

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, March 8

I. Quiz: Present the ontological argument (either version).

II. Dualism and monism

Descartes is a dualist, believing that there are minds (both finite and infinite) and bodies.
A monist believes that there is only one kind of substance.
We will read Locke as a materialist monist, that there is only matter.

Locke is really a dualist, believing that there is a God, who is a different kind of substance.
But we will read him more conveniently as a materialist.
Hobbes was really a materialist.
Contemporary science tends toward materialism by identifying the mind with the brain.
Berkeley, who we will read after Locke, is a different kind of monist, an idealist monist.

III. Getting Rid of the Deceiver, and Avoiding Error

Once we have a criterion, and God to ensure that it holds, everything else follows.
A perfect God is all good, but the deceiver is not.

Descartes's problem of Error, Meditation IV, pp 53-4

- 1) God exists and is perfectly good.
 - 2) God creates and preserves me.
 - 3) My faculty of judgment therefore comes from God.
- So, my judgments never err.

Uh-oh.

Since I do err, there must be a problem with this argument.
Perhaps God is really the deceiver after all!

But, God is no deceiver, p 54:

- 1) Deception is a defect.
 - 2) God has no defects.
 - 3) So God is no deceiver.
 - 4) God created and preserves me.
- So, I am not deceived by God.

Given these two arguments, there is a puzzle about how I could err.

Since the conclusion of the first argument is false, one of the premises must be false, or the conclusion does not follow from the premises.

Descartes is committed to all three premises.

So, his solution is to deny that the argument is valid, i.e. the conclusion does not follow.

Still, we need an explanation of how we can err.

Descartes distinguishes between the will and the understanding.

Our power of willing is infinite, pp 56-7.

Our power of understanding is finite, p 57.

So we err when we apply our will (and judge) outside our understanding.

The way to always avoid error, then, is to avoid judging unless you have a clear and distinct understanding.

If I clearly and distinctly understand P then I know P.

Remember, clarity and distinctness, as a criterion, is ensured only by the presence of God.

This, and the goodness of God, ensures that there is no deceiver, no systematic deception.

I am the source of my error, and if I am careful not to judge hastily, I can be sure to never judge falsely.

Descartes's account of error thus allows small mistakes, but prevents systematic deception or misunderstanding.

I can be wrong about minor particular claims, but not about profound ones, like the existence of a physical world.

Now, we shall begin to reclaim that world.

IV. What kinds of knowledge are clear and distinct?

The deceiver eliminated beliefs about mathematics and of universals, all Class III beliefs.

I also included logic and analytic truths (truths of language) as part of Class III

Now, we can reclaim them.

See Meditation V, pp 64-5.

We can be sure of mathematical truths themselves, and mathematical properties of objects (e.g. length, shape, and anything describable using mathematics).

This leads to Descartes' second argument for the existence of God, the ontological proof, pp 65-6.

These objects are known by proof, and are not sensory.

They are a priori, or, 'innate', as Descartes calls them.

Sensory information is still in doubt, since the dream argument lingers, even with the defeat of the deceiver.

The problems of the resemblance hypothesis have not been resolved.

Mathematical knowledge remains, even in dreams, pp 70-71.

We can be sure of mathematical truths themselves, and mathematical properties of objects (e.g. length, shape, and anything describable using mathematics).

Sensory information is still in doubt, since the dream argument lingers, even with the defeat of the deceiver.

The problems of the resemblance hypothesis have not been resolved.

V. Blocking the dream argument

Meditation VI, pp 89-90.

Waking experience is connected in the way that dreams are not.

Now, Descartes has a way of reclaiming items of Class II.

The physical world was brought into doubt by the dream argument.

I now see a way of judging clearly and distinctly whether I am dreaming.

So, I can reclaim the objects brought into doubt by the dream argument.

Still, I must be careful not to be misled by the (false) resemblance hypothesis.

VI. Topics for review

- 1) Three doubts:
 - Illusion
 - Dream
 - Deceiver
- 2) Rationalism
- 3) Empiricism
- 4) Skepticism
- 5) A priori, or innate, knowledge
- 6) A posteriori, or empirical, knowledge
- 7) Clarity and Distinctness as criteria for knowledge
- 8) Resemblance hypothesis
- 9) Ontological argument for God's existence
- 10) The problem of error and Descartes' account of error
- 11) The role of our senses
- 12) The possibility and existence of physical objects
- 13) The mind/body thesis