

Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

Russell Marcus
Hamilton College
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Class 3 - Meditations Two and Three

Topics for Today

1. Finish the Doubts
2. The Cogito
3. The Wax Argument
4. Descartes's Rule
5. Foundationalism
6. The Resemblance Hypothesis
7. The Solipsistic Barrier
8. Causal Argument for God's Existence

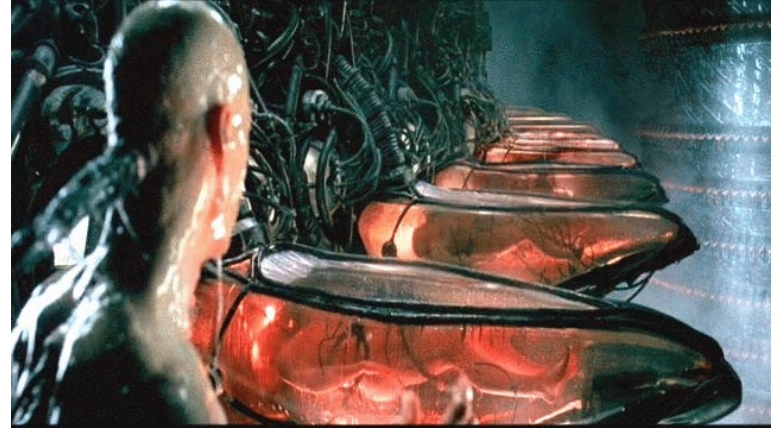
Waking and Dreaming Experience

- There is no obvious mark.
- Anything we can do when we are awake, we can dream we are doing.
- We might be able to know that some state was a dream.
- We can not be sure that our current state, if it has no obvious dream-like qualities, is a waking state.
- If we can not be sure that we are not dreaming, then we can not be sure of anything our senses tell us.
- The list of beliefs the possibility of our dreaming eliminates will be long and detailed.

What Survives the Dream Doubt?

- Mathematical claims
 - $7+5=12$
 - the tangent to a circle intersects the radius of that circle at right angles'
- Logic
- Semantic facts
 - 'Bachelors are unmarried.'
- Universals/properties
 - color, shape, quantity, place, time
 - the "building blocks"
 - The properties remain, even if only in our minds.
 - "It is from these components, as if from true colors, that all those images of things that are in our thought are fashioned, be they true or false" (AW42).

The Deceiver



- What if there were a powerful deceiver who can place thoughts directly into our minds?
- The *Matrix* (and similar)
 - According to such examples, our thoughts really happen in brains.
 - There is a physical reality, but it is unlike the one we perceive.
 - In contrast, the deceiver hypothesis is consistent with the non-existence of the physical world.
- We could be disembodied minds, whose thoughts are directly controlled by an independent source.
- When we apply the deceiver hypothesis to our beliefs, we notice that just about all of them can be called into question.
- Nothing, it seems, is certain.

Seeking Firm Foundations

- Three arguments for doubt
 1. Illusion
 2. Dream
 3. Deceiver.
- Each of the three doubts corresponds to a set of beliefs eliminable on the basis of that doubt.
 - Class I: Beliefs about the sensory nature of specific physical objects, or the existence of distant or ill-perceived objects.
 - Class II: Beliefs about the existence and nature of specific physical objects, and the physical world generally.
 - Class III: Beliefs about universals, like color, and shape, the building blocks of physical objects; and about space and time
 - Beliefs about arithmetic and geometry
 - Beliefs about logical and semantic truths
- In order to rebuild his beliefs, Descartes seeks a single starting point.
 - Archimedes and the lever

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The Cogito

- One belief resists doubt.
 - Whenever I am thinking, even if I am doubting, I must exist.
 - 'Cogito' is Latin for 'I think'.
- The problem with the 'I think; therefore I am' formulation
 - NC1. Whatever thinks, exists.
 - NC2. I think.
 - NCC. So, I exist.
- NC, as a logical deduction, would require
 - previous knowledge of the two premises; and
 - previous knowledge that the conclusion follows from the premises.
- But Descartes eliminated logical knowledge on the basis of the deceiver doubt.
- Descartes calls the cogito a pure intuition.
- But what then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, imagines, and senses (45a).
 - imagination, for representing or beholding sensory images
 - a capacity to make judgments, to affirm or deny, or to doubt
 - capacities for willing and refusing
 - emotions, like happiness

Augustine (5th Century CE)

- But, without any delusive representation of images or phantasms, I am most certain that I am, and that I know and delight in this. In respect of these truths, I am not at all afraid of the arguments of the Academicians, who say, What if you are deceived? For if I am deceived, I am. For he who is not, cannot be deceived; and if I am deceived, by this same token I am. And since I am if I am deceived, how am I deceived in believing that I am? for it is certain that I am if I am deceived. Since, therefore, I, the person deceived, should be, even if I were deceived, certainly I am not deceived in this knowledge that I am. And, consequently, neither am I deceived in knowing that I know. For, as I know that I am, so I know this also, that I know (*City of God*).
- Honor Code Violation by Descartes?

