

Critically discuss one of the arguments used by descartes to demonstrate the exis...



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History of Philosophy I Title: Critically discuss one of the arguments used by Descartes to demonstrate the existence of God." Man is the measure of all things: of things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not"[1] This statement by the sophist Protagoras summarizes to an extent (and not regarding the interpretation of Relativism that it was given) the basis of Descartes reasoning and especially the first two Meditations well only if one applies the following change to it: Replace the word man for thought (which in Descartes'™ definition of the word represents all consciousness). As a simplified summary, it is through thinking that he comes to the conclusion that he exists and it is because of thinking that he knows that his existence is a certainty. With this basis of his reasoning, the thought as ??? the measure of all things???, he then tries in the third Meditation to prove the existence of God by emanating from the idea of God he has. He comes to the conclusion that the ??? Idea of God??? can't be adventitious as things obtained through the senses normally come suddenly whereas he was always aware of this Idea of God. Neither can it be invented by himself because firstly it seems unchangeable (??? And it was not invented by me either; for I am plainly unable either to take away anything from it or to add anything to it???) [2] and secondly and more importantly because in order to produce such an ??? Idea??? of perfectness and infinity of the highest degree of objective reality the producer himself must have such a high degree of eminent reality. The producer must be actually (and not potentially) infinite, which Descartes is obviously not and so it could only have been God that produced and placed this idea in him.

Therefore it is innate, a thought I would like to underline and take further with an anthropologic remark. Examining different cultures and different stages of the human evolution one can in every case observe the cultures in question having an Idea of and addressing themselves to some sort of supreme power, whether they call it God, Gods, nature etc. I claim that even people who call themselves atheists have an idea of God; they just call it or subconsciously think of it as destiny.

The simple trust in one owns actions implies that we believe in something that oversees our actions and makes sure that we do the right thing.

Humanity instinctively turns and has turned to an infinite being. It seems that with the loss of most of our guiding animal instincts through evolution, with our becoming humans, God has become a new instinct. With the loss of guidance God was a way of ceding our newly achieved responsibility for our actions to a different faculty.

The thought of God as an instinct could speak for Descartes??™ persuasion of the ??? Idea of God??? being something we didn??™t learn or were told but with which we were born with. But what Descartes doesn??™t account for is that humans differ in their exact definition of God. A certain natural group could think of God apart from it being supernatural and infinite as a power which is everywhere and in everything, so that God can be found for example in a tree.

Descartes??™ idea of God disagrees with this as it names unity as an important and necessary feature of God. In addition to that for Descartes infinity can??™t possibly be present or included in a finite and even

extended thing like a tree. So how can we explain that although God assumingly is an instinct we were born with, people have different ideas of him. The idea of God must be alterable and is therefore open to additional features we discover depending on our surroundings giving it an adventitious dimension. I claim that Descartes would have a different idea of God if he was brought up in the mentioned ??? nature society??? and he would argue in the same way for this rather animistic definition of God than he now does for his rather ??? Christian??? idea of God. A similar objection was raised in the second set of objections. It questions whether Descartes would have had this idea of God if he spent his life in reclusion. Native Canadians called the Hurons for example do not have any idea of God.[3] Consequently his idea of God might have been formed by former ideas or by his surroundings.

Descartes??™ reply to this objection is that such native people as the Hurons or every person without this idea of God simply lack the ability to entertain this exact idea of God, but it is still represented in them, though unconsciously.[4] But how can he know that he has the capacity to entertain the right idea of God. There are enough religions and cultures to state, which have a totally different idea of God. Are they all mistaken. Did they all just not meditate thoroughly enough about their idea of God. His capacity reply seems like an easy way out. Hence I abide by my claim that the idea of an infinite being might be innate, but his exact idea of infinity did underlie some external additions. But if we assume that a perfect being created mankind and that this being placed an idea of him in us, why would it be such a vague and modifiable idea. Wouldn't God in his perfectness place a perfect idea of him in us. Herewith I want to question whether our idea of God really has

this highest degree of objective reality that Descartes ascribes to it. It seems that our idea of God is obscure and may underlie changes, which makes it rather imperfect.

Consequently it may have been produced by a being with less eminent reality than Descartes' God, for example by our parents. In his comment on the Meditations Hatfield describes a scenario how we could have invented the idea of God ourselves. From the conclusion that the idea of a finite body could be formed on the basis of the idea of a finite mind, he derives that we could create the idea of God by emanating from the infinity of bodily things. [5] We could create the idea of an infinite God by for example looking at the sky or considering the endlessness of space. Descartes replies to this in the First Set of Replies. He draws a difference between 'indefinite' and 'infinite' things.

