

- 1 Rene Descartes
Meditation One
(1596 – 1650)
Methodological Doubt
Concerning Things That Can be Doubted
- 2 Important Names, Terms and Concepts
 - Rene Descartes
 - Skepticism
 - Methodological Doubt
 - The Search for Certainty
 - Suspending Judgment
 - The Dream argument
 - The Deceiver argument
- 3 Descartes purpose is to see what can be doubted
 - Descartes Goal
 - Descartes asks what if anything is certain
 - Descartes strategy is to approach the investigation by withholding belief from things that are not entirely certain as those things that are obviously false
- 4 Withholding belief or the Suspension of Judgment
 - Comparing the logic of belief with the notion of truth
 - There are two possibilities regarding the truth of a statement
 - A statement is either true or false
 - There are possible attitudes towards belief
 - One can believe the statement – accept it as true
 - One can disbelieve the statement – reject it as false
 - One can withhold belief in the statement – neither believe nor disbelieve the statement
- 5 Diagram of the two views
- 6 Example of a belief attitude towards a statement
 - Suppose we consider the statement “God Exists”
 - A Theist is a person that believes the statement God exists
 - An Atheist is a person that disbelieves the statement God exists
 - An Agnostic is a person that withholds belief concerning the statement God Exists
- 7 Continuing the Investigation
 - Descartes method of doubt
 - Descartes decides rather than attempting to disbelieve each and every belief individually he will challenge the basic principles on which the beliefs are grounded
 - Descartes explains that everything previously accepted and considered as most obvious and

- certain by him has been based on the senses
- Descartes also notes that he has found out that sometimes this belief has turned out to be false

8 Cartesian Dialectical Method

- Descartes uses the conversational strategy by taking a pro and con position towards what can legitimately be doubted
- His first step in this process is to point out that perceptions made in poor conditions are suspect
- This step could be considered as an application of common sense

9 Dream Argument

- Descartes counters common sense with the skeptical doubt of perceptions in favorable conditions
- He asks the question: would I not be considered insane if I questioned these sorts of perceptions
- His answer is No!
- For even perceptions occurring in ideal conditions of observation may be indistinguishable from vivid dreams

10 Descartes' Dream Argument

- I sometimes have vivid dreams that are qualitatively just like my best (waking) perceptions
- If I sometimes have vivid Dreams that are qualitatively just like my best perceptions, then I cannot distinguish with certainty between my best perceptions and vivid dreams
- I cannot distinguish with certainty my best perceptions and vivid dreams

11 Dream argument continued

- If I cannot distinguish with certainty between my best perceptions and vivid dreams, then even my best perceptions provide no certainty
- Even my best perceptions provide no certainty

12 Descartes considers the source of dreams

- Descartes trying to salvage some hope for perception suggests that images must be derived from something real and adds that surely mathematics must be secure even in dreams
 - Descartes finds that even these claims can be doubted

13 Descartes postulates a God that could put ideas in our mind

- The point is in theory that there is not any guarantee that the images in our dreams may not be from a source that corresponds to anything real
- Perhaps there is no Physical world at all
- Even simple mathematics can then be doubted

14 Problem of Error

- Descartes anticipates two possible objections to the deceiver argument
 - God is supremely good
 - 1 But if God is supremely good and not a deceiver then there is a problem
 - Problem of error – If I could be deceived some of the time, then why can't I be deceived all of time
 - 2 Perhaps God is not that powerful – then it is more likely I might be deceived

15 Descartes' Evil Demon

- The last stage of the method of doubt involves Descartes imagining an evil demon. The evil demon's goal is to make you believe things that are not true. Descartes uses the Evil Demon Hypothesis as a way to test whether an idea is clear and distinct. It is a quality control tool to determine if a belief is certain. If a belief can be certain despite the efforts of an evil demon trying to confuse and confound us then Descartes maintains that we can then build on this foundation of certainty. But if there is no belief that can pass this test perhaps we will be forced to accept Skepticism.

16 Conclusion

- At the end of Meditation one Descartes leaves the reader without any solid belief that is certain. He explains that this Meditation or methodological doubt is a means to finding knowledge and does not recommend that one think of it as perhaps applying to how one should live.

17 Class Room Discussion

- A large group format will be used to discuss Dreams. Some of the questions for discussion will be:
 - Can a person control their dreams?
 - Can dreams be an indication for the future?
 - How can we interpret our dreams?
 - Do Dreams have any meaning at all?

18 Web sites of Interest

- All Six of the Meditations translated in Latin and English
- Brief account of the Method of Doubt