

Concept of god according to descartes assignment

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The concept of God according to Descartes and the so called antitheist position of Descartes Philomon Kani ???? Rene Descartes is often credited with being the “ Father of Modern Philosophy. ” This title is justified due both to his break with the traditional Scholastic-Aristotelian philosophy prevalent at his time and to his development and promotion of the new, mechanistic sciences. His fundamental break with Scholastic philosophy was twofold. First, Descartes thought that the Scholastics’ method was prone to doubt given their reliance on sensation as the source for all knowledge.

Second, he wanted to replace their final causal model of scientific explanation with the more modern, mechanistic model. Descartes attempted to address the former issue via his method of doubt. His basic strategy was to consider false any belief that falls prey to even the slightest doubt. This “ hyperbolic doubt” then serves to clear the way for what Descartes considers to be an unprejudiced search for the truth. This clearing of his previously held beliefs then puts him at an epistemological ground-zero. From here Descartes sets out to find something that lies beyond all doubt.

He eventually discovers that “ I exist” is impossible to doubt and is, therefore, absolutely certain. It is from this point that Descartes proceeds to demonstrate God’s existence and that God cannot be a deceiver. This, in turn, serves to fix the certainty of everything that is clearly and distinctly understood and provides the epistemological foundation Descartes set out to find. Descartes was a rationalist philosopher. The rationalists wanted to prove everything by reason alone, because they thought that ‘ the senses’ were unreliable. The difference between analytic statements or synthetic statements was not yet clear at that moment.

We think that “ God exists” can only be proven by using both senses and reason, but Descartes’ ‘ proved’ the existence of God with reason alone. At the outset of the Third Meditation, Descartes tried to use this first truth as the paradigm for his general account of the possibilities for achieving human knowledge. In the cogito, awareness of myself, of thinking, and of existence are somehow combined in such a way as to result in an intuitive grasp of a truth that cannot be doubted. Perhaps we can find in other cases the same grounds for indubitable truth. But what is it? The answer lies in

Descartes’s theory of ideas. Considered formally, as the content of my thinking activity, the ideas involved in the cogito are unusually clear and distinct. (Med. III) But ideas may also be considered objectively, as the mental representatives of things that really exist. According to a representative realist like Descartes, then, the connections among our ideas yield truth only when they correspond to the way the world really is. But it is not obvious that our clear and distinct ideas do correspond to the reality of things, since we suppose that there may be an omnipotent deceiver.

In some measure, the reliability of our ideas may depend on the source from which they are derived. Descartes held that there are only three possibilities: all of our ideas are either adventitious (entering the mind from the outside world) or factitious (manufactured by the mind itself) or innate (inscribed on the mind by God). (Med. III) But I don’t yet know that there is an outside world, and I can imagine almost anything, so everything depends on whether God exists and deceives me. The next step in the pursuit of knowledge, then, is to prove that God does indeed exist.

Descartes's starting point for such a proof is the principle that the cause of any idea must have at least as much reality as the content of the idea itself. But since my idea of God has an absolutely unlimited content, the cause of this idea must itself be infinite, and only the truly existing God is that. In other words, my idea of God cannot be either adventitious or factitious (since I could neither experience God directly nor discover the concept of perfection in myself), so it must be innately provided by God. Therefore, God exists. (Med.

III) As a backup to this argument, Descartes offered a traditional version of the cosmological argument for God's existence. From the cogito I know that I exist, and since I am not perfect in every way, I cannot have caused myself. So something else must have caused my existence, and no matter what that something is (my parents?), we could ask what caused it to exist. The chain of causes must end eventually, and that will be with the ultimate, perfect, self-caused being, or God. As Antoine Arnauld pointed out in an Objection published along with the Meditations themselves, there is a problem with this reasoning.

Since Descartes will use the existence (and veracity) of God to prove the reliability of clear and distinct ideas in Meditation Four, his use of clear and distinct ideas to prove the existence of God in Meditation Three is an example of circular reasoning. Descartes replied that his argument is not circular because intuitive reasoning in the proof of God as in the cogito??? requires no further support in the moment of its conception. We must rely on a non-deceiving God only as the guarantor of veridical memory, when a

demonstrative argument involves too many steps to be held in the mind at once.

But this response is not entirely convincing. The problem is a significant one, since the proof of God's existence is not only the first attempt to establish the reality of something outside the self but also the foundation for every further attempt to do so. If this proof fails, then Descartes's hopes for human knowledge are severely curtailed, and we are stuck in solipsism, unable to be perfectly certain of anything more than our own existence as a thinking thing. With this reservation in mind, we'll continue through the Meditations, seeing how Descartes tried to dismantle his own reasons for doubt.

