

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Spring 2006  
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Lecture Notes, March 1

I. Quiz: What is the Resemblance Hypothesis? Provide examples.

We saw on Monday that Descartes cited the Resemblance Hypothesis as a source of his errors.

So, now we have reasons to keep the rotten apples out of the basket: the three doubts.

We have criteria for putting good apples back into the basket: the criterion for certainty, clear and distinct perception.

And we also have a criterion for recognizing bad apples: reliance on the Resemblance Hypothesis.

If we are going to make any progress, though, we need to know that the criterion for knowledge ensured.

That is, we need to defeat the deceiver doubt.

So, Descartes proceeds to argue for the existence of God.

As I noted in early classes, we are skipping around a bit.

We first look at Anselm's argument, then Descartes version of that argument, and then return to the end of Meditation Three.

II. Anselm's ontological argument

There are various consistent characterizations of 'God'.

Whatever necessarily exists, p 67.

All perfections, including omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence, p 40.

Creator and preserver, p 49.

Anselm (1033-1109) uses a different characterization: "something greater than which can not be thought."

These are definitions of a term, or a word, but not an object.

Note the use of " " to indicate when I refer to the term, and not the object to which the term refers.

That is, there is no presupposition in this characterization that such a thing exists.

Or, so it seems.

The ontological argument for God's existence (see Anselm handout, Chapter 2)

1) I can think of 'God'

2) If 'God' were just an idea, or term, then I could conceive of something greater than 'God' (i.e. an existing God).

3) But 'God' is that than which nothing greater can be conceived

4) So 'God' can not be just an idea

So, God exists.

Anselm further argues that one can not even conceive of God not to exist.

This argument is not present in the *Meditations*, and need not concern us.

### III. Descartes's ontological argument

Descartes's version of the argument is simpler than Anselm's.

Anselm argued that the object which corresponds to the concept 'something greater than which can not be thought' must exist.

For, if we thought that the object which corresponded to that concept did not exist, then it would not be the object which corresponded to that concept.

There would be something greater, i.e. the object which does exist.

So, we give the name 'God' to that best possible object.

Descartes's version does not depend on our conception, our ability to conceive.

He merely notes that existence is part of the essence of 'God', pp 65-66.

This is similar to the way that having angles whose measures add up to 180 degrees is part of the essence of a 'triangle'.

Or, as Descartes notes, like a mountain necessarily has a valley.

The essence of an object is all the properties that necessarily belong to that object.

They are the necessary and sufficient conditions for being that object, or one of that type.

Something that has all these properties is one.

Something that lacks any of these properties is not one.

A chair's essence (approximately): furniture for sitting, has a back, furniture, durable material.

Bachelor: unmarried man.

A human person: body and mind.

God: three omni's, and existence.

### IV. Some problems with 'God'

- 1) Evil, which seems to conflict with omni-benevolence.
- 2) Error, which seems to conflict with omnipotence.
- 3) Free will, which seems to conflict with omniscience.