

Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

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Hamilton College
Spring 2014

Class #4 - Arguments for the Existence of God and
Applying the Criterion
Meditations Four through Six

In Last Tuesday's Class...

- ✓1. The Cogito
- ✓2. The Wax Argument
- ✓3. Descartes's Rule
- 4. Foundationalism
- 5. The Resemblance Hypothesis
- 6. The Solipsistic Barrier

And Now...

- 1. The Causal Argument for God's Existence
- 2. The Problem of Error and the Two-Faculty Theory of Mind
- 3. Reclaiming Class III Beliefs
- 4. The Ontological Argument

Foundational Systems

- Two essential elements:
 - 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 are sometimes useful.
- We might distinguish the axioms in importance
- But F1 and F2 are the core.
- Descartes's synthetic presentation in *Second Replies* follows standard axiomatic structure.
- 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
 - setting up the proof of God's existence
 - ▶ substance, mind, body,
 - ▶ God, essence, distinctness
- 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

Topics for Today

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The Resemblance Hypothesis

The Real Source of Error

- The source of some of my errors is in believing that sensory experience leads to knowledge.
- The central claim underlying beliefs in the veracity of sense experience might be called the resemblance hypothesis.
- The resemblance hypothesis says that my ideas of objects are like the objects as they are in themselves.
- Descartes rejects the Resemblance Hypothesis.
 - replacing Aristotelian accounts of our knowledge and the world with views consistent with the new science



Aristotle on Perception



- Aristotle had taken sensory qualities to be properties of external objects.
 - Perception occurs when our sense organs change to be like the world around us.
 - Our bodies are enformed by the properties (or forms) of the objects we perceive.
- The redness and sweetness of an apple are real properties of the apple itself.
 - I see the apple as red because my eye itself is able to change to red.
 - Our senses are thus attuned to the external environment.
- When we see a yellow lemon, our eyes become yellow; when we taste its bitterness, our taste buds become bitter.
- “What can perceive is potentially such as the object of sense is actually” (Aristotle, *De Anima* ii 5, 418a3-4),
- Similarly, in thinking, our minds are changed to match the forms of other objects in the world.
 - Our ideas resemble their causes.
- Objects really have the properties that we perceive them to have.



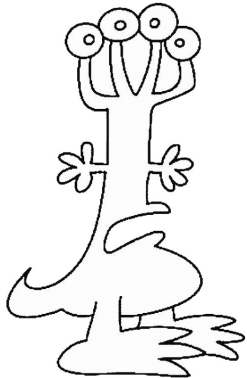
Galilean Physics



- By the time of Descartes's writing, it was difficult to see a way to make the Aristotelian view of perception, and its concomitant resemblance hypothesis, plausible.
 - Worries about the scientific plausibility of the doctrine of enformation.
- Galilean physics: all causes are impetus.
 - collisions of billiard balls
 - transfers of momentum
- Nothing could be given to us by external objects except their motions.
- We can not be given sense properties like taste or color.
- It is thus a fundamental principle of the new science that objects as we experience them may be very different from how they are in themselves.

Appearance and Reality

- Physical objects are really extended things, made of parts which may or may not be in motion, both together and relative to each other.
- Depending on how its parts, the atoms, unite and move, an object affects us in different ways.
- Their arrangement, along with our sensory apparatus, determines how we experience an object.
- The same object may have many different appearances.
- I see yellow lemons.
- Another person, or an alien with a radically different sense apparatus, could have different visual sensations of the same object.



The Primary/Secondary Distinction

- The distinction between the real properties of a physical object, how it is in itself, and how the object appears through our senses.
 - ▶ Locke argues for a primary/secondary distinction, as we will see later in the term.
 - ▶ Berkeley rejects the primary/secondary distinction, as we will also see later.
 - ▶ Descartes's discussion of the wax is an argument for the primary/secondary distinction.
- Galileo argues for the distinction on analogy with a feather which might tickle us.
 - ▶ “When touched upon the soles of the feet, for example, or under the knee or armpit, it feels in addition to the common sensation of touch a sensation on which we have imposed a special name, ‘tickling’. This sensation belongs to us and not to the hand. Anyone would make a serious error if he said that the hand, in addition to the properties of moving and touching, possessed another faculty of tickling, as if tickling were a phenomenon that resided in the hand that tickled” (Galileo, *The Assayer*, 275).
- Physical objects are just particles in motion, and they communicate this motion to us.



Descartes on the Primary/Secondary Distinction

- The analogy with words (in *Le Monde*)
 - A word, like 'René', can make us think of something that is nothing like a word, like René.
 - Similarly, sensations, like my conscious experience of red, can make me think of something, like an apple.
- We might call whatever is in the apple that makes me see it as red a dispositional property.
 - A particular arrangements of particles
 - “[Sound is] nothing but a certain vibration of the air which strikes our ears” (*Le Monde*, AT XI.6).
 - If my experience of sound really resembled the sound, then I would hear motion, not music.
- Descartes believed that physical objects have extension as their essence.
 - Extension is mathematically describable, as is motion.
 - The mathematical nature of both extension and motion were essential to the Galilean view of the world.

