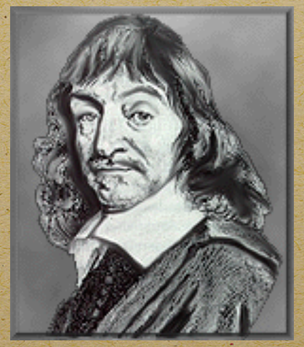
PHI 101 - Epistemology
Lecture 3



Descartes' Epistemology

Modern Rationalism

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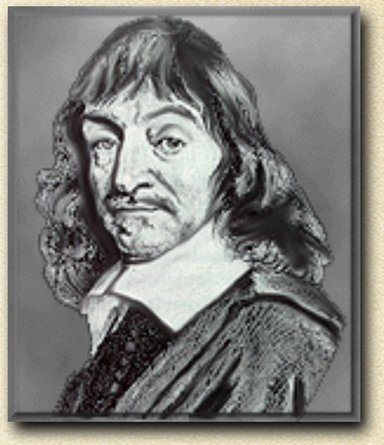

I. **Rene Descartes' Response to Skepticism**:

A. Descartes' Accomplishments:

1. **Optics** - the physics of light and how we see
2. **Mathematics** - the Cartesian Coordinate System
3. **Philosophy** - ***How*** and ***What*** we know (Epistemology and Metaphysics)

B. **"Meditations on First Philosophy"** - a summary of Cartesian Philosophy

1. **The Project** -
   a. Demonstrate why Skepticism fails
   b. Demonstrate how religion and science are compatible

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II. An **Overview** of the "Meditations":

1. ***Day 1*** - How to recognize the difference between true and false belief
2. ***Day 2*** - Discovery of an indubitable belief
3. ***Day 3*** - A Proof for the existence of God
4. ***Day 4*** - Why do we make mistakes?
5. ***Day 5*** - The essence of things
6. ***Day 6*** - Proof for Dualism: the mind/body distinction

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III. **"Meditation 1"**: What can be doubted, *or* How to get rid of false beliefs

A. **The Problem** - We grow up believing many false things, ***and*** we base other beliefs on these false ones

B. **The Solution** - Find a way to distinguish true from false beliefs (i.e., ***Methodological Skepticism***)

NOTE: Two necessary conditions for an *adequate* **T**ruth **R**ule/Filter -

- **The *Truth* Criterion** - the property appealed to must *never* belong to a false belief
- **The *Recognizability* Criterion** - the property appealed to must be recognizable to ordinary cognizers

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TR 1: Accept as true any belief that has been acquired through **direct** *or* **indirect sensory experience**.

Objection - Illusions and Hearsay

TR 2: Accept as true any belief acquired through direct sensory experience under **ideally favorable external conditions**.

Objection - Insanity or Hallucinations

TR 3: Accept as true any belief acquired through direct sensory experience under ideally favorable external ***and*** **internal** conditions.

Objection - Dreams

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TR 4: Accept as true any belief acquired through direct sensory experience under ideally favorable external and internal conditions **when one is not asleep**.

Objection - Can't clearly distinguish dreams from waking experience

TR 5: Accept as true those **general basic beliefs** that are ***necessary*** **in order to have dreams**.

Examples:

- color (smells, sounds, etc.)
- extension
- shape
- quantity/magnitude
- time

Objection - The Evil Genius

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III. **"Meditation 2"**: **A Response to the Skeptical Hypothesis**

A. Consequences of the Skeptical (*Evil Genius*) Hypothesis:

1. all our **sense data** *could* be false
2. all our **memories** *could* be false
3. there *might* be **no external universe** (time/space, etc.)

B. Necessary existence of the self (***cogito ergo sum***) - Think*ing* ***requires*** a think*er*

1. 'I' refers to the think***er*** (***whatever*** it is that is thinking)
2. If there is think***ing***, there is a think***er***.
3. I am a think***ing*** **thing** (*the substance of the soul is thought*)

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IV. **"Meditation 3"**: How the existence of God secures our knowledge of things other than ourselves

TR 6: Accept as true any belief that is ***clearly*** and ***distinctly*** believed.

Question: Does this rule meet the Truth and Recognizability criteria?

A. Evaluating TR 6

1. Are clear and distinct ideas ***recognizable***?

Yes, we have the example of our own existence.

