

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Fall 2005  
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## I. Meditation III: trying to locate the source of our errors

Descartes has located a possible source of many of his errors: reliance on the Resemblance Hypothesis. It is natural to take our ideas of objects, and the world in general, as resembling, as being like, the world as it is in itself.

But, the ideas which really tell us about the nature of the world are the ones which are not directly derived from sensory experience.

Descartes uses the example of the sun.

The idea of the sun derived from the senses tells us that it is very small.

The idea which comes from reasoning, using mathematics and formal science, is the one which tells us the true nature of the sun.

Descartes provides a list of the possible sources of our ideas, p 38.

This list does not presume that we have any ideas of each type.

It is a list of possible ways of knowing.

### 1) Innate

These are, roughly, 'a priori' ideas.

They are not instinctive, or intuitive, abilities, except in the sense that the Cogito is a pure intuition.

### 2) Acquired

These are, roughly, 'a posteriori' or 'empirical'.

They are derived from sense experience.

### 3) Produced by me

These are ideas that I create, like those of fantasy and imagination.

They are also roughly empirical.

Note that only those of classes 2) and 3) are subject to errors from the Resemblance Hypothesis.

The innate ideas, ones which do not rely on the senses, are clean of this infection.

We can see why the "light of nature" can yield these.

They can be clear and distinct because they aren't affected by the Resemblance Hypothesis.

## II. Proceeding from MIII.

Descartes seems to be in a bit of confusion at p 36.

He has arrived at a solipsistic barrier.

Solipsism is the thesis that only I exist.

Knowledge of the Cogito seems to lead us to knowledge of mathematics.

But the possibility of the deceiver led us to reject mathematics.

It seems that to move on, we will have to deal directly with the question of the existence of a deceiver. Despite rejecting the Resemblance Hypothesis, we will need to argue for God's existence. Descartes provides two arguments for God's existence in the *Meditations*, one in MIII, and one in MV. These arguments are based on our ideas, as we only have our ideas, so far. They are thus a priori, or innate, p 51. We have not yet established the reliability of empirical experience.

We will skip the difficult argument for God's existence in Meditation Three. There are many such arguments, or 'proofs'. See the links to Thomas Aquinas on the website for empirical arguments. Berkeley provides one, too. Instead, we will look only at the argument in Meditation V, pp 64-8, which is based on Anselm's Ontological Argument. Then, we will return to the end of Meditation Three and proceed from there.

### III. Anselm's ontological argument

There are various consistent characterizations of 'God'.  
Whatever necessarily exists, p 67.  
All perfections, including omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence, p 40.  
Creator and preserver, p 49.

Anselm (1033-1109) uses a different characterization: "something greater than which can not be thought."

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 argument for God's existence (see Anselm handout, Chapter 2)

- 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 not be just an idea
- So, God exists.

Anselm further argues that one can not even conceive of God not to exist. This argument is not present in the *Meditations*, and need not concern us.