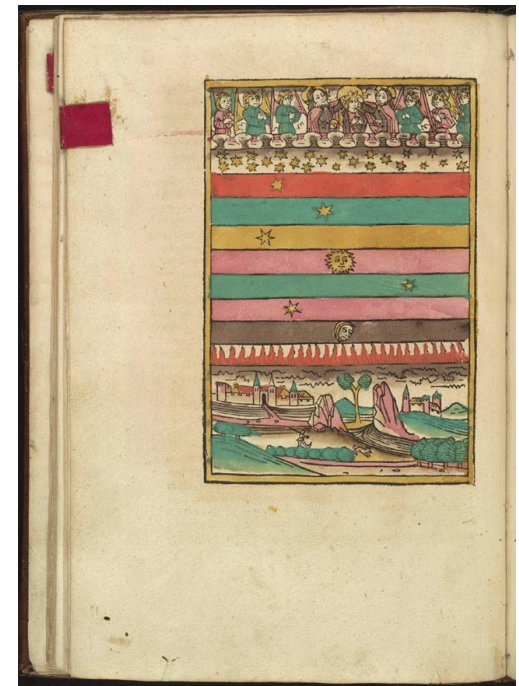


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René

Mathematics and the World

- “Philosophy is written in this grand book, the universe, which stands continually open to our gaze. But the book cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend the language and read the letters in which it is composed. It is written in the language of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometric figures without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it; without these, one wanders about in a dark labyrinth” (Galileo, *The Assayer*).
- Similarly, Descartes writes that the only principles he needs are mathematical.
- “The only principles which I accept, or require, in physics are those of geometry and pure mathematics; these principles explain all natural phenomena, and enable us to provide quite certain demonstrations regarding them” (*Principles of Philosophy* II.64).
- Extension and motion are real properties of physical objects; sense properties are unreal.



Konrad von Meigenberg, Buch der Natur (Book of Nature). Augsburg: Johannes Bämler, 1481

Nominalism



- ‘Nominalism’ refers to the claim that some words are merely names and do not denote real objects or properties.
- We are all nominalists about fictional objects, like the Tooth Fairy.
- Some people are nominalists about numbers.
- Galileo and Descartes are nominalists about sense properties, what Descartes calls the content of our imagination.
- Still, for many people, especially those who resisted Galilean physics, the essence of the Aristotelian view, the claim that our perceptions match the nature of the outside world, persisted.

Descartes's Argument for the Resemblance 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.

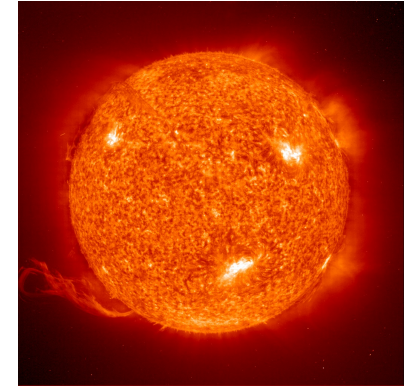
Against RH2

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).

Consequences of Rejecting the Resemblance Hypothesis

- 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.
- So, we have a serious account of our earlier errors.
 - None of this silly doubt stuff

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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The Causal Argument for God's Existence

An Overview

- There is one idea which can not be merely constructed by myself.
- The idea of God has properties which make it such that it can not be created by me, alone.
 - ▶ Since I have doubt, I can not be perfect.
 - ▶ But, I have the idea of perfection.
- The idea of perfection can not have come from an imperfect source.
 - ▶ That would violate a general principle (as clear and distinct as the cogito) which prohibits something coming from nothing.
- So, the idea of God must come from God.

Definitions

see also the synthetic presentation

- The objective reality of an idea is a quality that an idea has in regards to that which it represents.
 - ▶ The idea of God has more objective reality than the idea of a person, which has more objective reality than the idea of a mode (or property) of a person.
 - ▶ There are really three kinds of objective reality:
 - of modes
 - of finite substances
 - of infinite substances
- Formal reality is what we ordinarily think of as existence.
 - ▶ The idea of Easter Bunny has the same kind of objective reality as the idea of myself.
 - ▶ Both ideas are of finite substances.
 - ▶ But, I have formal reality, whereas the Easter Bunny does not.

The General Principle

R: There is at least as much reality in the cause of something than in the effect.