2. Are clear and distinct ideas ***true***?

Yes, ***if and only if***:

1. God exists, ***and***
2. God is ***not*** the Evil Genius

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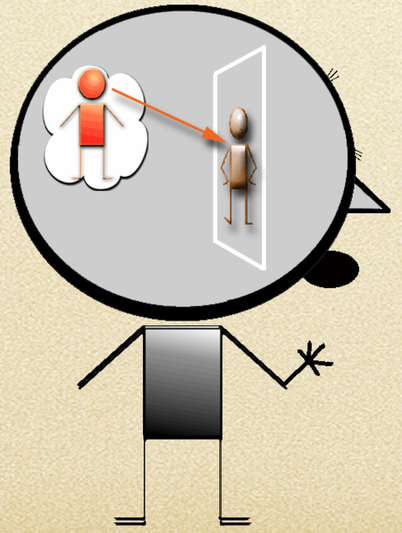
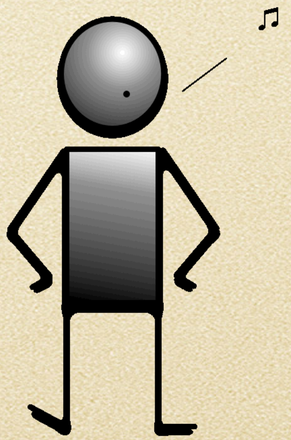
V. Descartes' argument for God's existence

A. **Types** of ideas in the mind -

1. **Innate** - that which is native to myself
2. **Adventitious** - that which (*apparently*) comes from outside
3. **Invented** - that which I create out of other ideas

B. Theory of Perception - ***Representationalism*** (*the TV screen theory*)





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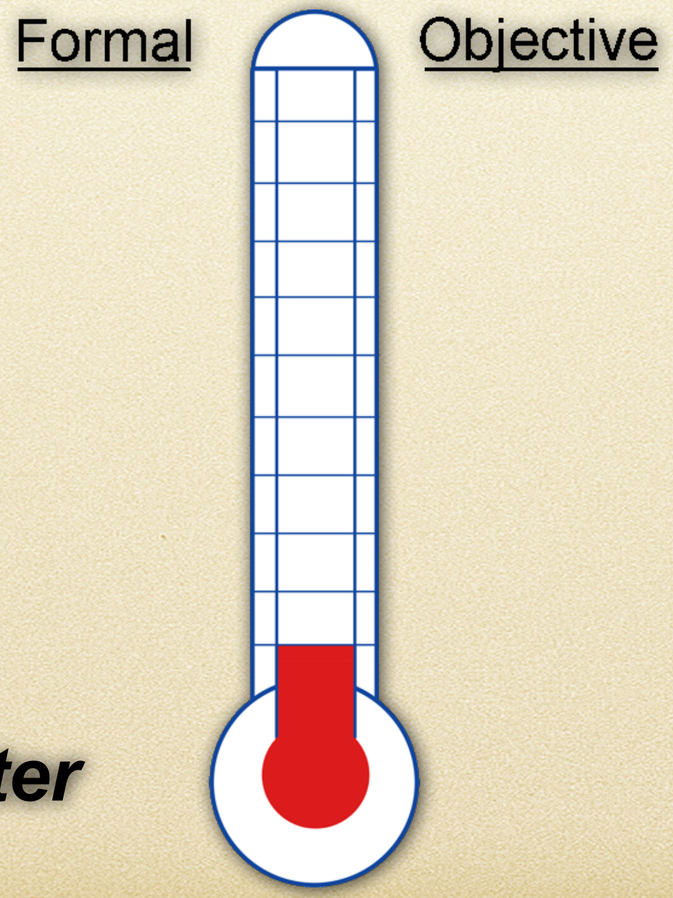
a. Descartes' Ontological Hierarchy -

i. **Formal Reality** - that which belongs to a thing-in-itself

ii. **Objective Reality** - that which *represents* a thing-in-itself



The Ontameter

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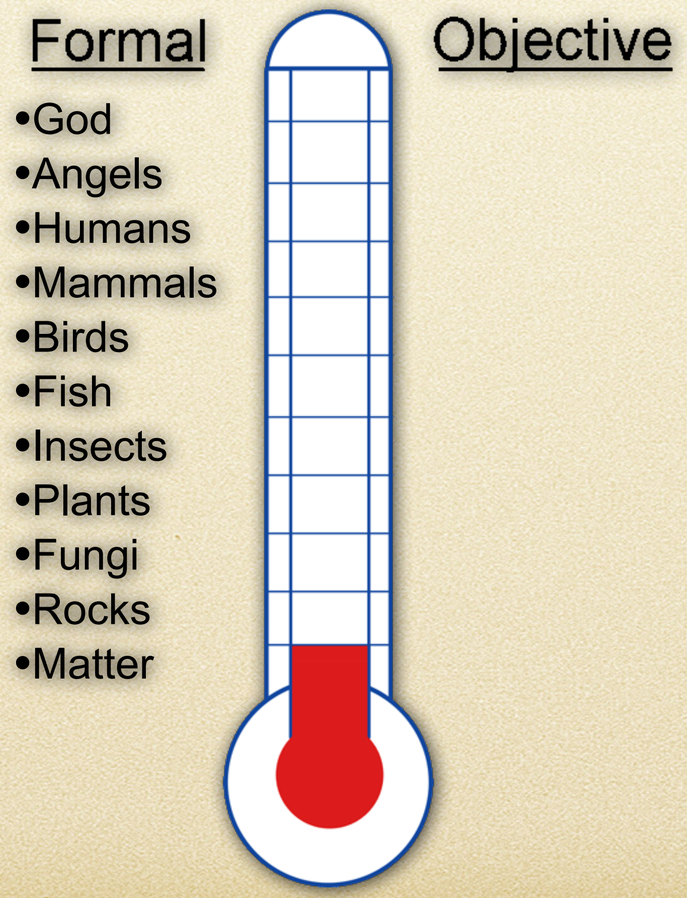

