

Candidate 1 evidence

Section 1 Knowledge and Doubt

1.

Descartes meditation 3 carries on from the conclusion he came to at the end of meditation 2. The conclusion Descartes reached at the end of meditation 2 claimed that he reached something firm and lasting within the sciences stating that the one thing he found for certain was that he existed as a thinking thing "I am, I exist is necessarily true every time it is uttered by me or conceived in my mind" this conclusion from meditation 2 causes Descartes to venture into the possibility of a deceiving God. In this meditation Descartes aims to find out whether God truly exists and whether he is being deceived by him. Descartes aims to prove the existence of God in this meditation as he is uncertain of how his idea of God and supposed clear and distinct perception of a perfect being came to be in his mind.

Descartes begins his third meditation using what is now known as the causal adequacy principle. To accurately understand the causal adequacy principle, Descartes gives the example of a stone. He goes on to state that the stone, granted it has not existed before, must be made out of something which contains everything within the stone. For example, the stone cannot be made out of air as air does not contain everything that the stone contains and therefore cannot be the cause of the stone and the stone cannot be made out of nothing as everything has a cause. Descartes then applies this principle to ideas stating that our ideas have a cause. This links to Descartes idea of God in which he deems to have a cause outside of himself as he himself could not have created this idea of God and placed it in his mind as he as a finite being is not capable of fathoming even the idea of an infinite being stating that God must have put the idea of himself into Descartes mind, appealing to his innate ideas. Another thing that appeals to Descartes innate ideas of God are the examples of thought he gives in his causal adequacy principle. Descartes goes on to explain in his causal adequacy principle that there are two vital parts to this principle, modes and substances, stating that modes are dependant on substances while substances exist on their own. Descartes again applies this to his idea of God stating that his idea of finite is dependent on the infinite and therefore the infinite substance (God) must have come first and therefore exist for him to exist.

Descartes then moves onto what is known as degrees of reality in which he states that he as a finite being is incapable of fathoming an idea of an infinite being stems of from the fact that for something, even an idea, to exist it must contain at least as much if not more objective reality than the reality of the idea. Descartes states that his idea of God contains more objective reality than even him himself as God is an omnipotent, all powerful, perfect being, this emphasises that his idea of God could not have come from him and must have come from somewhere or someone else outside of himself who contains the same amount if not more objective reality than him. "God must exist for if I had created myself I would have given myself every perfection". Within degrees of reality Descartes explores the idea of the perfect and imperfect in which he states that Descartes being an imperfect being again could not fathom the idea of a perfect being. However, although Descartes is an imperfect being he does say that he has a clear and distinct perception of perfection (with clear meaning an unclouded and certain perception and distinct meaning a perception that is in and of itself) although he does not fully grasp the concept.

There are a few criticisms Descartes degrees of reality. Specifically in the modern world, many people believe that either something exists or it doesn't, this undermines Descartes degrees of reality as they are no longer taken into consideration.

Another criticism of Descartes meditation is that he claims to have a clear and distinct perception of perfection however he also claims not to fully grasp the concept. This is a difficult thing for us to wrap our heads around as using Descartes reasoning in order to have a clear and distinct perception of something, you need to have a full understanding and grasp of it. Another criticism of Descartes clear and distinct ideas is that it is questionable whether he is even capable of having clear and distinct ideas as in his second meditation, Descartes made it obvious that the malicious demon could deceive us about such concepts as he is consistently deceiving us about everything as he uses both the deceiving God argument and the hypothetical malicious demon argument to demolish his previously clear and distinct beliefs and ideas causing us to doubt knowledge based on reason and completely undermining Descartes philosophy.

Descartes then moves onto the possibility that God would not deceive us as he is an all good being. In as in this meditation he aims to disprove God's ability to be an evil deceiver. However, Descartes comes to the conclusion that God being an all good being, not capable of deceiving is possibly false as it could be taken that God's goodness is irrelevant to deceit and therefore God could still deceive us while being an all good being.

Descartes then moves onto the possibility of there being no God at all to which he promptly concludes that this in his mind is not possible as Descartes' idea of god is reliant on the existence of God as there is no other explanation for either his existence nor his innate idea of god. Descartes even goes as far as disregarding being created by his parents as his parents are imperfect beings and therefore would not have been able to instil him with the innate idea of God in his mind. Descartes considering the idea of there being no God strengthens his argument as this causes his argument to seem more rigorous as he has chosen to willingly undermine his innate ideas of God that he put so much of his faith in throughout his meditations therefore countering the argument against him claiming his argument to be insincere.

However there are many criticisms regarding Descartes innate ideas of God, with Hume in particular suggesting that through his dream argument in meditation one, claiming that his innate idea of God could be simply the product of his imagination with many other philosopher not believing in innate ideas in general with Hume again suggesting that the basis of knowledge should be experience rather than reason as Descartes argues throughout his meditations this causes Descartes idea of God to crumble.

In conclusion, I believe Descartes attempt at proving the existence of God in meditation three to be unsuccessful, although his method of doing so has its strengths such as being rigorous, it seems as though Descartes has reaches a dead end in his argument with his degrees of reality no longer being taken into consideration anymore, this undermines his practice as many people now simply believe something to exist or not to exist. Descartes so called clear and distinct perceptions of God also seem to be an extremely difficult thing to wrap our heads around as he claims to have this clear and distinct perception but not fully grasp the concept which using Descartes reasoning doesn't make sense. Descartes seems to not be able to respond to a number of these criticisms therefore weakening his argument, making this meditation his weakest one yet.