Ideas Can Not Be False

- Distinguish sensing from seeming to sense.
- The doubts lead us to wonder if we are living in a dream-like world.
- But
 - I have direct access to my thoughts: privilege.
 - The doubts infect only my claims about what those thoughts represent: indefeasibility.
 - Ideas can not be false.
- The next step: examine these thoughts and see if they can help us make any conclusions beyond our thoughts.
- No luck; let's come back the other way.

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Knowledge of Bodies From the Mind Alone

- We generally think that our knowledge of physical objects is the result of sense experience.
- We see a chipmunk, perhaps represent it to ourselves in imagination, and then we know about the chipmunk.
- “I now know that even bodies are not, properly speaking, perceived by the senses or by the faculty of imagination, but by the intellect alone, and that they are not perceived through their being touched or seen, but only through their being understood” (47a).



The Ball of Wax



- First, it is cold, hard, yellow, honey-flavored, and flower-scented.
- Then, after it is melted, the wax becomes hot and liquid, and loses its color, taste, and odor.
- All of its sensory properties have shifted.
- We have images of the wax, in several incompatible states.
- But we do not have an image of the essence of the wax, or of wax in general.
- “I grasp that the wax is capable of innumerable changes of this sort, even though I am incapable of running through these innumerable changes by using my imagination... The perception of the wax is neither a seeing, nor a touching, nor an imagining...even though it previously seemed so; rather it is an inspection on the part of the mind alone “(46a).

Descartes's Argument That Knowledge of the World Comes From the Mind Alone

W1. Knowledge must be firm and lasting.

W2. What we get from the senses is transient and mutable.

W3. So our senses do not give us knowledge.

W4. We do have knowledge about the wax.

W5. Knowledge which does not come from the senses must come from the mind alone.

WC. So, our knowledge of physical objects must come from the mind alone.

Two Possible Cheats

- We don't even know that physical objects exist.
 - Descartes's conclusion is that if we have any knowledge of physical objects, then it can not come from the senses.
- Is the wax same before and after melting?
 - "Does the same wax remain? I must confess that it does; no one denies it; no one thinks otherwise" (45b).
 - Descartes neglects the Heraclitean view.
 - The Heraclitean view, though, will not get Descartes any "firm and lasting" knowledge.
- No honor code violations here.



Real and Apparent Properties

- According to the new science, the wax is just a body which can take various manifestations, hot or cold, sweet or tasteless, etc., but is identified with none of these particular sensory qualities.
- “Perhaps the wax was what I now think it is: namely that the wax itself never really was the sweetness of the honey, nor the fragrance of the flowers, nor the whiteness, nor the shape, nor the sound, but instead was a body that a short time ago manifested itself to me in these ways, and now does so in other ways... Let us focus our attention on this and see what remains after we have removed everything that does not belong to the wax: only that it is something extended, flexible, and mutable” (46a).

Descartes's Metaphysics

- S1. God (infinite mind);
- S2. Persons (finite minds); and
- S3. Extended objects (bodies).

The Role of the Senses in Knowledge

- Weak claim: the senses are insufficient for knowledge.
 - We use the senses to gather information
 - In conjunction with reasoning, which is purely mental, we arrive at knowledge.
 - Fairly uncontroversial
- Strong claim: the senses are irrelevant to knowledge.
 - Knowledge of physical objects comes from the intellect (or mind) alone.
 - Any information we get from the senses does not rise to the level of knowledge.
 - We can believe that the chair is blue, but we can never know this.
 - We know that the wax can take more forms than we could possibly imagine: more shapes, more sizes.
 - We don't see potential colors.
 - Our knowledge that there are other potential shapes and colors must go beyond anything that could come from the senses.
- Two different types of beliefs about the wax.
 - It has a particular shape, color, and other sense properties.
 - not knowledge
 - It can take on innumerable many different forms.
 - knowledge

The Priority of Mind

the mind is known better than the body

“There is not a single consideration that can aid in my perception of the wax or of any other body that fails to make even more manifest the nature of my mind” (47a).

