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INTRODUCTION

A. Goals of the *Meditations*

Following Daniel Garber in various essays, including "Descartes' Physics," in *Cambridge Companion to Descartes*,

The explicit metaphysical goal is to demonstrate the existence of God and the relation of Soul or Mind and Body.

The implicit metaphysical goal for Descartes is to use God to ground his mechanistic (non-Aristotelian) physics. God is what supports

1, the truth of our belief in the mathematical structure of the objects of the external world (we have clear and distinct ideas of the modes of extended substance: size, shape, and motion via our understanding, even if our senses can deceive us about other properties of objects, such as colors, smells, texture, taste...);

2, and he guarantees the laws of motion of bodies (Descartes thought God continually recreated the world from moment to moment, and this was the principal cause of motion – it's too much to get into here, but this notion became known as "occasionalism" when it was picked up by Descartes's followers, notably Malebranche).

The explicit epistemological standard he adopts is absolute certainty, that which is beyond even "hyperbolic" or extreme doubt. This will enable us to get rid of [Aristotelian] prejudices about the world and to "withdraw our mind from the senses" [and focus on the understanding instead].

The implicit epistemological goal, according to Garber in his "*Semel in vita: The Scientific Foundations of Descartes' Meditations*," is for Descartes to overthrow the epistemology behind Aristotle's physics, which assumes that we can know substantial forms which are responsible for characteristic behavior of things ("horseness" explains how horses behave). That is, our senses tell us *how* things behave, and forms tell us *why* they behave that way.

1, In response, Descartes's notion is that matter and motion is everywhere the same, so we can explain behavior by the mathematically accessible movement of parts of matter, which we can actually have clear and distinct ideas about, which we don't with regard to what our senses tell us.

2, And with substantial forms, we have a cluttered universe with as many forms as there are types of substances, and there's no real way to settle disputes about the kind of form / substance people claim.

The political objective is to show his grounding of mechanistic physics is compatible enough with Church doctrine for him not to get in trouble with the Counter-Reformation Church like Galileo did.

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B. Why "absolute certainty"?

According to Stephen Toulmin's *Cosmopolis*, Descartes's time was a time of crisis and war, a reaction by established powers to the religious tolerance and moderately skeptical humanism that preceded it. "Modernity is a counter-Renaissance," we could say, an abandonment of tentative, but thick and concrete, investigations of humanity, religion, and politics, such as we saw with Montaigne, to a search for a bedrock that could anchor science, and further, denigrate all that did not have the certainty of science as "mere" politics, poetry, etc., as "flights of fancy" that gentlemen could indulge in, but that serious people would avoid, as in the wrong hands, such shrug-of-the-shoulders skepticism left everyone to their own viewpoints, with no agreed-upon way of reasoning together.

So, again, why was an absolutely certain grounding of knowledge needed in Descartes time? Partially because the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) had as its ideological motivation, unprovable religious dogmatism: there was all-too-much "subjective" certainty, but nothing to ground it in that crossed religious lines.

So, Descartes hoped to provide a method of thinking that would provide a solid ground in a time of horrible chaos.

The difficulty he faced was to produce a method and to establish the ground of his science in a way that appeased the Catholic Church authorities as not being against Catholic doctrine, but that could convince those of other faiths that his God wasn't essentially Catholic, so they might use it to ground their scientific endeavors, and might convince the atheists that his science might eventually stand on its own without its divine guarantor.

C. Descartes and Aristotle

The official Catholic Church doctrine, upheld by the "scholastic" philosophers of the time, was based on Aristotle.

Aristotle's physics had "4 causes," but "causes" is probably better translated as "principles of explanation."

First, we'll take a statue as an example. Why is it the way it is?

Material principle: bronze is able to be shaped so that the person can be depicted.

Efficient principle: the art of statue-making [knowing how to shape bronze], as well as the vision of the artist of what the statue is to depict and to accomplish.

Formal principle: the essence or "look" of the depicted person as captured in the statue: his dignity, mood, courage, etc.

