

Descarte and God

Descartes argues for the existence of God based on the belief that the idea of God cannot be formed without the existence of God himself. This cosmological approach shows the existence of God established by distinguished certainties about the world, that everything must originate from something. Descartes states that although we may hold the belief that one idea can lead to the discovery or creation of another idea, there has to be a root cause to spin off the domino of effects. This belief is demonstrated in Meditation III as it is stated that “although it may be the case that one idea gives birth to another idea, that cannot continue to be so indefinitely; for in the end we must reach an idea whose cause shall be so to speak an archetype, in which the whole reality which is so to speak objectively in these ideas is contained formally.” This statement introduces the idea of objective reality or representational reality, which centers around the object that the idea is about. “The greater the thing an idea is about, the more objective reality the idea has, e.g., ideas about God have more objective reality than ideas about humans” (Latus). Descartes defines God as a substance that is infinite and eternal. He says that God is independent, all-knowing, all-powerful, and the Being that all have been created by. Descartes uses the inevitable human thoughts of doubt and desire to further his proposition by suggesting that it is impossible for someone to have feelings of imperfection unless there was some idea of a Being more perfect than themselves in comparison with which helps to recognize flaws. Something that is perfect cannot come out of something that is less than perfect. Descartes argues that if he were in charge of his own existence/being, he would doubt nothing and would desire nothing, having no lack of perfection. With that in consideration, to further his claim

towards the existence of God, Descartes alludes to the reasoning behind why he cannot be God himself. "It is this, that if the objective reality of any one of my ideas is of such a nature as clearly to make me recognize that it is not in me either formally or eminently, and that consequently I cannot myself be the cause of it, it follows of necessity that I am not alone in the world, but that there is another being which exists, or which is the cause of this idea." This makes it impossible to have this idea of a God inside his mind if God did not truly exist, considering that the idea of God is an elevated effect. This belief is rationed by the idea of substance, eminence and formality, where 'eminently' is best defined by Memorial University Professor Andrew Latus' textual definition that says "If something possesses a property formally, it *literally* possesses it. If something possesses a property eminently, it possesses it in a 'higher' sense" (Latus). This concept is additionally explored through the IEP introduction of the Causal Adequacy Principle, which further assesses the causes of ideas. The IEP example for the Causal Adequacy Principle says "the idea of the sun must be caused by something that contains the reality of the sun, either actually (formally) or in some higher form (eminently)." This demonstrates Descartes' main argument that an idea cannot be greater than its cause.

Next, if substance is within him [Descartes], preluding to the fact that he is a finite substance, he could not have the idea of an infinite substance, considering that would expand beyond his capabilities of reality. More specifically, he says that since "I [Descartes] am only a thing that thinks; but because they are merely certain modes of substance and because I myself am also a substance, it would seem that they might be contained in me eminently. Hence there remains only the idea of God, concerning which we must consider whether it is something which cannot have proceeded from me myself...hence we must conclude that God necessarily exists."

The *existence* of God, instead of just the *idea* of Him, is based on the premise that an effect cannot surface into reality if not having originated from a cause; and that this said effect cannot be more eminent/higher than the cause itself. Descartes spends Meditation III examining the premises of how ideas in reality have to originate from one being that can be neither him, his parents, or any other finite being. Next, he evaluates natural ideas of reality around him, specifically on the concepts of hot and cold. The infinite, formal, and eminent cause of God as the root which stems the effect of ideas, leads Descartes to the conclusion of God's existence based on the belief that a higher substance can cause the lower, but not vice versa.

Work Cited

Haldane, S. Elizabeth. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1996. 1911 edition of The Philosophical Works of Descartes (Cambridge University Press),
https://yale.learningu.org/download/041e9642-df02-4eed-a895-70e472df2ca4/H2665_Descartes%27%20Meditations.pdf

Latus, Andrew. "Meditation Three ." *Three Ways in Proving Gods Existence, Memorial University* , 4 Apr. 2001, <http://www.ucs.mun.ca/~alatus/phil1200/MeditationThree.html>.

Skirry, Justin. "Rene Descartes ." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,
<https://iep.utm.edu/descarte/>.