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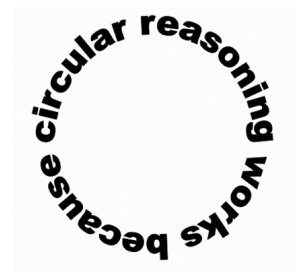
Descartes's Rule

- We need some kind of mark, or rule, which enables us to separate true knowledge from mere belief.
- We start with the Cogito.
- “Surely in this first instance of knowledge, there is nothing but a certain clear and distinct perception of what I affirm. Yet this would hardly be enough to render me certain of the truth of a thing, if it could ever happen that something I perceived so clearly and distinctly were false. And thus I now seem able to posit as a general rule that everything I very clearly and distinctly perceive is true” (47).

On Clarity and Distinctness

- “I call a perception ‘clear’ when it is present and accessible to the attentive mind - just as we say that we see something clearly when it is present to the eye’s gaze and stimulates it with a sufficient degree of strength and accessibility. I call a perception ‘distinct’ if, as well as being clear, it is so sharply separated from all other perceptions that it contains within itself only what is clear” (*Principles of Philosophy* I.45).
- We can not see with our senses clearly and distinctly, but only with the mind.
- The light of nature formulation
 - “Whatever is shown me by this light of nature, for example, that from the fact that I doubt, it follows that I am, and the like, cannot in any way be doubtful. This is owing to the fact that there can be no other faculty that I can trust as much as this light and which could teach that these things are not true” (49a)
- The specific formulation of the criterion is not important.
- Without a mark, all searching for knowledge, on Descartes’s terms, is fruitless.

The Cartesian Circle



- Given any mark, or rule, for certainty, how do we know that we have the correct mark?
- Appeal to the mark itself is circular.
- Later, Descartes argues that the goodness of God secures the criterion of clear and distinct perception.
- That argument seems to rely on the use of the criterion in the argument for the existence of God.
- The problem of Cartesian circularity is one of the more vexing and interesting in Descartes scholarship.
- Still, the cogito does seem to contain some kind of undoubtable truth.
- If we can grasp what it is that makes the cogito unassailable, perhaps we can find the surety elsewhere.

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Foundational Systems

- F1. Basic axioms, or undisputable truths; and
- F2. Rules of inference
 - Rules allow us to generate further theorems on the basis of already established ones.
- Definitions
- Distinguish the axioms in importance
- F1 and F2 are the core.
- Descartes's synthetic presentation in Second Replies
- Euclid's *Elements* (see website)
- Spinoza's *Ethics*

The Synthetic (Geometrical) Version

- Descartes provides definitions, postulates, common notions, and derived propositions.
- Definitions:
 - thought, idea
 - objective reality, formal reality
 - substance, mind, body,
 - God, essence, distinctness
- In the definitions of objective and formal reality, Descartes is setting up the proofs of God's existence.
- Already in the definitions, we can find some worries about Descartes's project.
 - "By the word "thought" I include everything that is in us in such a way that we are *immediately aware* of it... By the word "idea" I understand that form of any thought through the immediate perception of which I am *aware* of that very same thought "(94).
 - Unconscious thought
 - Blindsight

The Rest of the Synthetic Version

- Seven postulates:

1. Frailty of the senses
2. Security of pure thought
3. Self-evidence of logic, including the logic of causation (but see the Common Notions, as well)
4. Connection between ideas and objects (compare to Definition IX)
5. The idea of God includes necessary existence.
6. Contrast clear and distinct perception with obscure and confused perception
7. Security of clear and distinct perceptions

- Ten common notions:

1. We can ask about the cause of any thing.
2. Each instant is independent of every other, so that creation and preservation are indistinct.
3. Nothing can be uncaused.
4. Whatever reality is in a thing is formally or eminently in its first cause.
5. Our ideas require causes which contain formally the reality which exists objectively in the ideas.
6. There are degrees of reality: accidents, finite substances, infinite substance.
7. Our free will aims infallibly toward the good.
8. Whatever can make what is greater can make what is less.
9. It is greater to create (or preserve) a substance than an accident.
10. The ideas of all objects contain existence; only the idea of a perfect object contains necessary existence.

- Propositions

1. Ontological argument for God's existence
- 2-3. Causal arguments for God's existence
4. Distinction of mind and body

The Synthetic and the Analytic

- The single, Archimedean point of the *Meditations* is almost completely absent from the synthetic presentation.
- Meditations:
 - Cogito - God - Clarity and Distinctness - Free Will - Mathematics - Mind/Body distinction
- The synthetic version hardly mentions mathematics or the cogito.
- The order is different.