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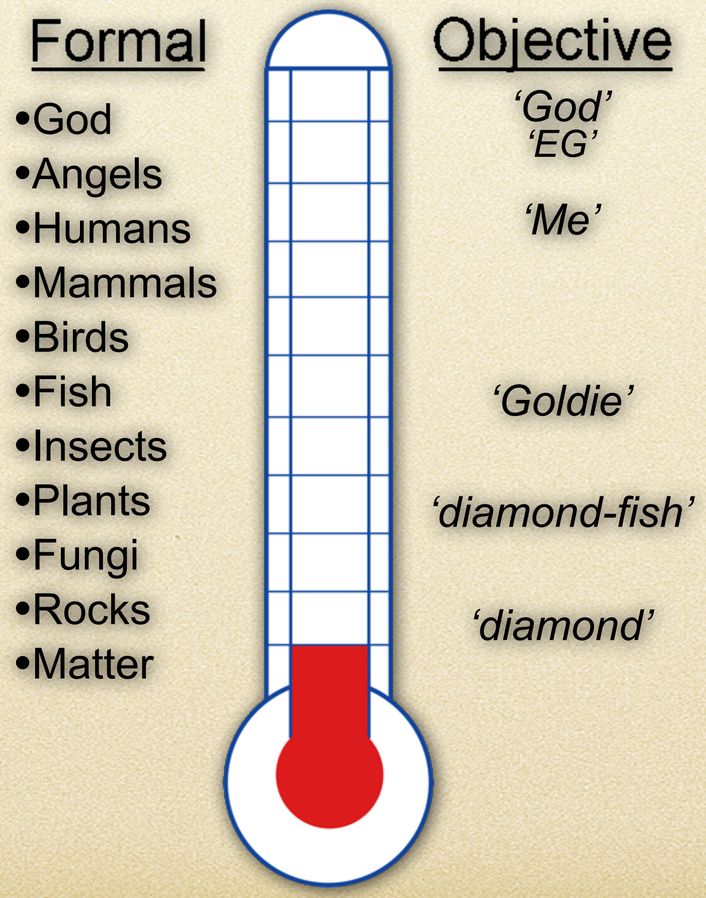
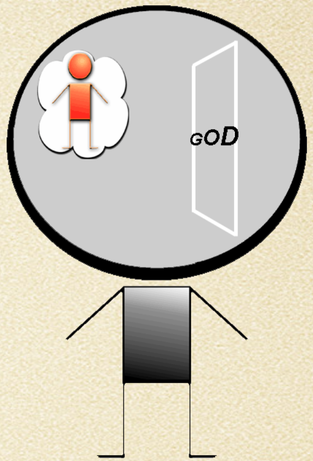


The Argument for God's Existence



P1) I have the ***idea*** 'God' in my mind.

P2) The idea 'God' is of a perfect being.

- Omnipotent
- Omniscient
- Omnibenevolent

'God' = perfect being

P3) The ***cause*** of an idea must have an equal or greater amount of ***formal*** reality as the idea has ***objective*** reality. (i.e., *an idea cannot be ontologically superior to its cause*).

P4) The idea 'God' has more ***objective*** reality than I have ***formal*** reality.

C1) *Therefore*, I cannot be the ***cause*** of the idea 'God'.

P5) Since I could not cause the idea 'God' in my mind, there must exist *some* other cause of it outside my mind.

P6) Only a being with perfect ***formal*** reality could cause the idea of a perfect being in my mind.

C2) *Therefore*, God, the perfect being, exists outside my mind.

Summary

- Absolute Skepticism fails because some ideas are indubitable.
- Some indubitable ideas are innately placed in the mind by God.
- God's existence can be demonstrated through rational argument.
- The existence of God insures that *a posteriori* ideas are reliable ***if*** we exercise reason along with careful observation.
- Both *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge is possible.