Final principle: that for the sake of which the statue is made: for instance, to induce civic pride.

Note that the hammer / forge / mold are not included: they are merely tools by which the statue comes about. The important things are the knowledge and the vision of the artist; craft workers could handle the matter.

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Now, let's do the 4 causes for a living thing. In this case, human beings.

Material principle: a living body which can support the development and exercise of the vegetative, sensible, and rational capacities human beings display

Efficient principle: the male contribution to conception (the egg is just matter)

Formal principle: the essence, or what picks us out as unique, is rationality (and some adult males enact reason)

Final principle: to be an adult who enacts rationality in the world (most fully in philosophy, but also in politics as discussion among equals, in friendship as caring for friends, and in household management as advising women, commanding slaves, and educating children)

How did Descartes treat Aristotle? According to Garber,

"Descartes was against the doctrine of substantial forms. For the Aristotelians of his time, bodies were made up of prime matter and substantial form. Matter is what every physical body shares, while form is what differentiates bodies from one another. And so, it is form that explains why stones fall, and fire rises, why horses neigh and humans reason.

In opposition to the Aristotelian view of the world, the ancient atomists, Democritus, Epicurus, Lucretius, attempted to explain the characteristic behavior of bodies, not in terms of substantial forms, but in terms of the size, shape, and motion of the smaller bodies, atoms, that make up the grosser bodies of everyday experience, atoms which were taken to move in empty space, a void. [These ideas were taken up in the 17th century.]

Descartes' physics wound up retaining a number of crucial features of the physics he was taught in school, and differing from the world of the atomists; most notably, Descartes rejected the indivisible atoms and empty spaces that characterize atomistic physics.

But Descartes' rejection of the forms and matter of the schools, and his adoption of the mechanist program for explaining everything in the physical world in terms of size, shape, and motion of the corpuscles that make up bodies, is hardly conceivable without the influence of atomist thought." ("Descartes' Physics," in *Cambridge Companion to Descartes*)

D. Structure of the *Meditations*

1. Hyperbolic Doubt and the evil genius
2. Self as Thinking Thing; the piece of wax; intellect not sensation is ground of knowledge; self-knowledge of mind
3. Existence of God via the Causal-Representative argument; punctual temporal nature of existence such that God must create over again each moment; God is no deceiver
4. Clear and Distinct Ideas as criterion of truth and proper boundary of the will
5. Nature of corporeal existence; another proof of God's existence
6. Understanding vs imagination; Mind is distinct from, yet joined to, the body, forming a union

MEDITATIONS 1

"Concerning Those Things That Can Be Called Into Doubt"

Hyperbolic [extreme] doubt and the evil genius. (I've benefitted from Geoff Pyn's notes: <https://geoffpynn.weebly.com/modern-philosophy.html>)

Descartes want to defeat the skeptics (and the Aristotelians). So he needs something certain (against the skeptics), and that certainty can't come from the senses or from substantial forms (against the Aristotelians).

Descartes thinks that ideas have *representational content*, that is, an idea is an internal picture that "claims" that what it represents as existing really does exist.

In order to find an absolutely certain basis for knowledge, Descartes wants to doubt not just ideas that are apparently false, but even that which can be doubted in any way, no matter how outlandish. If an idea can be doubted in any way, it is not absolutely certain.

He gives three increasingly drastic arguments for this hyperbolic doubt.

- 1, the sense deception argument works for distant objects, but it's crazy to doubt nearby things
- 2, the dreaming argument gets rid of everything except basic math
- 3, the evil genius argument can make us doubt even basic math

