

**Date:** Thu 2 Nov 21:39:27 EST 2006

**From:** <wkallfel@umd.edu> [Add To Address Book](#) | [This is Spam](#)

**Subject:** Some answers to a few emailed questions

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Hi everyone- I'm circulating some answers I responded to, from some recent emailed questions -WMK

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"the dream argument with regards to skepticism- is this simply just that because there is no set criterion for determining if we are conscious of dreaming we must be skeptical?"

I think you got the general gist here, but to to make it more precise: Descartes and others are alluding to special kinds of dreams which: a.) more or less reproduce what we experience when we're awake (in the sense that the properties of the sensations in the dream 'track' the properites of the objects, which themselves behave like what we'd encounter when 'awake.' b) One doesn't know that one is dreaming. Then, yes, experiencing such a dream there is no criterion to determine that what one is experiencing is a dream. Then, yes, there is a reason to doubt in the objective basis of my sense-data reports, since these sense-data could be part of the dream mentioned above (they could all be subjective). (Note: in the above answer I mentioned explicitly what it means to be 'skeptical' here [we have a reason to doubt...] as well as what we can be skeptical about [the truth of my sense data]

"And the parts about tautologies and claim/belief about sense data- is this simply that one cannot be skeptical about tautologies and that we cannot rely on sense data, and therefore must be skeptical when regarding information obtained in this manner?"

Careful. Yes, we can be deductively certain (recall term in syllabus) about tautologies, since they are claims that are always true (to deny them would be contradictory). So yes, we have no basis for skepticism (i.e. we have no reason to doubt) for claims concerning tautologies. By the same token, no, we cannot be skeptical about sense-data, as sense-data themselves are just simply reports of what my senses are directly experienceing (e.g. 'flesh colored patch in vision field now!' 'green spot now!' etc) We can be skeptical about any claim beyond that, that seeks to account for my sense datum (For instance, I can be skeptical that there is an actual physical object like a 'hand' that causes my sensory experience of a flesh-colored patch in my vision field (e.g, the doubt raised by the dream argument.) So in a nutshell, according to the exclusive definition of classical skepticism, the only claims I have no basis to doubt are: tautologies, and sense data ! re! ! ports.

"I was studying the questions of the study guide and I came across a point I was really unclear on. It's from question 4. I was wondering if you could clarify The problem Berkeley finds with Locke's theory and his solution to to? I was also unclear about Hume's objection to Locke an Berkeley. I know their general arguments, but I guess I'm just having a hard time tying them in to one another"

1.) The tension in Locke's philosophy stemmed from his empiricism (knowledge is derived primarily from sensory experience) and his notion of material substance (and its associated primary qualities) which according to Locke is unobservable directly, and we infer its existence via the causal theory of perception.

2.) Berkeley rejected Locke's notion of material substance primarily because of its inconsistency with empiricism...so for Berkeley there are only sense-data...which are ideas, therefore there is only one kind of substance (mental substance). To explain why one's sense data remains consistent, and mostly beyond my influence, Berkeley argues that God is the master perceiver, so to speak...and everything (including our own minds) is merely an idea in God's mind

3.) Hume objected to Berkeley, by arguing that the same reason why Berkeley rejects material substance applies also to mental substance. We never directly observe mental substance, we only observe ideas/impressions. Moreover, the thought that the external world 'causes' such ideas and impressions is just an association we make by habit, which cannot be rationally warranted

For more info, see the materials I posted Oct 20, Oct 27 in Reading Notes and Other Handouts which you can get to by scrolling down or by clicking on Weekly Materials link in your section webpage:

<http://www.glue.umd.edu/~wkallfel/PHIL100Fall2006/WK/index.html>

**Date:** Fri 3 Nov 19:22:59 EST 2006

**From:** <wkallfel@umd.edu> [Add To Address Book](#) | [This is Spam](#)

**Subject:** ...just one more :)

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Hi everyone,

Another good question:

"...i dont really understand Descartes's perfection proof of God's existence. if you could email me back explaining it that would be really great. thank you so much."

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Quoth the TA (yrs truly :)

See the end of Meditation III. Basically, the gist is:

1. I've got this innate idea (infinity) which seems not to represent anything in my experience. (Note: This is *after* he's deduced that he is a thinking thing [cogito ergo sum], so he's confident or certain that he, as a self, exists at least as a mental substance. So that mental substance has ideas/representations in it) "I who am finite would not have the idea of infinite substance in me unless it came from a substance that was really infinite." (p. 125, bottom left hand column) Obviously no such infinite substance exists in experience. "And I ought not to say that...I grasp it [infinity] as the absence of limits--in the way I grasp rest as the absence of motion and darkness as the absence of light. **On the contrary, it's clear to me that there is more reality in an infinite than in a finite substance and hence, that my grasp of the infinite must somehow be prior to my grasp of the finite....how could I understand that I doubt and desire, that I am deficient and imperfect, if I don't have the idea of something more perfect to use as a standard of comparison?"** (ibid, top right hand column). That last sentence is very crucial -- he's signalling there's something privileged about this innate idea: we need this idea to understand what finiteness is, just as we need the concept of perfection as a standard to understand imperfection.
2. All ideas are representations, which are effects of other causes. Whatever caused me to have this innate idea is not found in my experience.
3. Furthermore, and crucially, the reality of the cause must be at least as great as the reality of the effect. "Therefore, since I am a thinking thing with the idea of God [=infinite substance] in me, my cause--whatever it is, must be a thinking thing having in it the perfection the idea of every perfection I attribute to God...But it's obvious from what I have just said, that if my cause gets its existence from itself [since Descartes argued above that he himself could not have been the cause of the idea of infinite substance, since he--Descartes--is clearly a finite substance] it must *be* God." (middle RH column, p. 126)

So basically, you can see elements of Anselm's ontological argument (the idea of infinite perfection) and Aquinas' causal argument (every idea has a cause...whose reality is just as great as the reality of its effect.) If you look at the top left hand column of page 126 you see that Descartes really plays up, in somewhat dramatic (and one could say perhaps exaggerated) terms the absolute distinction between finitude and infinity. So he's really trying to underscore on the one hand how radically different this idea is from everything else, and at the same time argue for its ultimate necessity (as shown in Step 2 above). Then he drags in this notion of the reality of a cause must be at least as great as the reality of the effect, and voila...some infinite real substance (God) must have caused me to have this innate idea.

Aside from being vulnerable to the critiques of Anselm and Aquinas, one could further critique Descartes (as we mentioned in discussion) for confusing the properties of an idea or representation with the properties of whatever caused me to have that idea or representation. For instance, even if it follows that something (call it X)'caused' me to have this idea of infinite substance, why must it follow that whatever this X itself must be infinite?

For additional info, pls see some of the postings in the section website:

<http://www.glue.umd.edu/~wkallfel/PHIL100Fall2006/WK/index.html>

hope this helps!

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