Descartes vs Hume
OUTLINE

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20th April 2001
1. Descartes’ arguments in the third meditation

(a) Summary of things about which I am certain or doubt.

i. It is clear and distinct to me that I exist as a thinking thing.

ii. Mathematical knowledge must be doubted, since God might be deceiving me (evil deceiver).

iii. If I want to become certain of anything besides my own existence I must first inquire upon the existence of God and whether or not he is an evil deceiver.

(b) Preliminary Discussion of Ideas

i. There are three possible types of ideas: innate, those that originate in myself, and those that originate from something outside of me. We shall be most interested in the latter group.

ii. Even though some ideas of apparent external objects come to me against my will, I cannot regard them as corresponding to external things. This is because:
   A. I may have some faculty which produces these ideas.
   B. Even if they come from outside me, I have no guarantee that they are similar to their causes.
   C. Therefore, the principle upon which I have judged my ideas to be similar to external objects seems to be mistaken.

(c) The argument for the existence of God from the fact that I have an idea of Him:

i. Every idea has formal reality, just by existing, and objective reality, which is the real object itself.

ii. There must be as much reality in the cause as there is in the effect.

iii. I don’t need to assume a cause greater than myself for any of my ideas of corporeal substance nor of other people or angels.

iv. I have an idea of a perfect God, and this idea has more objective reality than any idea of a finite substance.

v. The idea of God could not have originated in me, since I am a finite substance.

vi. Therefore, God must exist as the only possible cause of the objective reality found in my idea of Him.
(d) The argument from my existence: It can also be argued that a cause more perfect than myself must be assumed to explain my coming into being and my continued existence. This cause must be God.

2. Hume’s Arguments in “Sceptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding”

(a) All objects of human reason can be divided into Relations of Ideas and Matters of Fact.
   i. Relations of Ideas includes the sciences like Mathematics.
   ii. These relations are intuitively or demonstratively certain.
   iii. Matters of fact are not attained in the same way.
      A. There is no evidence of the truth of a Matter of Fact
      B. The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible, since it is perceived with the same amount of indistinctness.
      C. A contradiction cannot be conceived by the mind.
      D. That the sun will not rise tomorrow is no less intelligible than the sun will rise tomorrow.

(b) All reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of Cause and Effect.
   i. It is constantly supposed that there is a connexion between the present fact and that which is inferred from it.
   ii. For example, If a man finds a watch or any other machine on a desert island, he would conclude that there had once been men on that island.
   iii. All other reasonings of this nature are founded on the relation of cause and effect.

(c) How do we arrive at the knowledge of cause and effect?
   i. Cause and effect knowledge is not a priori, but instead comes entirely from experience.
   ii. Using the qualities that appear to the senses, no object can ever discover the causes which produced it, or the effects which will arise from it.
   iii. We can draw no inference concerning real existence and matters of fact without experience.
(d) *Causes and effects are discoverable, not by reason, but by experience.*

i. This can be believed easily regarding things like what happens when gunpowder is set on fire, or what intricate machinery does. These could never be discovered through *a priori* arguments.

ii. It is not as easy to see that this is true of events.

iii. This is because events, such as the motion of billiard balls running into each other, is such a deeply ingrained habit of understanding that its hard to let go of.

iv. Every effect is a distinct event from its cause in terms of reasoning.

3. **Thesis:** One primary conflict between Hume and Descartes is in their respective principle’s of sufficient reason, and Humes more conservative view is the one which we must take in order to have the most possibly accurate view of reality.

   (a) Descartes’ principle of sufficient reason says that there must be at *least* as much cause as effect.

   i. This is clearly demonstrated in Descartes’ proof for the existence of God.

   (b) Hume’s principle of sufficient reason says that there must be *no more* cause than effect.

   i. Matters of fact can only be known to have real existence through experiential inference.

   ii. An effect greater than its cause has never been experienced, let alone experienced enough to draw generalities from it.

   (c) Hume’s view is a better reflection of what we believe in day-to-day life.