The proof of God's existence actually makes the hypothetical doubt of the First Meditation a little worse: I now know that there really is a being powerful enough to deceive me at every turn. But Descartes argued that since all perfections naturally go together, and since deception is invariably the product of imperfection, it follows that the truly omnipotent being has no reason or motive for deception. God does not deceive, and doubt of the deepest sort may be abandoned forever. (Med. IV) It follows that the simple natures and the truths of mathematics are now secure.

In fact, Descartes maintained, I can now live in perfect confidence that my intellectual faculties, bestowed on me by a veracious God, are properly designed for the apprehension of truth. But this seems to imply too much: if I have a divinely-endowed capacity for discovering the truth, then why don't I always achieve it? The problem is not that I lack knowledge of some things; that only means that I am limited. Rather, the question is why I so often

make mistakes, believing what is false despite my possession of God-given mental abilities.

Descartes's answer derives from an analysis of the nature of human cognition generally. Every mental act of judgment, Descartes held, is the product of two distinct faculties: the understanding, which merely observes or perceives, and the will, which assents to the belief in question. Considered separately, the understanding (although limited in scope) is adequate for human needs, since it comprehends completely everything for which it has clear and distinct ideas. Similarly, the will as an independent faculty is perfect, since it (like the will of God) is perfectly free in every respect.

Thus, God has benevolently provided me with two faculties, neither of which is designed to produce error instead of true belief. Yet I do make mistakes, by misusing my free will to assent on occasions for which my understanding does not have clear and distinct ideas. (Med. IV) For Descartes, error is virtually a moral failing, the willful exercise of my powers of believing in excess of my ability to perceive the truth. To put it in simple term this is how Descartes proof about the existence of God unfolds: 1. I exist (Axiom). 2. I have in my mind the notion of a perfect being (Axiom, partly based on 1) 3.

An imperfect being, like myself, cannot think up the notion of a perfect being (Axiom) 4. Therefore the notion of a perfect being must have originated from the perfect being himself (from 2 &

3)??? 5. A perfect being would not be perfect if it did not exist (Axiom) 6. Therefore a perfect being must exist (from 4 & 5) Descartes proof about the existence of God has been

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criticized by many for its simplicity and on the grounds that not everyone has the idea of God in his mind. Even some Christians lack the idea of God. Descartes still defended his stand on the existence of God.

But the funniest of all things to happen is the condemnation of Descartes work by the then Catholic Church. One can ascribe the condemnation to his break from the traditionalist scholastic Aristotelian philosophy but the widely accepted reason for his condemnation according to C. F. Fowler is that Descartes in his meditation has failed to prove the immortality of the Soul. Descartes argues that mind and body are really distinct in two places in the?? Sixth Meditation. The first argument is that he has a clear and distinct understanding of the mind as a thinking, non-extended thing and of the body as an extended, non-thinking thing.

So these respective ideas are clearly and distinctly understood to be opposite from one another and, therefore, each can be understood all by itself without the other. Two points should be mentioned here. First, Descartes' claim that these perceptions are clear and distinct indicates that the mind cannot help but believe them true, and so they must be true for otherwise God would be a deceiver, which is impossible. So the premises of this argument are firmly rooted in his foundation for absolutely certain knowledge.

Second, this indicates further that he knows that God can create mind and body in the way that they are being clearly and distinctly understood. Therefore, the mind can exist without the body and vice versa. On this account, the mind is an entirely immaterial thing without any extension in it

whatsoever; and, conversely, the body is an entirely material thing without any thinking in it at all. After looking into the concept of God and Soul according to Descartes, it is important to ask the question is the concept of immortality really a Christian concept and is the condemnation of Descartes justified in any way by the Catholic Church.

Many people think the Bible says we have an immortal soul destined, at death, for heaven, hell or purgatory. What does the Bible say? What happens to us after we die? Where are our loved ones who have passed on? Will we ever see them again? Everyone needs to know that life has purpose, that death isn't the permanent end of our existence. The most common Christian belief regarding the afterlife is that people possess souls and at death their consciousness in the form of that soul departs from the body and heads for heaven or hell. Most religions teach some form of life after death.

The ancient Egyptians, for example, practiced elaborate ceremonies to prepare the pharaohs for their next life. They constructed massive pyramids and other elaborate tombs filled with luxuries the deceased were assumed to need in the hereafter. In some civilizations when a ruler died others who had accompanied and served him in his life were put to death so they could immediately serve him in the afterlife. Wives and other relatives, servants, sometimes even household pets joined him in death and a supposed entrance into a new life on the other side.

Belief in the immortality of the soul was an important aspect of ancient thought espoused by the Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Plato, in *Phaedo*, presents Socrates' explanation of death: " Is it not the

separation of soul and body? And to be dead is the completion of this; when the soul exists in herself, and is released from the body and body is released from the soul, what is this but death? ” (Five Great Dialogues, Classics Club edition, 1969, p. 93). Socrates explained that the immortal soul, once freed from the body, is rewarded according to good deeds or punished for evil.