1. Senses sometimes present ideas that can be doubted
 - a. Most people would accept that senses can deceive us about distant and small things
 - b. But what about beliefs about nearby things, like "I'm wearing clothes"?
 - i. D says folks that doubt like that are insane, suffering from brain disorders
 - ii. D would have to be mad like them to use this as a method of doubt
2. Dreams sometimes present ideas we can doubt even of nearby things
 - a. Sometimes I dream I'm wearing clothes and jogging but I'm actually in bed, naked!
 - i. So there's no strict criterion between waking and dreaming
 - ii. So let's say we're still dreaming.
 - iii. So what's presented to the mind could be false, even that I have hands!
 - iv. Let's say what's presented to the mind in dreaming are like painted images.
 - b. Now painters combine everyday things into fantastic beasts
 - i. But mostly all they are doing is combining parts of everyday animals
 - ii. Even if they produce something utterly new
 - iii. At least the basic components (shapes like circles, say) are true
 - c. So, coming back to the method of doubt
 - i. We can get rid of "composite things" like those considered by physics, astronomy, medicine – they are like the fantastic beasts
 - ii. But objects of arithmetic and geometry remain – they are the "basic components"
 1. simplest and most general things
 2. shape, size, number, place, time (duration)
 - d. Now let's examine the common and residual opinion about God's veracity
3. The evil genius
 - a. An *evil genius* (a deceiving God) will make him doubt even basic math!

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- b. Doubting the external world's existence, yet affirming the existence of false beliefs about the world as "bedeviling hoaxes of my dreams"
- c. Doubting the body's existence, yet affirming the existence of false beliefs
- d. But this is hard work, and Descartes is lazy and falls back into his old opinions

MEDITATIONS 2

"The Nature of the Human Mind: That It Is Better Known Than the Body":

(The thinking things, and the wax experiment)

A. First off is an extremely famous argument, usually called the "cogito" ("I think").

It boils down to this: even if I am deceived as to the object of my ideas (I think the world and the body exist, but I am wrong by Descartes's extreme standards of absolute certainty, that is, they do not exist beyond hyperbolic doubt), I cannot be deceived about the existence of the act of thinking, while I am thinking. Thus, "I am, I exist" is "necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive it in my mind."

Two standard objections:

Is Descartes warranted in using "I"? Shouldn't he only be certain if he says that "thinking is happening" even when deceived about the existence of the objects of the thought?

Or, if you accept that there must be a thinker in order for thinking to happen, is Descartes warranted in identifying himself with that thinker, rather than just "a thinker exists when thinking is happening"?

B. Next, Descartes wants to know the nature of the "I" that necessarily exists whenever the activity of thought (even when one is deceived about the existence of the object of the thought) is going on. Here again he wants absolute certainty in his self-knowledge.

So he's going to reject Aristotle's "rational animal" which Descartes previously accepted (and now sees is just a doubtful opinion).

He's also going to examine habitual thoughts about himself:

1. that he had a body
 - a. shape
 - b. place
 - c. excludes other bodies from its space
 - d. perceptible
 - e. being moved (not by itself – passive matter)
2. that he has an (Aristotelian) soul
 - a. to which he attributes vegetative, sensory, and rational capacities
 - b. and whose nature he imagines as a rarified physical material

If he applies the evil genius criterion, he rejects habitual notions of body and vegetative, locomotive, and sensory capacities of the Aristotelian soul.

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BUT with thinking, he's found his point of certainty! I am, I exist holds as long as he is thinking. He is "nothing but a thinking thing." *A res cogitans*.

And what are the activities that go under "thought"?

Purely mental: doubting, understanding, affirming, denying, willing, refusing, "and also" imagining and sensing.

There is a unifying subject, an "I" underlying all these different activities: I doubt, I understand, I imagine, I sense (that is, I "seem" to see, hear, feel). AND, this "I" or unifying subject is NOT an object of the imagination (that is, the "I" is not a corporeal object, but only the object of rational thought).

C: The wax example. How is physical nature known?

There are many twists and turns here, but the main points are that the essence of physical bodies is extension and that understanding and not sensation is the ground of our knowledge of physical bodies. We can form a "clear and distinct idea" of extension, but not of what the senses give us.

Extension as essence of physical things is tied in with Descartes' project for a mechanistic physics. What does "essence" mean here? Everything about the wax can change except that it is extended: essence of something is what doesn't change and hence provides the ground for that which changes. Extension can be known intellectually, whereas qualities like colors and tastes and smells can't; they are like clothes, and must be "stripped" to reveal the "nakedness" of physical things, that is, extension as essence.

