

**Arnauld, raising the problem of the Cartesian Circle, in the Fourth set of Objections:**

I have one further worry, namely how the author avoids reasoning in a circle when he says that we are sure that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true only because God exists.

But we can be sure that God exists only because we clearly and distinctly perceive this. Hence, before we can be sure that God exists, we ought to be able to be sure that whatever we perceive clearly and evidently is true. (CSM2: 150)

**Descartes's "Atheist Geometer" passage, from his Replies to the Second Set of Objections:**

That an atheist can know clearly that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, I do not deny, I merely affirm that, on the other hand, such knowledge on his part cannot constitute true science, because no knowledge that can be rendered doubtful should be called science. Since he is, as supposed, an Atheist, he cannot be sure that he is not deceived in the things that seem most evident to him, as has been sufficiently shown; and though perchance the doubt does not occur to him, nevertheless it may come up, if he examine the matter, or if another suggests it; he can never be safe from it unless he first recognizes the existence of a God. (HR II, p. 39; AT 141)

**Descartes, letter to Regius (24 May 1640):**

In your second objection, you say that the truth of axioms which are clearly and distinctly conceived is self-evident. This too, I agree, is true, during the time they are clearly and distinctly conceived; because our mind is of such a nature that it cannot help assenting to what it clearly and distinctly conceives. But because we often remember conclusions that we have derived from such premises without actually attending to the premises, I say that in such a case, if we lack knowledge of God, we can pretend that they are uncertain even though we remember that they were deduced from clear principles; because perhaps our nature is such that we go wrong even in the most evident matters. Consequently, even at the moment when we deduced them from those principles, we did not have scientific knowledge (*scientia*) of them, but only a conviction (*persuasio*) of them. I distinguish the two as follows: there is conviction when there remains some reason which might lead us to doubt, but scientific knowledge is conviction based on an argument so strong that it can never be shaken by any stronger argument. Nobody can have the latter unless he also has knowledge of God. But a man who has once understood the arguments which prove that God exists and is not a deceiver, provided that he remembers the conclusion 'God is no deceiver', whether or not he continues to attend to the arguments for it, will continue to possess not only the conviction, but real scientific knowledge of this and all other conclusions whose premises he remembers he once clearly perceived.

**James Van Cleve ("Foundationalism, Epistemic Principles, and the Cartesian Circle") draws a distinction between two readings of "I am certain of the truth of my clear and distinct perceptions":**

(A) For all p, if I clearly and distinctly perceive that p, then I am certain that p.

(B) I am certain that (for all p, if I clearly and distinctly perceive that p, then p)

**He explains:**

The difference is that (A) says that whenever I clearly and distinctly perceive any proposition, I will be certain of it (the proposition in question), whereas (B) says that I am certain of a general principle connecting clear and distinct perception with truth.

**Van Cleve claims that this distinction**

enables us to make sense of...the notorious fourth paragraph in the Third Meditation, where Descartes appears to oscillate inconsistently between saying, on the one hand, God or no God, I am certain of things when I clearly and distinctly perceive them, and, on the other hand, I can doubt even the truth of clear and distinct perceptions if I do not know that there is a veracious God. The appearance of inconsistency is removed if we see Descartes as being uncertain not of particular propositions that he clearly and distinctly perceives, but only of the general connection between clear and distinct perception and truth. What he shows us in the paragraph is that at this stage in the Meditations (A) is true of him but (B) is not. (Van Cleve, p. 67)

-On Van Cleve's solution, while Descartes does not take the (B) reading of "I am certain of my C&DP's" to be true of himself as he starts his constructive project, he does take the (A) reading to be true of himself: He takes himself to all along be certain of the truth of individual c&dp's. They are never in any way doubted (only the general principle connecting C&DP with truth is doubted). Thus, Descartes's individual c&dp's are available for legitimate use as the starting points for Descartes's building project.

-The big problem for this reading

-An alternative reading of M3-4, based on a distinction a *distinction between psychological and epistemic (or evaluative) certainty*. The first is a matter of being psychologically incapable of doubting something; the second is a matter of having no good reason for doubting something.

## Descartes's Deceiving God / Evil Genius Argument (AT: 21.0-23.7)

-Doesn't really depend on God, as Descartes makes clear in par. 10 (AT 21.6-22.1). It can be the doubt that, as Descartes puts it toward the end of Meditation Five, "I am so constituted as to go wrong sometimes about what I think I perceive most evidently" (AT: 70.2; A&G; close to our translation): a doubt about whether his nature is such as to get such matters right.

-I think the argument suggested here is a case of the basic ("classic," we might say) form of skeptical argument by skeptical hypothesis that I call the "Argument from Ignorance," and that goes like this:

1. I don't know that not-H

2. If I don't know that not-H, then I don't know that O

So, C. I don't know that O,

Where 'H' is a skeptical hypothesis (here, that I'm the victim of a deceiving god), and 'O' is something I would ordinarily think I know (here, for instance, that  $2+3=5$ , or one of the other items from AT 21.3).

-Force? I put the argument in terms of knowledge, but that was mainly because "know" is so short and easy to work with. What force Descartes really intends here is a very tricky matter to which we will return.

-Scope?, How are we to generalize this skeptical conclusion? Is this an argument for Universal skepticism??!!

a. in favor of US:

1. M1, par's 9-10 (AT: 21.0-22.1): see esp. the "nothing" at AT 21.8

2. M3, par 4 (AT: 36.0-36.9): the "notorious M3-4"

b. against US:

1. M2, par's 1-3 (AT: 23.9-25.5)

2. structure of the Meditations: If you're going to "rebuild" something stable, as Descartes clearly thinks he succeeds in doing, you need some "foundation" on which to build

Some highlights of the argumentative structure of the Meditations::

