

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Spring 2006
Russell Marcus, Instructor
email: philosophy@thatmarcusfamily.org
website: <http://philosophy.thatmarcusfamily.org>
Office phone: (718) 997-5287

Lecture Notes, February 27

I. The resemblance hypothesis

The resemblance hypothesis says that my ideas of objects are like (resemble) the objects as they are in themselves.

Descartes provides an argument for the resemblance hypothesis:

- 1) I have ideas about objects involuntarily.
 - 2) Involuntary ideas come from outside of me.
 - 3) Objects send me their own likeness.
- So, my ideas resemble their causes, i.e. physical objects.

Locke defends the resemblance hypothesis.

Berkeley does too, in an unexpected way.

Descartes, in rejecting the resemblance hypothesis, provides arguments against both the second and third premises.

Remember, that when you reject an argument, as Descartes does here, you should determine which premises are false.

II. Descartes's rejection of the resemblance hypothesis

He agrees with premise 1), although says that those ideas can lead one astray.

Against Premise 2), he argues that he may have a heretofore unnoticed ability to create these images.

As with dreams, we may create these ideas without realizing that we are doing so.

Or we may have another faculty inside us for making these sensations.

The sci-fi example of people who don't make noise with their voices is the kind of example Descartes means.

Against Premise 3), he provides the example of the sun, p 39.

The senses tell us that the sun is very small.

We reason that the sun is very large.

It can not be both.

We decide in favor of reasoning, and against sensation.

Compare with the stars and candle of Meditation Six, pp 82-3.

We have discovered a reason for making errors: reliance on the Resemblance Hypothesis.

Notice that the arguments against the Resemblance Hypothesis are independent of the three doubts.

We would have this problem even if the exaggerated doubts were absent.

So, we should look at our ideas, and see if we can delete the ones which depended on the Resemblance Hypothesis.

Maybe that will leave us in better shape to conquer the doubts.

III. Cataloguing Ideas, the contents of the mind, p 37

- 1) Simple ideas
- 2) Emotions, or affects, (idea + feeling)
- 3) Volitions (idea + willing)
- 4) Judgments (E.g. $2+2=4$; that I want or feel x or y; 'snow is white'; that an idea resembles an object)

Ideas of classes 1, 2, and 3 can not be false.

If I want something, or feel something, I want it or feel it.

"Ideas can not be false", p 37.

Only judgments can be true or false.

These are called 'propositions', in contemporary philosophy.

IV. Meditation III: trying to locate the source of our errors

Descartes has located a possible source of many of his errors: reliance on the Resemblance Hypothesis.

It is natural to take our ideas of objects, and the world in general, as resembling, as being like, the world as it is in itself.

But, the ideas which really tell us about the nature of the world are the ones which are not directly derived from sensory experience.

Descartes uses the example of the sun.

The idea of the sun derived from the senses tells us that it is very small.

The idea which comes from reasoning, using mathematics and formal science, is the one which tells us the true nature of the sun.

Descartes provides a list of the possible sources of our ideas, p 38.

This list does not presume that we have any ideas of each type.

It is a list of possible ways of knowing.

1) Innate

These are, roughly, 'a priori' ideas.

They are not instinctive, or intuitive, abilities, except in the sense that the Cogito is a pure intuition.

2) Acquired

These are, roughly, 'a posteriori' or 'empirical'.

They are derived from sense experience.

3) Produced by me

These are ideas that I create, like those of fantasy and imagination.

They are also roughly empirical.

Note that only those of classes 2) and 3) are subject to errors from the Resemblance Hypothesis.

The innate ideas, ones which do not rely on the senses, are clean of this infection.

We can see why the "light of nature" can yield these.

They can be clear and distinct because they aren't affected by the Resemblance Hypothesis.

V. Proceeding from MIII.

Descartes seems to be in a bit of confusion at p 36.

He has arrived at a solipsistic barrier.

Solipsism is the thesis that only I exist.

Knowledge of the Cogito seems to lead us to knowledge of mathematics.

But the possibility of the deceiver led us to reject mathematics.

It seems that to move on, we will have to deal directly with the question of the existence of a deceiver.

Despite rejecting the Resemblance Hypothesis, we will need to argue for God's existence.

Descartes provides two arguments for God's existence in the Meditations, one in MIII, and one in MV.

These arguments are based on our ideas, as we only have our ideas, so far.

They are thus a priori, or innate, p 51.

We have not yet established the reliability of empirical experience.