So, in terms of Descartes' project of replacing Aristotelian physics, there are no substantial forms (the essence of a horse cannot be extracted from consideration of the horse; there is no "horseness") or final causes (horses are created by God to give people useful tools for transportation or food growing), just pieces of extended physical substance (matter) bumping into themselves and forming / dissolving composite objects. That is, there is no horseness, even if there are material objects composed in such a way to yield horses.

Perception is not sensation, but is really "an inspection on the part of the mind alone." When perception / understanding concentrates on extension as essence of physical things, then its ideas are clear (extension is the essence of physical things) and distinct (nothing else but extension is mixed into the idea).

At the end is a very important conclusion: once I realize that perception is not sensation or imagination but is really understanding, then I realize that my mind is the prime object of perception, that which is most clearly and distinctly perceived (= understood). I am more certain about my mind than I am about physical nature.

MEDITATIONS 3

RECAP: goal of the *Meditations*: provide the metaphysical and epistemological foundations for a mathematically accessible mechanistic science. In a famous image from the *Principles* (written just after the *Meditations*), Descartes talks about the "tree of knowledge": metaphysics (knowledge of

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God and the soul – its distinction from the body) is the roots; physics is the trunk; and the particular sciences (among them medicine and morals) are the branches.

MOTIVATING THE ARGUMENT FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE:

What good is the cogito as a foundation for the sciences if the representational content of its non-cogito thoughts (what those thoughts represent) might not exist? This is the *threat of solipsism*.

Descartes must *prove the existence of a non-deceiving God* to expand the point of certainty beyond the cogito.

How can we expand the circle of certainty beyond the point of the cogito?

OVERVIEW OF THE ARGUMENT IN MEDITATIONS 3

- 1) Descartes relies on his readers to accept that there is a *hierarchy of reality* (or "Great Chain of Being"), with *God as perfect, infinite, substance* at top. Then there are animate (ensouled) finite substances: body and mind, put together as angels and humans. Then inanimate (soulless) finite substances: animals, plants, rocks. Then the attributes of those substances (extension and thought), and their modes (shapes and ideas).
- 2) Some of Descartes's thoughts are "*ideas*" which *represent* things.
 - a. *Formal vs objective reality*
 - i. *Formal reality* is reality of existence (of things or of ideas as psychological events);
 - ii. *Objective reality* is the reality of the representational content of an idea.
 - iii. Just as you can rank order things by their formal reality, you can rank-order ideas by the reality of what they represent:
 1. the idea of an angel has more objective reality than that of a human being, because the angel is more perfect, has more reality, than a human.
 - b. *There must be as much formal reality in a cause as in its effect*. That is, causation can go horizontally or downward on the chain of being, but not upward. A more perfect thing can cause a less perfect one, but a less perfect thing cannot cause a more perfect thing.
 - c. Descartes believes that *things cause ideas*, so there must be as much formal reality in the thing as cause of an idea as there is objective reality of the idea of the thing. This is a difficult assumption to grant Descartes, but it is a key to his argument.
- 3) *Surveying his ideas*,
 - a. Descartes finds *he could have been the cause of almost all of them*: thus, still under the spell of the evil genius, the real world existence of things corresponding to the representational content of those ideas, the thing the idea represents, is doubtful; the thing might not exist.
 - b. *But there is an idea of a perfect, non-deceiving God*.
 - i. This *idea could not have been produced by Descartes*: the cause of an idea must have as much formal reality as there is objective reality of the idea. That is, a less perfect thing cannot create the idea of a more perfect thing.
 - ii. So, *Descartes is not alone in the world*: the threat of *solipsism* created by the evil genius hypothesis has been removed.
 - iii. As God must be a non-deceiver, whatever Descartes *perceives clearly and distinctly as existing he can trust really does exist*. This provides him an escape from the cogito, an expansion of the zone of truth, and a foundation for the sciences.

