

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Fall 2005  
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## I. Objections to Descartes' ontological argument

Descartes' ontological argument starts by noting that the concept 'God' is that of a being with all perfections.

Since it is more perfect to exist than not to exist, the concept must include existence.

And if the concept includes existence, the object to which it corresponds must exist.

You can have the concept of a non-existing object just like God, but which does not exist.

But this would not be the concept of God, by definition.

Caterus, a Dutch philosopher, noted that the concept of a necessarily existing lion has existence as part of its essence, but it entails no actual lions.

You can find this in Objections 1, and in a handout I will have for you soon.

Caterus is saying that we must distinguish more carefully between concepts and objects.

Even if the concept contains existence, it is still just a concept.

Similarly, Gaunilo, responding to Anselm, wrote that my idea of the most perfect island does not entail that it exists.

In fact, it may entail that it does not exist, since a non-existing island would be free of imperfections.

Still, the airfare would be pretty steep.

Kant, following Hume, claims that existence is not a property, the way that the perfections are properties.

Existence can not be part of an essence, since it is not a property.

This objection accounts for Caterus' objection.

Kant's support for his assertion, that existence is not a predicate, is thin.

He relies on the belief that logic should make no existence assertions.

In many cases this is true.

But Descartes (and Anselm) might respond that this is an exception to that rule.

## II. Descartes' metaphysics, dualism, and monism

1. God

2. Minds

3. Bodies

In the first sentence of Meditation IV, he says that our quantity of knowledge of these things comes in this order.

We know a lot about God, some about minds, and very little about bodies.

Descartes is a dualist, believing that there are minds (both finite and infinite) and bodies.

A monist believes that there is only one kind of substance.

We will read Locke as a materialist monist, that there is only matter.

Locke is really a dualist, believing that there is a God, who is a different kind of substance.  
But we will read him more conveniently as a materialist.  
Hobbes was really a materialist, and contemporary science tends toward materialism by identifying the mind with the brain.  
Berkeley, who we will read after Locke, is a different kind of monist, an idealist monist.

### III. Getting Rid of the Deceiver, and the problem of error

Once we have a criterion, and God to ensure that it holds, everything else follows.  
A perfect God is all good.  
The deceiver is not.

Descartes problem of Error, Meditation IV, pp 53-4

- 1) God exists and is perfectly good.
  - 2) God creates and preserves me.
  - 3) My faculty of judgment therefore comes from God.
- So, my judgments never err.

Uh-oh.  
Since I do err, there must be a problem with this argument.  
Perhaps God is really the deceiver after all!

But, God is no deceiver, p 54:

- 1) Deception is a defect.
  - 2) God has no defects.
  - 3) So God is no deceiver.
  - 4) God created and preserves me.
- So, I am not deceived by God.

Given these two arguments, there is a puzzle about how I could err.  
Since the conclusion of the first argument is false, one of the premises must be false, or the conclusion does not follow from the premises.  
Descartes is committed to all three premises.  
So, his solution is to deny that the argument is valid, i.e. the conclusion does not follow.

Still, we need an explanation of how we can err.  
Descartes distinguishes between the will and the understanding.  
Our power of willing is infinite, pp 56-7.  
Our power of understanding is finite, p 57.  
So we err when we apply our will (and judge) outside our understanding.  
The way to always avoid error, then, is to avoid judging unless you have a clear and distinct understanding.  
Remember, clarity and distinctness, as a criterion, is ensured only by the presence of God.  
This, and the goodness of God, ensures that there is no deceiver, no systematic deception.  
I am the source of my error, and if I am careful not to judge hastily, I can be sure to never judge falsely.  
Now, we shall begin to reclaim the world.