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Introduction to Philosophy

Epistemology 3

Recapitulation

- The idea that a belief is knowledge if it is true and justified ('formed according to the rules') does not work.
- Alternative approach: knowledge is that which is based on indubitable beliefs – foundationalism
- Descartes tried to isolate those indubitable beliefs by submitting ever more beliefs we assume to constitute knowledge to doubt: dream argument and evil demon argument.

Descartes on What is Left

- Descartes thinks there is something left: my inner world is still there, I am thinking, I am doubting, therefore I know that I exist (= I am right about me being real) – in Latin: *Cogito, ergo sum*.
- This inner world of experiences is completely clear and distinct
- So when something is completely clear and distinct, I am right about that > incorrigibility of the inner world.

Descartes on the Bridge from the Inner to the Outer

- Descartes' bridging argument has two parts:
Part I
- (1) Part of our experience is that we might be wrong and are imperfect
- (2) Therefore [1] we have the idea of a perfect being, which cannot be wrong
- (3) A perfect being must be real, otherwise it would not be perfect
- (4) Therefore [2&3] this perfect being = God exists

Descartes on the Bridge from the Inner to the Outer II

- Part II
God is perfect, and therefore would not deceive me in all my thoughts and perceptions
 - > generally my perceptions and ideas are right
 - > only sometimes I get it wrong, through my own fault, because I choose to follow an experience which is not clear and distinct
- So:
 - > Descartes first establishes what is absolutely certain (one cannot be wrong about)
 - > on the basis of this he argues that all beliefs which are derived from this foundation and from clear and distinct ideas is knowledge.

The Weak Links in Descartes' Foundationalism

- 1. The proof of the existence of God
- 2. How can Descartes be sure that his belief that he thinks is true? Or his belief that he has an idea of a perfect being? Would it be impossible to imagine that there is this belief without there really being an 'I'? Or that there is this belief without there really being this idea of a perfect being?
- 3. The basis of our knowledge claims is not in the real world, but in our beliefs!



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