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DETAILS OF THE ARGUMENT

I, DESCARTES REVIEWS THE FINDING OF YESTERDAY

He asks what is the *scope* of my knowledge?

It is very limited, but there is some content: he is a thing that thinks; this is the extent of what he knows with certainty, what cannot be doubted.

He now finds he has a *criterion* for truth:

When he knows the *cogito*, he has a "clear and distinct perception of what I affirm."

He then proposes as a general rule that whatever he has a clear and distinct perception of is true.

But then he remembers he used to feel certain about a lot of things, sensory images as coming from external things, and truths of mathematics.

He then recalls the evil genius: he might have fooled me about sensory images, and even about math (even if he couldn't fool me about the existence of the activity of thought).

Although the doubting of math via the evil genius is "very tenuous, and, so to speak, metaphysical."

Nonetheless, he says, let's see if we can remove the evil genius as basis for doubt.

Does God exist, and is he a deceiver? If we can prove that He exists and that He is not a deceiver, we can expand the scope of certain knowledge beyond the *cogito* and provide a metaphysical foundation for the sciences.

The cogito is the point of certainty that survives the hyperbolic doubt occasioned by the thought of the evil genius, but unless we can establish God's existence and trustworthiness, we're stuck at the point of the *cogito* with nowhere to go.

II) WHAT KINDS OF THOUGHTS DO I HAVE?

Many thoughts are "ideas" or images of things. They *represent* things; they stand in for them.

There are other thoughts that take different forms, for example, when I will, or fear, or affirm, or deny, there is something that I grasp as the subject of my thought, yet I embrace in my thought something more than the likeness of that thing. Some of these thoughts are called volitions or affects, and others are called judgments.

[Or in another translation: "though I always perceive something as the subject of the action of my mind, yet by this action I always add something else to the idea which I have of that thing; and of the thoughts of this kind some are called volitions or affections, and others judgments."]

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Other thoughts are acts of willing, fearing, affirming, or denying. These are complex: there is an object (a house, a lion, a person ...), AND "something more" than this thought-about object. This "something more" can be 1) a "volition" or desire; 2) an "affect" or emotion; 3) a "judgment" or a "truth stance" (I'm making up this term) toward that object.

Volition or desire: I can want to a) build a house, or b) run away from a lion, or c) get a date with this person.

Affect or emotion: I can be a) awestruck by a house; b) be afraid of a lion; or c) be happy that this person wants to go out with me.

Judgment: I can a) affirm that this is a house I'm looking at; b) deny that that sound in the distance is a roar of a lion; c) be uncertain whether my friends think it's a good idea that I go out with this person.

This concept of complex ideas (objects plus "something more") will have distinguished descendants.

In the analytic tradition, complex ideas will be called "propositional attitudes." There are lots of different positions here, but by way of introduction, let's say this.

First, by convention, we write "p" for a "proposition," a statement that is true if certain states of affairs obtains. For instance, "p" could be "I win the lottery." That proposition is true if I really did win the lottery. So "p" is the analytic way of talking about what Descartes means by the object of the idea. It's what happens to ideas once the "linguistic turn" is taken. Ideas for the early analytics are thoughts whose contents are propositions; that is, ideas are statements whose truth conditions depend upon states of affairs; they aren't pictures of things, as they are for Descartes.

Now, let's talk about the "something more." Here the syntax is "Subject-Verb-that p." For instance, "I desire that p" means, "I want the state of affairs that makes "p" true to happen" or "I want "p" to be a true statement." Those are both equivalent to "I want to win the lottery."

There are many interesting passages in the phenomenological tradition dealing with what the analytics call "propositional attitudes," but I'll leave that to you for further study.

III) THOUGHTS BY THEMSELVES VERSUS THOUGHTS AS REPRESENTATIONS.

So, first, let's go back to "ideas" as images of external things. By themselves (just as an image that appears to me, rather than as an image making a claim that the external thing exists and is like the image) they are neither true nor false.