Socrates lived ca. 470-399 B. C. , so his view of the soul predated Christianity. Plato (ca. 428-348 B. C.) saw man’s existence as divided into the material and spiritual, or “ Ideal,” realms. “ Plato reasoned that the soul, being eternal, must have had a pre-existence in the ideal world where it learned about the eternal Ideals” (William S. Sahakian, History of Philosophy, 1968, p. 56). In Plato’s reasoning, man is meant to attain goodness and return to the Ideal through the experiences of the transmigration of the soul.

Thus secular philosophies sanction the idea of the immortal soul, even though the Bible does not. Believe it or not, God’s Word teaches something entirely different. History of a Controversial Teaching The doctrine of the immortal soul caused much controversy in the early Catholic Church. Origen (ca. 185-254) was the first person to attempt to organize Christian doctrine into a systematic theology. He was an admirer of Plato and believed in the immortality of the soul and that it would depart to an everlasting reward or everlasting punishment at death.

In Origen De Principiis he wrote: “... The soul, having a substance and life of its own, shall after its departure from the world, be rewarded according to its deserts, being destined to obtain either an inheritance of eternal life and blessedness, if its actions shall have procured this for it, or to be delivered

up to eternal fire and punishments, if the guilt of its crimes shall have brought it down to this ... ” (Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 4, 1995, p. 240).

Origen taught that human souls existed before the body but is imprisoned in the physical world as a form of punishment.

Physical life, he reasoned, is a purification process to return humans to a spiritual state. Later Augustine (354-430) tackled the problem of the immortality of the soul and death. For Augustine death meant the destruction of the body, but the conscious soul would continue to live in either a blissful state with God or an agonizing state of separation from God. In *The City of God* he wrote that the soul “ is therefore called immortal, because in a sense, it does not cease to live and to feel; while the body is called mortal because it can be forsaken of all life, and cannot by itself live at all.

The death, then, of the soul, takes place when God forsakes it, as the death of the body when the soul forsakes it” (Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2, 1995, p. 245.) The influences of pagan Platonic philosophy on Origen and Augustine are profound. Richard Tarnas, in his best-seller *The Passion of the Western Mind*, points to this influence: “... It was Augustine’s formulation of Christian Platonism that was to permeate virtually all of medieval Christian thought in the West. So enthusiastic was the Christian integration of the Greek spirit that Socrates and Plato were frequently regarded as divinely inspired pre-Christian saints ... (1991, p. 103). Centuries later Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274) crystallized the doctrine of the immortal soul in *The Summa Theologica*. He taught that the soul is a conscious intellect and will and cannot be destroyed. A few centuries later the leaders of the Protestant

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Reformation generally accepted these traditional views, so they became entrenched in traditional Protestant teaching. The immortality of the soul is foundational in Western thought, both philosophical and religious. Belief in going to heaven or hell depends on it.

But does the Bible teach that death is the separation of body and soul or that the soul is immortal? Hebrew Understanding of the Soul The Hebrew word translated “ soul” in the Old Testament is nephesh, which simply means “ a breathing creature. ” Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words defines nephesh as “ the essence of life, the act of breathing, taking breath ... The problem with the English term ‘ soul’ is that no actual equivalent of the term or the idea behind it is represented in the Hebrew language. The Hebrew system of thought does not include the combination or opposition of the ‘ body’ and ‘ soul’ which are really Greek and Latin in origin”. The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible makes this comment on nephesh: “ The word ‘ soul’ in English, though it has to some extent naturalized the Hebrew idiom, frequently carries with it overtones, ultimately coming from philosophical Greek (Platonism) and from Orphism and Gnosticism which are absent in ‘ nephesh. ‘ In the Old Testament it never means the immortal soul, but it is essentially the life principle, or the living being, or the self as the subject of appetite, and emotion, occasionally of volition”.

That nephesh doesn’t refer to an immortal soul can be seen in the way the word is used in the Old Testament. It is translated “ soul” or “ being” in reference to man in Genesis 2: 7, but also to animals by being translated “ creature” in Genesis 1: 24. Nephesh is translated “ body” in Leviticus 21: 11 <https://assignbuster.com/concept-of-god-according-to-descartes-assignment/>

in reference to a human corpse. The Hebrew Scriptures state plainly that, rather than possess immortality, the soul can and does die. "The soul [nephesh] who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18: 4, 20). The Old Testament describes the dead as going to sheol, translated into English as "hell," "pit" or "grave. Ecclesiastes 9: 5-6 describes sheol as a place of unconsciousness: "For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished ... " King David laments that death extinguishes a relationship with God. "For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?" (Psalm 6: 5). The immortal-soul concept isn't part of the Old Testament, but it began to make inroads into Jewish thought as Jews came in contact with Greek culture.

