphysically necessary truths (truths that in a very strong, metaphysical sense could not have been false), and self-evident truths about his (one's) own states of consciousness

Kant clearly conceived of the problem of knowledge in terms of methodological solipsism. That is, like thinkers from Descartes to Hume, he supposed that an answer to skepticism must lie in what reflection on his own thoughts can reveal to the individual thinker even on the supposition that nothing but his own consciousness exists. -Paul Guyer (Review of *Identität Und Objektivität: Eine Untersuchung Über Kants Transzendentale Deduktion*, by Dieter Henrich, *Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979): 151-67.

Descartes's M3 Causal Proof of God's Existence: AT 40.8-42.5, 45.3-47.8

(One can count these as two different but related causal arguments, one for God as the cause of Descartes's idea of God, and the other for God as the cause of Descartes's own existence as a thinking thing possessed of an idea of God. I am collapsing these down to one argument, which is for God as the cause of Descartes's idea.)

-Degrees of Reality – independence and perfection

-Formal Reality and Objective Reality (AT 41.1)

-CPI: Any idea must have a cause that has at least as much formal reality as the idea has objective reality (at & around AT 41.3)

Derived from ~~the Ro~~ R&H?

-some of the guts of the proof: AT 45.3-46.1

-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 AT 53.8

-The basic argument

1. God (exists &) is not a deceiver
2. If my c&d p's were false, God would be a deceiver

So, 3. My c&d p's are true (RoT)

-Key to 2: The Problem of Error (AT 54.2) and the Problem of Evil – the problem of error as the problem of epistemic evil

-The Free Will Defense: AT 56.3-58.8

-C&DPs as assent-compelling

-The Rule of Truth AT 62.6

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

-The heart of the argument is at AT 79.8-80.2. It is driven by what I call the “Rule of Some Truth” (this name comes from AT 80.6, 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—none of which made our chart) 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, wrt their apparent secondary qualities?