Descarte 2Nd Med Essay, Research Paper

Tutorial Paper

Questions

1. Locate Cogito argument and say how it is supposed to go.

2. Locate 2nd argument and say how it is supposed to go.

Within his second meditation Descartes seeks “to save himself from the general seas of skepticism ” (Blackburn, 1999, p 20). In other words he attempts to limit the all-consuming spread of doubt brought about by the evil demon hypothesis. Descartes holds that the Cogito argument establishes this point of certainty, this belief he can be certain is true, even if he is dreaming, or God or an evil demon is trying to deceive him as fully as possible. To be more specific “Cogito, ergo sum,” translates to “I think, therefore I am,” (Blackburn, 1999, p 20) and this forms the basis of Descartes belief in the certainty that if nothing else, he exists. Following this conclusion Descartes then argues that our clearest perception of ourselves is of ourselves as thinking things. In this paper I will aim to analyze the above two arguments.

The cogito argument is located in the second paragraph of the meditation. Descartes wonders if the doubt can extend even to his own existence. But discovers that even reverting back to the evil demon hypothesis, if he is deceiving me I must exist in order to be deceived. Thus he states “I am, I exist, is necessarily true, every time I express it or conceive it in my own mind.” So the premise follows that whenever I am thinking, I will have clear and distinct perception that I am thinking. So Descartes does not claim to know he has existed through time, but only that he exists at the moment of the thought, for the evil demon could have planted false memories. The proposition I am, I exist, doesn’t rely on the idea that he is assured that he thinks. He has the view that thinking is self-intimating and all thinking is fully available to consciousness. He also has to defend against the proposition that ‘I think, therefore I am,’ is privileged over for example a proposition ‘I breathe, therefore I am’ or ‘I walk, therefore I am.’ It seems Descartes believes that while the evil demon can make me think falsely that I breathe and walk, but when thinking thoughts that I am aware that I am thinking, I can be confident that I exist.

The point is that it is impossible to doubt the truth of the proposition that ‘I exist’, when one thinks it.

So now whilst Descartes is faced with the question ‘but what kind of thinking thing am I?’ This leads me to his second argument which begins in fourth paragraph. Descartes divides up the faculties of the mind into three parts: sensation, perception and imagination. Descartes uses that wax to illustrate that what is essential to the wax is any properties, which I cannot think away, for he looses the top three faculties to the evil demon. Descartes argues that it is the contribution of ones own intellect, of ones understanding or conception, which leads to the inference or idea of the wax. Thinking is my understanding of and response to my perceptions, that it is conception and rationality that will help him off his rock. Thus the idea of clear and distinct perception of conception is assumed and it is this Descartes argue that will help him off his rock. But because Descartes can only count of this perception, he returns to that fact that the only thing he can really know about himself is that he exists as a thinking being.

So in conclusion Descartes through the cogito argument manages to stop the spread of doubt, however in his second argument he is unable to discover any more of himself than that he existed as a thinking thing.