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Introduction to Philosophy, PHI2010

Essay Exam One; Reality, Religion, and Knowledge

Reality

Greek philosopher Plato argues in his theory of forms that an object of material perception can never be of an ideal composition. Plato considers the real realm to be an illusion of what is perceived from the form realm, the forms realm thus being the true real realm. He argues that our perception of reality is more real than that of reality itself and that our idealization of that perception is what makes it real. For Plato the real realm is just a shadow interpretation of our ideals and that our true reality is within the realm of Forms.

Plato goes on to argue that because the real world may be changed and altered it is also unreliable and imperfect, thus there being a world in which ideas and aesthetics are static and perfect. This being the realm of forms. Plato says that a perfect right triangle may only exist in the realm of forms and when brought into this world by a mathematician it becomes imperfect and unreliable. The triangle in its ideal form belonging only to the realm of forms, thus making the ideal realm perfect.

Plato also argues that any object that is attempted to be brought from the world of the ideal will be corrupted and disturbed when it gets to this realm of reality, and end up a pale facsimile of the perfection of the idea.

After this argument there is a reaction from another Greek Philosopher called Aristotle, which argues that the realm of forms is impossible and inexistent, just merely a representation of our perception of the real world. Aristotle's counter-argument says that there is no ideal realm, that it is in each individual's head and it is encompassed of the different interpretations of perfection as perceived from the real world. He also argues that the reality we perceive is the only reality that there is, even as chaotic and unreliable as it may seem.

Religion

The first Ontological Argument is thought to be St. Anselm's argument. St. Anselm argues that God exists, to support his argument he states that God must be the greatest defined version of a being that can be conceived, and thus he must exist. If God were not to exist, then a greater version of God must, that being that is the greatest being and it exists.

St. Anselm argues that without existing, God would not be perfect, and that since God is perfect in every way, God must exist. Immanuel Kant objects to this logic because of its reliance of the property of existing being a variable for perfection. He argues that God as the idea of the perfect being does not rely on the idea has to be exemplified in the world much less our perception of the world. Thus with St. Anselm's argument we cannot prove nor deny the existence of a higher being.

Kant argues Plato's point of view on the ideal realm, that being that within the ideal realm everything can be in an ideal way. However that in the realm of the real, an ideal idea becomes imperfect. Thus the idea God's existence in itself makes God imperfect, and so denying the existence of a perfect being in the realm of the real. Instead the perfect definition for a higher being belongs on the ideal realm only.

My perception of St. Anselm's ontological argument sides with Kant, in that it is impossible to tell whether God exists on the pure merit that God must be the perfect being. A God being legitimized from its perfection by transporting itself to the real world. However it is possible that an ideal God might or might not exist purely in the ideal, and may from time to time intervene within the perception of the real world. Such as is with the placebo effect.

An example of St. Anselm's argument being derived from is Rene Descartes Fifth Meditation, in which he argues that it is no less contradiction to picture a perfect being without existence as it is to picture a triangle with a combined less than a hundred and eighty degrees angles. For this argument

Descartes will proceed to contradict himself, because he argues that within our perception there is no knowledge we as humans can know for sure, except the existence of God.

The ontological argument given by St. Anselm was the stepping stone for many philosophers to derive theories from, either on his side or on the Platonic point of view of the idealism. In either case this specific ontological argument is mostly seen as flawed by many modern philosophers.

Knowledge

Rene Descartes has several interesting aspects to his theories explained in Fifth Meditation, one of his theories is that the absolute only postulate that one might come up with is that oneself is a thing that thinks. He is most well known for his skepticism of the absolute, he bases his understanding on the fact that there is nothing that he may prove with absolute certainty, except for “I am a thing that thinks.” From this argument he derives other reasoning but he believes this to be the only absolute certainty. In that whatever realm, whether real or ideal, he is at this moment a thing that thinks.

Descartes then made some assumptions, because he could not theorize or understand the idea of God, or how it might have propped up into his mind. He uses his only postulate to presume that since we are things that think, there must be somewhere the rest of our knowledge comes from, thus he derives that our knowledge is innate. Our knowledge then came from the only being able to give us knowledge, God. Therefore God gave us the knowledge that God exists.

There seems to be a problem with this argument, that it uses inductive reasoning. Inductive reasoning is the action of following steps through proposition until you arrive at a conclusion. It is a good method for justifying logical problems, but it has to be used carefully otherwise a proposition might end in a circular argument, such is Descartes’s problem. Deductive reasoning is the act of having a conclusion and making slashes of the assumptions to arrive at a starting point. This is the method Descartes used to take off ideas from his theory to arrive at the point in which he knew that he was a thing that thinks.

Philosopher John Locke has a problem with Descartes’s circular reasoning and attempts to solve it through deductive reasoning. He sees that we might have a few factors at play. We have the mind; the thing that thinks. The perception; the power between to communicate between the material space and the mind. The material; the actual existing objects in the real world. And God; the being that created the material. Locke then splits the perception between primary and secondary qualities.

Primary qualities being the power being reflected from a material object into my physical aspect, such as eyes or hands. And Secondary qualities being our senses and perceptions, such as sight and touch. Secondary qualities needing Primary qualities to be able to inform the mind of the material. Thus Locke's deductive reasoning got his argument into a stable position, while Descartes is usually thought to be somewhat unreliable because of the circularity of his propositions.