In the first century the Jewish philosopher Philo taught a Platonic concept: "... The death of a man is the separation of his soul from his body ... " (The Works of Philo, translated by C. D. Yonge, 1993, p. 37). Philo followed the Hellenistic view that the soul is freed upon death to an everlasting life of virtue or evil. In the New Testament the Greek word translated "soul" is psuche, which is also translated "life." ?????? In Psalm 16: 10 David uses nephesh ("soul") to claim that the "Holy One," or Messiah, wouldn't be left in sheol, the grave.

Peter quotes this verse in Acts 2: 27, using the Greek psuche for the Hebrew nephesh (notice verses 25-31). Like nephesh, psuche refers to human "souls" (Acts 2: 41) and for animals (it is translated "life" in the King James Version of Revelation 8: 9 and 16: 3). Jesus declared that God can destroy <https://assignbuster.com/concept-of-god-according-to-descartes-assignment/>

man's psuche, or " soul" (Matthew 10: 28). If the Old Testament describes death as an unconscious state, how does the New Testament describe it? No one wrote more about this subject than the apostle Paul. He describes death as " sleep" (1 Corinthians 15: 51-58; 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18).

Many people are surprised to find that the term immortal soul appears nowhere in the Bible. However, though the Scriptures do not speak of the soul as being immortal, they have much to say about immortality. For example: " You know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3: 15). Paul told the members of the congregation in Rome to " seek" immortality (Romans 2: 5-7). He taught Christians at Corinth that they must be changed and " put on" immortality (1 Corinthians 15: 51-55). Paul proclaimed that only God and His Son possess immortality (1 Timothy 6: 12-16) and that eternal life is a " gift" from God (Romans 6: 23).

The most powerful words come from Jesus Himself: " And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6: 40).

True Origin of Immortal-soul Teaching We've seen in this brief look at the supposedly immortal soul that the Bible teaches no such concept. The idea filtered into Western thought through Greek philosophy. Its origins are older than Athens, in fact as old as man. The concept of the immortal soul was introduced into man's thinking at the earliest beginnings of human history.

God told the first human beings, Adam and Eve, that if they sinned they would die and return to the dust from which He had created them (Genesis 2: 17; 3: 19). Satan, the embodiment of evil, the powerful entity who

opposes God, assured them they wouldn't die (verses 1-5). Satan slyly injected into Eve's consciousness the notion that God was lying and that she and her husband would not die, thus ingraining the unscriptural teaching of the immortality of the soul into human thought. Satan has since deceived the world on this important understanding as well as many other biblical truths (Revelation 12: 9). Much of the world, including millions of people in religions outside of traditional Christianity, are convinced they have??? or are??? immortal souls and hope they will go to a happy place or state of being immediately after they die. Soul/Nephesh According to Judaism The Hebrew word for soul, " nephesh," does not mean what you say it does, if you want to use Judaica as an original source. The foundation of Judaism, according to Judaism, is Kabbalah. The Kabbalistic meaning of nephesh/soul is that the one soul of the Creator that has been divided into many parts among mankind and awaits its reunification in the final correction.

This is actually the root of our belief that all souls will be eternally okay, in the end. The Biblical Answer to Death Yet the Bible plainly teaches that the dead lie in the grave and know nothing, think no thoughts, have no emotions, possess no consciousness. Does this mean death, the cessation of life, is final, the end of everything? The Bible answers this question too. Although mankind is physical, subject to death, the good news is that God promises a resurrection to eternal life to everyone who repents, worships God and accepts Jesus as the Messiah and His sacrifice.

The first resurrection to immortality will take place when Christ returns to establish God's Kingdom on this earth. Later will come another resurrection??? to physical life??? for people who had never had a
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relationship with the Father and Jesus Christ. They, too, will gain the opportunity for immortality. The true final answer is not death but resurrection. From the above it is clear that the concept of immortality of Soul is actually not a Christian concept and there is no reference to it in the Holy Bible.

Even if one does not want to rely too much on the above view of the Biblical verse, still one can say that immortality of Soul cannot be a Christian concept because according to Christian belief, the God is the Supreme commander and if our souls were immortal then there would not be any difference between the earthly human beings and the Divine God. And for human beings to be at par with the Supreme Commander is impossible. If one does not want to take this argument also then and stick to the belief that immortality of the soul is actually a Christian concept and Descartes has not proved it according to C.

F. Fowler in his book, "Descartes on the human soul: philosophy and the demands of Christian doctrine," from Descartes writing it is understood that the Soul is immaterial as against the body which is material. And if the Soul is immaterial then it cannot be put to death from this one can say that Descartes has proved the immortality of the Soul. So either way one can succeed in defending Descartes and say that the Catholic Church made a mistake by condemning Descartes writings.