

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Spring 2006
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Lecture Notes, March 13

Finishing Descartes's *Meditations*.

I. Knowledge that physical objects *can* exist

Meditation VI, p 71.

God is omnipotent.

So, he can create anything that I can perceive.

In fact, he can create anything that does not create a contradiction.

He may not be able to create a round square, or a sphere that's both blue and red all over.

Still, the question remains whether he did in fact create these things.

II. Knowledge that physical objects *do* exist

(Be careful to distinguish this argument from the one above.)

See pp 79-80.

1) I seem to sense objects.

2) If I seem to sense objects, while there are none, then God is a deceiver.

3) God is no deceiver.

So, Physical objects exist.

What are these objects like?

Only their mathematical properties are clear and distinct.

This is primarily their extension, p 80.

Their sensory properties are in doubt.

That is, we never defeat the illusion doubt, in the way that we reject the other two arguments for doubt.

The Resemblance Hypothesis is our major source of error.

So what good are the senses, then?

III. The role of the senses

The senses provide natural protection of our bodies, p 81.

This is just the best structure for humans.

It is far better to be deceived once in a while, pp 83-4; also pp 88-9.

The important point is that bodies are perceived by the mind alone, and only have extension as a real property.

The others are confused representations.

Locke and Berkeley take up this topic.

Still, our errors make God seem deceptive.

He could prevent them.

Descartes uses the mind/body distinction to block this accusation.

IV. The mind/body distinction

Descartes first argues that we are thinking things, i.e. minds alone, p 78.

That is, the mind is distinct from the body.

- 1) I have a clear and distinct understanding of my mind, independent of my body.
- 2) I have a clear and distinct understanding of my body, independent of my mind.
- 3) Whatever I can clearly and distinctly conceive of as separate, can be separated by God, and so are really distinct.

So, my mind is distinct from my body

Another proof of the distinctness of the mind and body, from the divisibility of body, pp 85-6.

- 1) Whatever two things have different properties are different objects.
- 2) The mind is indivisible.
- 3) The body is divisible.

So, the mind is not the body.

For Descartes, of course, we are essentially our minds.

Still, we are tied to our bodies in a remarkable way.

Like a sailor and ship, p 81.

We have a clear and distinct understanding of ourselves without our bodies, p 78.

Does this mean that our bodies are just imagined?

But then God would be a deceiver

V. Review for Monday's Midterm Examination