[6] God is infinite in every respect, whereas the universe for example is only boundless in the certain manner that I do not recognize a limit [7] and is therefore described as 'indefinite'. God's infinity is special as it has power and perfection which external infinity does not have, hence we cannot form its idea from the less formally real external infinity. This might be a sufficient answer to Hatfield's objection, but it still does not explain or why our idea of God is alterable and obscure. In the first set of objections this confused way of perceiving the idea of God is compared to the confused representation of a chiliagon in the mind. You cannot adequately imagine its form with all the thousand sides. How then can we have a distinct and not confused idea of God's alleged infinite perfections [8] The claim concludes that we only have a general idea of God in ourselves but not this specific and <https://assignbuster.com/critically-discuss-one-of-the-arguments-used-by-descartes-to-demonstrate-the-existence-of-god/>

clear idea of God that Descartes claims us to have. Descartes seems to have two answers to this objection: Firstly, if we have a different idea of God and it has been changed by experience we have been simply deceived by our surroundings. Secondly and more importantly, regarding the incompleteness of our idea of God, he claims that we cannot comprehend it, which means that we cannot understand God to the full extent, but can only apprehend it.

In contrast to this he says that he perceives this idea of God clearly and distinctly and even claims ??? God provides much more ample and straightforward subject-matter for clear and distinct knowledge than does any created thing???[9]. I understand perceiving an idea clearly and distinctly as comprehending something. Descartes contradicts himself in order to cope with the fact that his idea of God isn't complete. Here the word infinity comes in handy for him as something we just can't grasp, but in my opinion God can't just be described as infinity (and he doesn't merely describe it as infinity), that makes it too simplistic.

Through his radical doubting in the first meditation he places a benchmark of how sure you need to be about an idea in order to claim that the object it represents exists, I then ask the question: How can he be undoubtedly sure about the existence of a being of such absolute importance for him (as it presumably created him and therefore made it possible that he can even doubt) when he just ??? apprehends??? it Following Descartes approach to existence in the First Meditation I claim that in order to express the truth about the existence of something you need to understand it with certainty, a rule that he should have applied for the existence of God. In Addition it was not merely certainty that Descartes was after but he sought to establish the <https://assignbuster.com/critically-discuss-one-of-the-arguments-used-by-descartes-to-demonstrate-the-existence-of-god/>

truth. The certainty he gets from perceiving something clearly and distinctly is to be understood as a ??? certain knowledge of the truth??? and not the sort of certainty we ordinarily understand as certainty, which is certainty of belief.[10] Clear and distinct perception serves as his method to find the truth. However he never properly defines clear and distinct perceptions or how we can recognize them and here lies the problem.[11] We cannot determine whether he perceives the idea of God clearly and distinctly or not, as we do not exactly know what this includes and entails. Therefore we cannot say whether he succeeds in proving the existence of God or not, because his whole reasoning is based upon clear and distinct perception, which is itself not very clear. In conclusion we could claim that Descartes succeeds in affirming his certainty of the existence of God and the reasons for doing so as well as a quite convincing way for us to find personal certainty about this issue.

This means that he proved an ordinary certainty but not certain knowledge of the truth. He perceives the existence of God, with all the attributes he is suppose to have, clearly and distinctly, but an atheist, supposedly with the same intellectual capacity as Descartes and the same commitment to meditate about this question, might encounter problems in trying to perceive a divine existence clearly and distinctly. Firstly because it is not clear what it means to perceive clearly and distinctly.

Secondly, as I claimed before, like Descartes??™ ??? Christian??? idea of God, an atheist not having an idea of God was influenced or even brought about by his surroundings; his persuasion is too a certain degree

adventitious. The atheist meditation might make him find a general and  
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obscure idea of infinity innate in him. But how is he supposed to find in himself Descartes' specific idea of God as an infinite, independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful substance[12], which has created everything and additionally holds unity and simplicity[13]. The time and the surrounding Descartes lived in created this certain idea of God in him. It also obliged him to treat the question of God in his philosophy and the fact that he sets up God as a metaphysical frame around his scientific reasoning during his times might have given his philosophy a completeness that made it more untouchable. If he had stayed true to the thought as the one measure of all things, instead of placing God as the origin of thought, he would have come to an even greater philosophical conclusion than he already has. Word count: 1998 Words—[1] Quelle einsetzen[2] Descartes, The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Vol.

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