The same thing with desires and emotions; even if I desire or fear / love evil or non-existent things, it's true that I desire or fear / love that evil or imaginary thing (to own a unicorn, let's say).

So, what about *judgments*? Here there's a place for me to make a mistake, especially when I judge that the ideas (images) are like the external things they represent.

IV) NATURAL IMPULSES TO BELIEVE VS THE "LIGHT OF NATURE."

This is a complex section, but basically what's important for us is to distinguish between

- 1, the "light of nature" as that which enables me to see that indubitable things are true (e.g., the link between doubting and the existence of thought, the *cogito ergo sum*).
- 2, the spontaneous, natural impulse to believe that unbidden, simple beliefs about external objects are true (e.g., "this fire is making me warm")

So we have to conclude that ideas that seem to come from outside me aren't completely trustworthy:

- 1, they could actually come from a hidden faculty inside me;
- 2, but even if they did come to me from outside, they might not resemble their objects.

So it's really only been an untested habit that I've had that makes me think representations are trustworthy.

V) SOME TECHNICAL TERMS

A) Formal and objective reality

Formal reality of a thing = the reality of the thing as it exists in the universe

Formal reality of an idea = its mere existence as a mental act (as a mode of a mind; see below)

Objective reality of an idea = the "level" of formal reality of the object of the idea, that is, the formal or existent reality of what the idea represents.

B) Substance / attribute / mode or accident; and finite vs infinite substance

Substance = that which exists of its own accord, exists independently of other things. There are two kinds of finite substance for Descartes, body and mind; God is an infinite substance.

Attribute = the most basic way a substance exists, the essence of a substance; it's that which stays the same even when modes change. Extension is the attribute of bodily substance, and thought is the attribute of mind or soul, thinking substance.

Mode (or "accident") = that which exists only in relation to a substance; that which "modifies" a substance; it's a way that the attribute of a substance is changed. For instance, a particular shape is a mode of a physical substance; you never get shapes except as modes of physical things. And, a particular thought is a mode of a thinking thing; you never get thoughts without a thinker (recall Med II).

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For physical things ("bodily substances"), their attribute, the fundamental way they exist, is extension (remember the piece of wax). So when a bodily substance changes its shape, size, or motion, its modes change, but its attribute, extension, stays the same; whatever shape, size, or motion a physical thing has, it stays an extended thing.

For minds or souls, their attribute, the fundamental way they exist is thinking; (remember the beginning of Med II; the essence of mind or soul is not vegetative, locomotive, or rational powers; nor is it a mist or otherwise rarefied physical thing; rather, the essence of mind is thought). So even when a mind changes its modes, that is, it thinks different thoughts with different contents (now I'm thinking of a house, and now a lion ...), it stays a thinking thing.

Having said that, though, here's a twist: a finite substance for Descartes depends on God, which is an infinite substance and doesn't depend on anything else.

You will notice that the attribute of thought and the attribute of extension don't really have anything in common (there are some technical issues here about duration, number, unity, and so on, but let's let that go for the time being). So if extension is the attribute of bodily substance and thought the attribute of mind or thinking substance, then the problem of their interaction arises.

Descartes was pushed on this problem by Princess Elisabeth in their correspondence after the publication of the *Meditations*. In his last book, the *Passions of the Soul*, he elaborates his theory of the pineal gland, the organ of the brain where the "animal spirits" (we would probably say "neuronal firing patterns") of the body can affect the mind and vice versa. So Descartes is a dualist, who accepts interaction of mind and body. (Some modern folks are dualists, but not interactionists. For them, mind is "epiphenomenal": it's different from the brain but it can't affect the brain either; it's like the steam whistle of a locomotive, or like the shadow cast by a body: it's produced by the body, but doesn't affect the body.)

We're going to see how Spinoza tackles this problem later on: accepts that thought and extension are the two main attributes human beings can access, but for him they are (two of the infinite) attributes of the single substance God, and don't interact, but are "parallel." It's an amazing doctrine, and we'll see how it works later.

