

Introduction to Modern Philosophy

Lecture §7

I. Review Med. III Critique

II. The (infamous) Cartesian Circle

—what is a circular argument? —where is D's circle?

—2 part response:

a) actual (intuition or deduction) vs. potential knowledge.

b) circularity, validity, and the coherence of concepts.

III. Medit. IV: God, Truth and Error

—prove: that God is not a deceiver

—the "overproduction" problem

—WHY we make errors: finitude + free will (indifference vs. choice)+privation of the intellect

—HOW we make errors: the will exceeds the scope of the intellect when making judgments

—How to avoid errors: suspension of judgment + CM

—Objection: divine (epistemic) negligence? D's response: God's ok, we're ok.

I. Review last time, then consider objections to Med. III proof for existence of God.

Obj. to step 7:

—what is it to have a degree of reality? Not just complexity simpliciter. Complexity under a unified structure. More real=more structured diversity.

—is idea of God utterly vague?

why, if it is, is this an objection? If content is messy & vague, you cannot infer that anything more than a being "messy & vague" caused it (actually, you don't need anything outside as a cause of such an idea).

RD's reply: idea of God is not vague. Strikes RD with vividness, so seems quite clear. What about distinctness? Well, could a finite mind have a fully distinct idea of an infinite idea? RD: no. But you have the content of the idea partly distinctly. Our only access would be partial. Then RD says "and we do have that partially distinct idea of God." The more philosophy we do on it, the more distinct it becomes.

—objection 3: Is the content of the idea of God itself incoherent (i.e., materially false)? I.e., is it like the idea of the round square? No. If what RD has already establ'd, that idea of God is clear & partially distinct, is true, then the content of the idea must be meaningful & thus, not incoherent.

Step 10 objection:

RD: I couldn't have been the cause of the idea of PB. RD asks: could you have made it up on you own? What is the content of idea: total perfection. A finite, imperfect mind cannot produce images that are totally perfect (saith RD). Our imagination is limited to large finite structures. But RD is talking about the actual infinite. RD asks: so where do we get the idea of the actual infinite? He proceeds from certain facts of mathematics to existence of God.

RD provides multiple proofs of existence of God, each meant to prove existence of God while bypassing the premises which he thought bothered people in 1st proof.

Second Proof: RD gives all poss. causes of himself (who has IPB). Then eliminates all but God. (this proof relies on causal princ. of "at least equal reality of cause and effect").

Third Proof (5th Medit.): bypasses idea of causality. Takes existence as essential part of nature of anything perfect, since it is better to exist than not to exist. So, since IPB contains idea of perfection, the perfect thing must exist.

II. RD's Circle

Three responses:

a) actual knowledge=that which you know already or which you can deduce. Now RD says "I didn't include the existence of God in any of my premises in the argument for God's existence." This is the difference between an explicit & implicit circle. Some think he has nevertheless argued in a potential circle (because he uses a rule which is needed to construct the proof, tho' without being explicit).

JP: what's wrong with circular argumentation? Well, raises questions whether either conclusion or premises is more plausible than the other. If it is a circle, they are not either more plausible, but they stood or fell together. Now, JP notes some concepts that are distinct are nevertheless substantive and circular: triangularity & trilaterality. JP: in other words, a coherence circle is not trivial, as some find the circular arg. for the truth of the bible.

b) JP: one interp. of RD's stance on this circle: the price of rational knowledge is a commitment to God's existence.

c) RD can escape the circle, even the *potential* circle, because whatever you can *grasp at once* and satisfies the truth criterion escapes the EDH, and thus can be known *a priori* without further ado. RD thought that you can gradually increase your comprehension of an argument until you can 'load the whole thing in your mind at once' (the evidence for this lies in the Discourse on Method, among other places).

III. Meditation IV

A. Proof that God is not a Deceiver:

One form of argument: God is perfect, deception is a defect, hence God cannot be a deceiver.

nazi case: is deception a bad thing always? JP: no, but what RD is claiming is that on the whole is it better to deceive than not to deceive—answer: no.

Proof that God is not a deceiver:

- 1) From the supreme being only being may flow (non-being – nothingness – neither needs nor can have a cause).
- 2) As finite and limited, creatures (created beings) consist of non-being as well as being.
- 3) Only the being of creatures can derive from God, not their non-being.
- 4) Truth is the being of knowledge, falsity (ignorance) its non-being.
- 5) Falsity can never flow from God, never be caused by God.
- 6) As the cause both of my essence and my existence, God cannot be the cause of my errors.
- 7) Therefore, God does not deceive me; and by similar reasoning, we may clearly and distinctly perceive that no being is ever deceived by God.

B. Problem of Error arising from (A)

The proof that God is not a Deceiver leads to an "overproduction problem": I never make mistakes. So RD must explain how we can be capable of error if God made us, and God is not a deceiver. RD's offering:

- 1) our minds are finite

2) we have free will so we can make errors. Free will involves two capacities:

a) freedom to resist external causes (neg. freedom)

b) freedom to choose (pos. freedom)

Now, isn't this mind of ours, made by God, then defective? RD: no, our minds are perfect when used as intended. But various privations (misuses) of the intellect produce errors (exceeding the proper use of the intellect).

How we make errors: the will exceeds the scope of the intellect when making judgments.

Note that RD thinks both will & intellect are perfect on their own. Neither is a problem, therefore, on its own. Notice you cannot get T/F ideas until you combine will & intellect to make judgments. "I think F is P."

JP: is this plausible? Do propositions require a will? RD seems to think ideas are not T/F, but are all propositions judgments? Weird restriction on what counts as ideas.

Idea=image of cognitive parts.

Objection: why didn't God make me smarter? (divine epistemic negligence)

Hence, while not directly responsible for my errors, indirectly God is responsible for them. RD's answer: God has a suff. reason for all He does. ∴ We are as smart as we should be.