Recap of the MEDITATIONS:

Ist: **Pars destruens**

IInd: The Ego exists, **starts to build**.

IIIrd: **Deletes the Evil Genius** argument (only reason for doubting); impose the **GENERAL RULE** (i.e. what we perceive CLEARLY AND DISTINCTLY is true because it corresponds to reality)

IVth**: Problem of error**, or how is it possible to err if God is perfect and gave us the tools to perceive truth?

Vth: Through his new method he can describe the world starting from the essence of the external world.

In his Meditations, Descartes elaborates both a *a posteriori* (IIIrd Med.)   
and an *a priori* (Vth)proof of God’s existence

\*\*In the process, he gives an *a priori* demonstration (similar to St.

Anselm’s ontological argument), although he tries to avoid its

Critical point with additional premises\*\*

* D. wants to analyze the ESSENCE of the objects of reality (i.e.

Bodies), thanks to the GENERAL RULE

* While in general (Aristotelian Philosophy) firstly we prove the  
  existence of something,

and then we can say what that specific thing is (from an sit to

quod sit), in D. it’s the opposite, as he is ANTI-EMPIRICIST

* To the issue of how it is possible to know the ESSENCE (which   
  in D. is described possibly through mathematics) of things, D. answers through our INNATE IDEAS
* Since God is an INNATE IDEA, as the idea of the body, we can demonstrate God’s EXISTENCE

**THE VTH MEDITATION**: the essence of material things and the existence of God considered a second time (ontological demonstration).

Structure of the meditation:

1. Analysis of mathematical truths (which can describe the   
   essence of the bodies):
2. They are innate, this knowledge is innate.
3. What are the properties of innate ideas?
4. The idea of God is innate. From God we go the existence

The Innate Ideas

* INNATE IDEAS: I can find IDEAS that may not exist and yet are different from nothing
* Their reality is independent from my thoughts; they have their own truth and immutable nature (D. is really Platonic here)

IDEAS: in Plato they describe something in the Hyperuranion

According to which the Demiurg created this flawed world

In Christianity, they are the things thought by God

There is however a deep difference between D. and previous  
philosophers; the former denotes IDEAS as objects of the human  
mind (hence common linguistical features, e.g. ‘I’ve got an idea!’),   
while the latter no. The Pre-Christian definition of idea was a term  
used to describe the world outside human mind and that exists  
above the sky in a non-corporeal domain

* Mathematical ideas are not derived from experience.  
  Clearly, I cannot invent a triangle with more than 180o as the sum of

angles. In addition, I can continuously discover new things about a

triangle, while even in a work of art no (e.g. I cannot know the colour

of Hamlet’s hair if Shakespeare didn’t tell us that detail)

* This demonstrates INNATE IDEAS are not FICTITIOUS ones (the kind I can invent)
* Moreover, I can decide when to think about a triangle, so it is different from an ADVENTITIOUS IDEAS (which I either receive or not from external objects)
* NB. Memory of an ADVENTITIOUS IDEA ≠ ADVENTITIOUS IDEA
* They are not EMPIRICAL, as my IDEA of a geometric figure can also precede its eventual presence (i.e. we can also describe these shapes and their properties without having to physically make them)
* D. is Platonic again when he asserts we can perceive triangles because we have the IDEA of the triangle in our mind

**The properties of innate ideas:**

* + - I can decide to think about them (as to fictitious ideas = mind is active)
    - I cannot decide their content (as well as with regard to adventitious ideas = mind is passive)

After this, D. proposes another demonstration of God’s EXISTENCE…**The Ontological Demonstration**

– IDEA OF GOD ≈ IDEA OF A TRIANGLE, since the notion of His being PERFECT = geometric properties (God’s demonstration = mathematical demonstration)

i.e. the EXISTENCE of God is just as certain as the fact that a triangle’s angles sum up to 180o

* The passage ESSENCE 🡪 EXISTENCE (which Anselm uses but Aquinas and later on Kant criticize),

Is justified:

* D. admits that EXISTENCE in the mind ≠ EXISTENCE in reality, but also argues that the passage above is merely from reality to reality (i.e. from formal reality to objective reality)
* This is not refutable if we buy both D.’s concept of CLEAR AND DISTINCT perception and God being an INNATE IDEA (which describes real ESSENCES
* Moreover, stating that a supremely perfect being lacks EXISTENCE, would be a contradiction; I cannot imagine God not existing just as I couldn’t for a triangle which has not 180o as the sum of its angles
* Locke objected that different people have different concepts of God (and some, like children, do have none at all)… -> D. answered that it’s a problem of personal knowledge of the matter,

because by analyzing it thoroughly, in the end we will all come to the same

conclusion. We are eventually going to perceive it CLEARLY AND DISTINCTILY,

because humans have good tools to pursue this enquiry

this foreruns the enlightened way of thinking (i.e. there is a universal truth,

we all have the tools to reach it; no pluralism involved)

D. here is being deeply enlightened-like; in the first Meditation he set the stage so that everyone willing to follow him would arrive to equal findings (although everyone has to do it for himself) -> Kant would call this ‘’being an adult’’ (he also defined Enlightenment as a stage where humanity could have used reason for themselves thanks to themselves)

* D. believed that at the beginning, God created a mass of RES EXTENSA, gave it the laws of motion and these two gave rise to every natural phenomena (here mechanicism and deism both rise)
* Pascal accused him of making God nearly useless, since even the fact that God ‘’eternally creates the world’’ merely means that He sustains reality without changing it

HUME’S NATURAL HISTORY OF RELIGION

While D. thinks talking of God = talking of mathematics, Hume takes a different approach at the matter…

**Hume’s conception of religious belief**

* IDEA OF GOD AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF don’t derive from REASON (thus they are often said to be unintelligible by humans) but from human passions, particularly the fear of natural phenomena.  
  Polytheism 🡪 Monotheism (Human Passion)  
  Religious Belief is a consequence of fear about natural phenomena

**Anthropomorphism lead to Polytheism**

* He makes an *ante litteram* GENEALOGY OF IDEAS to explain how it all came to us

1. POLYTHEISM: derives from the NATURAL TENDENCY to anthropomorphize (i.e. to project human qualities onto natural phenomena, like faces in the moon, figures in the clouds, etc.). This aspect is explained by Spinoza and exploited brutally by Feuerbach

(Through NATURAL TENDENCY)

1. THEISM: we try to find someone more powerful to help us (basically opportunism)

* Hume reverts the relationship between earthly and celestial kings: in ancient times, power derived from God onto the crowned heads, but H. argues that we imagine God as a king because we have kings here (even their absolute authority is similar), and their power doesn’t come from God, since we have invented Him.
* We love to be flattered, so we are sure God will be happy if we flatter him and we humiliate ourselves in front of Him
* In reality, God as an infinite being comes only after a process of adulation (we praise and describe Him as larger and more powerful each time until we reach infinity, beyond which there cannot be anything)
* MONOTHEISM = ANTROPOMORPHISM + ATTEMPT TO GAIN CONTROL THROUGH FLATTERY
* H. says we have to distinguish between historical religions and the real notion of God, which is unattainable; we could try to demonstrate His EXISTENCE by nothing but appealing to the beauty and complexity of Nature. NATURAL THEISM is the only thing that has sense in religion, even praying is useless (and there are no personal deities)
* The first critic of anthropomorphism was Xenocrates, and even Descartes thought we have no clue of the reasons why God did what he did (there’s a clear-cut separation between God and our mind). Spinoza agrees.

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