VI) CAUSAL THEORY OF REPRESENTATIVE IDEAS AND THE "GREAT CHAIN OF BEING"

Next, Descartes says that there must be as much (formal or existent) reality in the cause of something as in the effect. This implies something like a hierarchy of reality of things: some are more real or more perfect than others. If something depends on something else, it is less perfect. So a mode is less real than a substance, as it depends on it: you can't have a shape, without it being the shape of something, a substance.

This hierarchy of perfection is often called the "Great Chain of Being." At the top of the Chain would be what is perfect, what lacks nothing – God, the infinite substance. At the bottom would be a mode of a finite substance: say a shape that a piece of wax has for just a minute as it's carried nearer or farther away from a candle.

Descartes will now say that representative ideas must come from – be caused by – things that have as much formal or existent reality as the objective reality of the idea.

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Remember that an idea has an object; the level of reality of the object of the idea is different from 1] the formal or existent reality of the idea, its existence as a mental act; and 2] is also different from the reality of the thing as it exists in the universe, the formal reality of the thing.)

So, if Descartes has the idea of "other men, or animals, or angels" in him, he could be the author of those ideas, mixing and matching from his other ideas.

But if Descartes has the idea of a perfect God in him, he can't be the author of that idea because he's not perfect (he makes mistakes, he's going to die, he can't create the universe). Therefore, since Descartes does have that idea, and it wasn't able to be created by him, it must have come from outside him, and it must come from something that has as much reality or perfection as in the object of the idea. Since that objective reality is perfect, the thing that causes that idea must itself be perfect, that is, God. Thus it must be that God, the cause of Descartes's idea of God, exists, and is perfect.

[Skipping the objections and replies]: And if God is perfect, that means He is not a deceiver, since "by the light of nature" it's clear that deception relies on a defect.

[Anticipating *Meditation IV*]: If God is not a deceiver, then I can trust the criterion of clear and distinct perception, even when it goes beyond the *cogito*.

Before he moves on, Descartes says something we will come back to in Spinoza: contemplation of God provides us "the greatest pleasure of which we are capable in this life."

PRÉCIS OF THE CAUSAL-REPRESENTATION PROOF

PRELIM: "Ideas" for Descartes are representations, something like an image or picture of the thing that is represented.

So we have four things to keep distinct:

1. The mind, which houses ideas.
2. The ideas, as psychological events.
3. The content of the idea, that is, the representations (the pictures) of things in the world.
4. The thing in the world that is represented (and that is judged to cause the ideas).

-- SEE DIAGRAM BELOW --

FIRST STEP: There must be as much (formal or existent) reality in the cause of something as in the effect.

To understand this, we have to understand two things: 1) the term "formal reality"; and 2) the implicit presupposition of levels of reality.

- a. "Formal reality" is paired with "objective reality."
 - a. Formal reality is the reality of a thing as it exists.
 - i. The formal reality of thing in the world.
 - ii. The formal reality of an idea as psychological event.
 - b. Objective reality: the reality of the representational content of the idea. This corresponds to, though is distinct from, the formal reality of the thing that is represented.
- b. Levels of reality: This is sometimes called "The Great Chain of Being," the idea that there is a hierarchy of levels of reality.
 - a. If something lacks something, it's less perfect – it's less real – than what doesn't lack it.
 - b. God, as infinite substance, lacks nothing.

SECOND STEP: I habitually judge that ideas are caused by the thing in the world that they represent.

THIRD STEP: So, putting the first and second step together, an idea must have been caused by a thing that has as much formal (existing) reality as there is objective (representational content) reality in the idea.

FOURTH STEP: Descartes surveys his ideas and finds that he could have invented almost all of them.

- a. That is, his level of reality as an existing / thinking, thing is such that he has as much formal reality as there is objective reality in (the representational content of) his ideas of rocks, plants, animals, other men, (and even angels).
- b. That is, he could put together innate ideas of substance, extension, thinking, and duration, and experiential (adventitious) ideas of other things, and create the ideas.
- c. So his judgment that those ideas come from outside (are caused by the things that are represented in his ideas) is habitual and doubtful.