Foundations and Method

- A starting point for the *Meditations*: the cogito
- A rule for generating more truths: clear and distinct perception

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The Resemblance Hypothesis

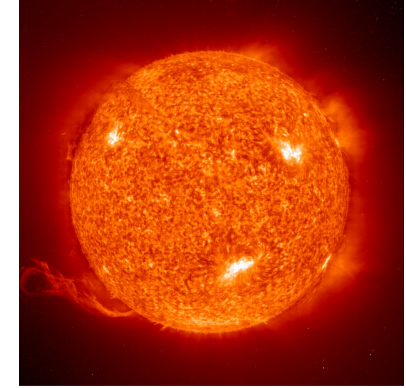
- The source of some of my errors is in believing that sensory experience leads to knowledge.
- The resemblance hypothesis says that my ideas of objects are like the objects as they are in themselves.
- Descartes rejects the Resemblance Hypothesis.
- An argument for the hypothesis.
 - RH1. I have ideas about objects involuntarily.
 - RH2. Involuntary ideas come from outside of me.
 - RH3. Objects send me their own likeness.
 - RHC. So, my ideas resemble their causes, i.e. physical objects.
- Descartes accepts RH1, although says that those ideas can lead one astray.
- Descartes provides arguments against both RH2 and RH3.

Against RH2

RH2. Involuntary ideas come from outside of me.

- We may have an unnoticed ability to create 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.

Against RH3



RH3. Objects send me their own likeness.

- The senses tell us that the sun is very small.
- We reason that the sun is very large.
- “Both ideas surely cannot resemble the same sun existing outside me; and reason convinces me that the idea that seems to have emanated from the sun itself from so close is the very one that least resembles the sun” (49a-b).



Ideas



- “Now as far as ideas are concerned, if they are considered alone and in their own right, without being referred to something else, they cannot, properly speaking, be false. For whether it is a she-goat or a chimera that I am imagining, it is no less true that I imagine the one than the other. Moreover, we need not fear that there is falsity in the will itself or in the affects, for although I can choose evil things or even things that are utterly nonexistent, I cannot conclude from this that it is untrue that I do choose these things. Thus there remain only judgments in which I must take care not to be mistaken” (48b).
- Three classes of ideas, depending on their origins
 - Innate ideas are *a priori*; they are not instinctive abilities, but pure intuitions are among the innate ideas.
 - Acquired ideas are *a posteriori*, or empirical; they are derived from sense experience.
 - Ideas that I create, like those of fantasy and imagination, are also empirical.
- Only acquired and created ideas are subject to errors from the resemblance hypothesis.

The Resemblance Hypothesis and the Doubts

- The arguments against the Resemblance Hypothesis are independent of the three doubts.
- We can delete the ideas which depended on the Resemblance Hypothesis.
- We now have reasons to keep the rotten apples out of the basket: the three doubts.
- We have criteria for putting good apples back into the basket: the criterion for certainty, clear and distinct perception.
- And we also have a criterion for recognizing bad apples: reliance on the Resemblance Hypothesis.

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The Solipsistic Barrier

But what about when I considered something very simple and easy in the areas of arithmetic or geometry, for example that two plus three make five, and the like? Did I not intuit them at least clearly enough so as to affirm them as true? To be sure, I did decide later on that I must doubt these things, but that was only because it occurred to me that some God could perhaps have given me a nature such that I might be deceived even about matters that seemed most evident. But whenever this preconceived opinion about the supreme power of God occurs to me, I cannot help admitting that, were he to wish it, it would be easy for him to cause me to err even in those matters that I think I intuit as clearly as possible with the eyes of the mind. On the other hand, whenever I turn my attention to those very things that I think I perceive with such great clarity, I am so completely persuaded by them that I spontaneously blurt out these words: “let him who can deceive me; so long as I think that I am something, he will never bring it about that I am nothing. Nor will he one day make it true that I never existed, for it is true now that I do exist. Nor will he even bring it about that perhaps two plus three might equal more or less than five, or similar items in which I recognize an obvious contradiction.” And certainly, because I have no reason for thinking that there is a God who is a deceiver (and of course I do not yet sufficiently know whether there even is a God), the basis for doubting, depending as it does merely on the above hypothesis, is very tenuous and, so to speak, metaphysical. But in order to remove even this basis for doubt, I should at the first opportunity inquire whether there is a God, and, if there is, whether or not he can be a deceiver. For if I am ignorant of this, it appears I am never capable of being completely certain about anything else (AW 47b-48a).

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 - That's pretty good!
- 8. Causal Argument for God's Existence
 - We'll start with this on Thursday.