

How does descartes
move from
concluding that he
exists to concluding
god exists? ...

[Profession](#), [Philosophers](#)



The question of God's existence is a very contentious and controversial issue ever since no man can remember. For thousands of years, it has persistently proved to be a perennial fundamental philosophical problem, and which has raised much contested debates between different opinions. It was tackled by many earlier scholars including scientists and philosophers, and to this date, at least on my personal opinion, we haven't yet come to a unanimous consensus regarding the matter.

Among the most prominent scholars on this subject, Descartes has proved to be a leading figure in his approach to this issue as we shall soon see through his methodical processes he applied and which are recorded as his "Descartes Meditations". Due to the voluminous nature of this subject and the many limitations involved in an effort to make this paper as precise as possible, I will however be restrictive in my approach to only those relevant ideas that show the problems of God's existence as expounded by Descartes (Hatfield, 2002, 25). In his meditations, Descartes had an overall objective, to question the validity of knowledge. This he did through his methodical questioning of various metaphysical matters such as God's existence as well as the distinction between the mind and the body. In this way, he attempted to have an explicit distinction between what we can certainly know as truth, because he believed that it was reason, and not experience, through which we can discover absolute certainty. In very particular explanations, Descartes Meditation II elaborates the reasons that inform us why Descartes was so much interested in knowledge.

Meditation I, however, is the foundation of all the others that followed, and it is mainly concerned with his discerns between absolute certainty and mere opinion (Garber, 2001, 15). In Meditation II, Descartes compared his endeavors with those of Archimedes and embarked on the journey of finding absolute truth. In his attempt to ascertain God's existence (as the fabricator for his thoughts and ideas), Descartes is seen as one who accidentally stumbled on his first validated notion, that he exist for certain. This is when he ascertained that if it is possible for him to persuade something or himself and at the same time he can be deceived about/of something, and then he surely must exist for this to happen.

This form of self validation is what is commonly referred to as the Cogito Argument. In simple terms, Descartes implies here that anything that thinks must surely exist, and it is from here that he went further to his investigation by attempting to explain the "I" concept which is a "necessary existence" (Broughton, 2002, 25). This he did by exploring his consciousness with an attempt to find that essence for which he existed.

At this point, Descartes applied his systematic method of doubting everything, including his own existence so that he could arrive at the indubitable, beyond any reasonable doubt. He refused to take himself as a rational animal in the sense that such an idea was impossible to understand. Lastly, he focused on the thinking act, from which he posits his famous dictum that, he thinks therefore he is, because he must exist in order for him to think (Hatfield, 2002, 40). Descartes argues that he is a thing that doubts, affirms, understands, refuses, wills, denies, and also that he senses and

imagines. He thus concludes that applying the mind is more valid to affirm the perceptions rather than the use of senses. At this juncture, he poses the question of the wax as we ascribe its qualities based on the senses. When we melt the wax, we ultimately alter its qualities, and we can only know its qualities after melting through the uses of the intellect.

Thus, information from the senses will only give us the observable qualities but the mind gives us understanding. Through doubt, Descartes has proved that he exists and that the essence of his existence is the mind. It is through this that the problem of self existence led to the problem of God's existence (Garber, 2001, 55). Meditation III on the other hand mainly concerns itself with Descartes main objective of proving God's existence. It is here that he first has to make clarity of his ideas as being distinct and clear. Basing his argument on his proven existence, he postulates that whatever he can perceive for certain, distinctly and clearly, must be true. So far, he still holds some of his earlier beliefs that God can deceive and he therefore wants to prove his existence and the fact that some of his beliefs are self oriented, not God's deception.

His argument here is that there must be some element of certainty idea in doubt itself. Through such assumptions, Descartes is able to discern some imperfectness in himself, from which he must move to explain the perfect being which he refers to as God. This perfect being must be aware of the imperfections, since it is only through a perfect being that the idea is placed in our minds (Broughton, 2002, 60). What Descartes is significantly telling us here is that there must be, in the very least occurrence, a totally efficient

cause as is in the effect that the cause causes. It is from this declaration that he affirms the existence of a perfect being, God. On the problem of God being a deceiver, Descartes makes a conclusion that God can never deceive because through the light of nature's manifestation, deception and fraud are determined by the presence of some defect on his part, and not on the perfect beings part. In Meditation IV, after Descartes have proved God's existence, he must at this point explain certainly that God is non-deceiver.

He argues that it is our will that leads us to err because God is no deceiver and His effect in us must be like His. We have an infinite will just like God and this free will makes us responsible for our actions and errors. Our intellect makes us perceive things distinctly and clearly, although we become imperfect due to the nature of our finite understanding, and improper application of our faculties. Furthermore, the free will allows us to make decisions and choices that are freely made without God's existence (Hatfield, 2002, 100).

This shows the second problem that has come up in Descartes line of thinking even after proving God's existence and his (Descartes) as well. By this time, Descartes has proved three fundamentally important facts to him. One, that there is no universal doubt. Secondly, he has identified the presence of a general truth rule, and thirdly that there is a God who exists and who can never be an evil deceiver. What Descartes is saying here is that if God did not give humans free will, then who would categorically have a direct influence in all that we do and this therefore would mean that we would never err. He postulates therefore that this free will in all of us

sometimes makes it difficult for God to help us, which is why we find ourselves making some poor decisions in some instances (Garber, 2001, 150).

After this realization and assertion of both his existence and proof of God's existence, the problem persists for Descartes because he now has to explore other arising issues such as the mind and body relationship, as well as the material things possibilities. The consecutive Fifth and the Sixth Meditations are his approach to these issues, and he wants to establish his remaining doubts and at the same time apply his discoveries, beginning with the essence of geometrical and mathematical truths and that of color. The other issue that comes up at this point is things and people existence. The third was the need to determine the difference between reality and dreams. He made a reiteration that God's omnipotence and imperfection can never be compatible. This he argued on the basis that a non-existing thing can never be perfect and that all perfect things must be perfect, and at the same time that a non-existent perfect thing must be imperfect. This is how he concludes that a perfect thing can never deceive (Broughton, 2002, 90).

These are the lines of thought that made it possible for Descartes to solve the second problem of physical or corporeal things existence with certainty, which further led to his second proof of God's existence. It followed that the idea of physical things must be real because God is not a deceiver. It is through this that he now knows with certainty that he has a body and that all things he perceives must be real since he can know them with certainty. By perceiving things that he knew with certainty where they came from and

what in which they are, it became possible for him to distinguish with certainty between being awake and being asleep. This he said made it possible for him to link these things with his whole life, and that he could now reject all his previous doubts as ridiculous and as hyperbolic (Hatfield, 2002, 150).

Many years after Descartes however, the problem still poses major fundamental problems that call for further investigation. On my opinion however, I believe we can go ahead with other more pressing issues rather than dealing with this issue since the more we dig deeper into it, the more the circularity of the matter manifests itself (Garber, 2001, 150).