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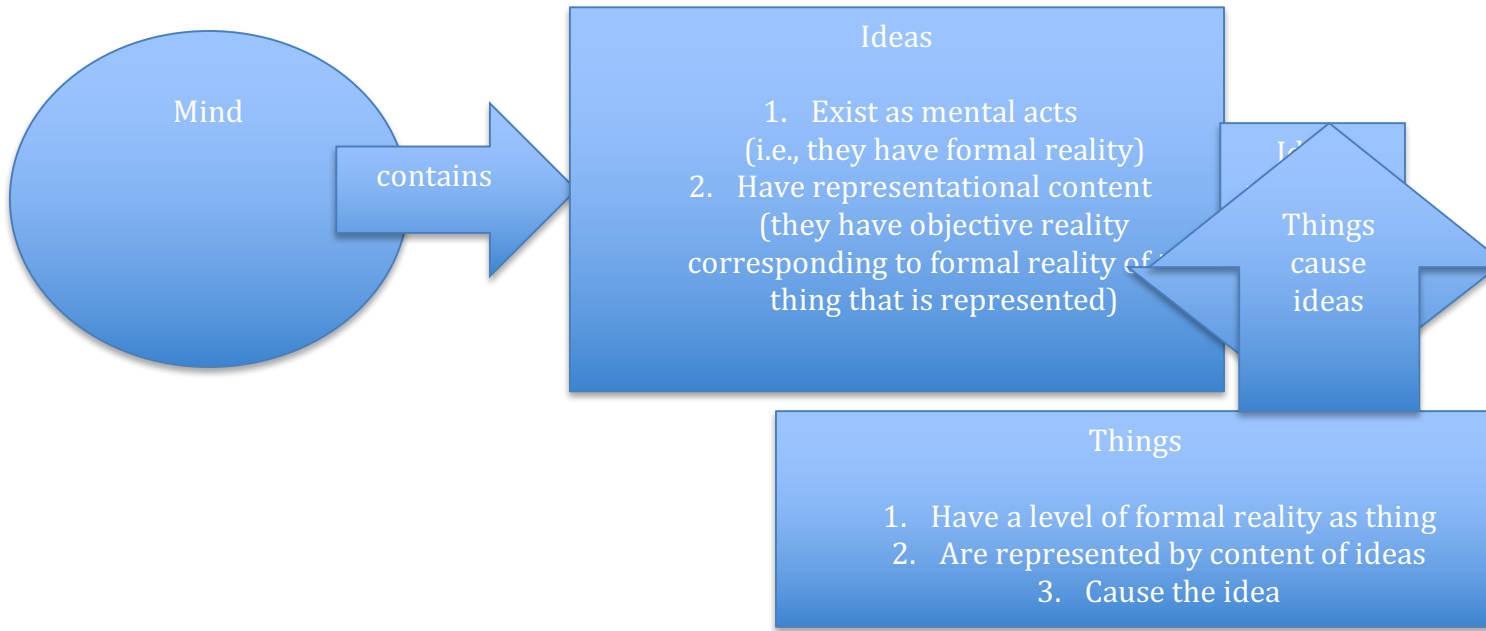
(Remember the reason for Med 3: Descartes must prove the existence of a trustworthy God so that he can apply his criterion of clear and distinct understanding beyond the point of absolute indubitable certainty, the cogito. Only when he's able to be certain about things other than the cogito can he build his mechanistic science.)

FIFTH STEP: But Descartes has an idea of a perfect being, an infinite substance, God.

- a. Descartes as an imperfect thinking thing doesn't have the level of formal reality necessary to have invented an idea with the representational content or objective reality of a perfect God.
- b. Since a cause must have the level of formal reality of its effect, and things as causes of ideas must have at least the level of formal reality as in the objective reality of the idea, then the idea of God must have been caused by an existing perfect being

CONCLUSION: therefore, God exists as perfect being

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