

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Fall 2004
Russell Marcus, Instructor
email: philosophy@thatmarcusfamily.org
website: <http://philosophy.thatmarcusfamily.org>
Office phone: (718) 997-5287

Lecture Notes, October 4

I. Our strategy for reading the rest of Descartes' *Meditations*

We've arrived at Descartes' argument for the existence of God in Meditation III.

It is very difficult and medieval.

There are many such arguments, or 'proofs'.

See the links to Thomas Aquinas on the website for empirical arguments.

Berkeley provides one, too.

Descartes provides two arguments in the *Meditations*.

These arguments are a priori, p 51.

They have to be, since we haven't yet established the reliability of empirical experience.

We will skip the argument in Meditation III, and look instead at the argument for God's existence in Meditation V, pp 64-8.

Descartes derives his argument in Meditation V from Anselm's argument, so we will look at that first.

Then, we will look at Descartes' argument in Meditation V.

Then, we will go back to Meditation III, just after the argument for God's existence there.

And then we will proceed through the remainder of the *Meditations*.

II. Anselm's ontological argument

There are various consistent characterizations of 'God'.

Whatever necessarily exists, p 67.

The three omnis, p 67.

Creator and preserver, p 49.

Anselm (1033-1109) uses a different characterization: 'that than which no greater can be conceived'.

These are definitions of a term, or a word, but not an object.

Note the use of '' to indicate when I refer to the term, and not the object to which the term refers.

That is, there is no presupposition in this characterization that such a thing exists.

Or, so it seems.

The ontological proof of God's existence (see handout)

1) I can think of 'God'

2) If 'God' were just an idea, or term, then I could conceive of something greater than 'God' (i.e. an existing God).

3) But 'God' is that than which nothing greater can be conceived

4) So 'God' can't be just an idea

So, God exists.

Anselm further argues that one can't even conceive of God not to exist.

This argument is not present in the *Meditations*, and does not concern us.

III. Descartes' ontological argument, pp 65-66

Descartes' version is simpler.

It doesn't depend on our conception, our ability to conceive.

He merely notes that existence is part of the essence of 'God'.

This is similar to the way that having angles which sum to 180 degrees is part of the essence of a 'triangle'.

The essence of an object is all the properties that necessarily belong to that object.

They are the necessary and sufficient conditions for being that object, or one of that type.

Something that has all these properties is one.

Something that lacks any of these properties is not one.

A chair's essence (approximately): furniture for sitting, has a back, furniture, durable material.

Bachelor: unmarried man.

A human person: body and mind.

God: three omni's, and existence.

IV. From where does the idea of God come?

Descartes urges that the idea of God is imprinted on him, as a mark of the artist on his work, p 51.

Remember that there are three types of ideas, according to Descartes:

1. Innate
2. Acquired
3. Produced by me

We have freedom to create ideas of the third type any way we wish, so the idea of God can not be produced by me.

And the idea of God can not be acquired, since we have no sensory experience of God.

So, the idea of God must be innate.