- From R, it follows that something can not come from nothing.
- R holds for ideas as well as for other objects, like physical ones.
 - At this point in the presentation, R can only hold of ideas.
- From R, Descartes concludes that there is more reality in the idea of God than in the idea of a person.
- There is so much reality in the idea of God that we can not have constructed it ourselves.
- The idea of God contains the ideas of all perfections.
- But, I could not have devised the notion of such perfections purely from my ideas.

God and My Ideas

Although the idea of substance is in me by virtue of the fact that I am a substance, that fact is not sufficient to explain my having the idea of an infinite substance, since I am finite, unless this idea proceeded from some substance which really was infinite... I clearly understand that there is more reality in an infinite substance than there is in a finite one. Thus the perception of the infinite is somehow prior in me to the perception of the finite... How would I understand that I doubt and that I desire, that is, that I lack something and that I am not wholly perfect, unless there were some idea in me of a more perfect being, by comparison with which I might recognize my defects (51b)?

Tlumak's Version

T1. Ideas are like images in that they represent things as having certain characteristics.

T2. Some of the objects of my ideas are represented as having more formal reality than others (i.e. some ideas have more objective reality than others).

T3. Whatever exists must have a cause with at least as much formal reality as it has.

T4. Every idea must have a cause with at least as much formal reality as the idea represents its object has having.

T5. I have an idea of God as an actually infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, all-knowing all-powerful substance by whom I (and anything else which may exist) have been created.

T6. I do not have all the perfections which my idea of God represents God as having.

T7. I am not the cause of my idea of God. (From 4, 5, and 6)

T8. The cause of my idea of God is some being other than myself who possesses at least as much formal reality as my idea of God represents. (From 4, 5, and 8)

TC. So, God exists.

Tlumak's Worry

- Tlumak questions the central claim, at T4, that ideas must have causes that are at least as real as the object of that idea.
- If I have an idea of a rock, there must be a cause of that idea with at least as much reality (i.e. the ability to create) that rock.
- The cause of my idea of the rock need not be the immediate source of my idea; I can just look at the rock.
- But, it must be the first cause of my idea of the rock.

Two Other Worries

R: There is more reality in the cause of something than in the effect.

- 1. What is the status of the general principle R?
 - It must be a clear and distinct perception, like the cogito.
 - Is it?
- 2. Descartes seems to be using logical principles to infer from R.
 - How were those principles secured?

What Can We Get Out of the Causal Argument?

- I believe that there is something salvageable here.
 - Not the proof of the existence of God!
- Poverty of the evidence argument:
 - I have some ideas.
 - I don't know how to account for their origins on the basis of my experiences.
 - So, I have to posit a non-experiential source of some ideas.
- Chomsky and linguistics
- Philosophy of mathematics

Problems for God

G1. Evil, which seems to conflict with omni-benevolence.

G2. Error, which seems to conflict with omnipotence.

▸ G1 and G2 are often conflated.

G3. Free will, which seems to conflict with omniscience.

Also, the best of all possible worlds.

We will pursue these questions more in the weeks ahead.

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Taking Stock

End of the Third Meditation

- We have reasons to suspend judgment concerning our beliefs: the three doubts.
- We have a criterion for restoring some of our beliefs: clear and distinct perception.
- We have a criterion for continuing to doubt others: reliance on the Resemblance Hypothesis.
- The rest of the *Meditations* is a process of re-claiming our beliefs:
 - Four: The self (and free will)
 - Five: Mathematics
 - Six: The physical world (and the mind/body distinction)
- At the beginning of the Fourth Meditation, Descartes argues for protection for the criterion.

Defeating the Deceiver

- To move forward, we need to know that the criterion (clear and distinct perception) will not lead us astray.
- To secure the criterion, we need to eliminate the possibility of a deceiver.
- GG
 - GG1. Deception is a defect.
 - GG2. God has no defects.
 - GG3. So God is no deceiver.
 - GG4. God created and preserves me.
 - GGC. So, I am not deceived by God.

The Problem of Error

GG1. Deception is a defect.
GG2. God has no defects.
GG3. So God is no deceiver.
GG4. God created and preserves me.
GGC. So, I am not deceived by God.

- GG appears to be too strong.
- If my creator and preserver can not, by her goodness, deceive me, it is a puzzle how I can ever err.
- PE
 - PE1. God exists and is perfectly good.
 - PE2. God creates and preserves me.
 - PE3. My faculty of judgment therefore comes from God.
 - PEC. So, my judgments never err.
- Descartes is committed to all three premises.
- He claims that PE is invalid (i.e. PEC does not follow from the premises).

The Two-Faculty Theory of the Mind

AW 55b - 58a

- Our minds have faculties both of will and of understanding.
- Our power of willing is infinite.
 - We are perfectly free to choose.
- Our power of understanding is finite.
 - We only understand a limited range of truths.
- We err when we apply our will (and judge) outside our understanding.

Avoiding Error

- If we affirm a belief about which we lack clear and distinct understanding, we will make a mistake.
 - If I assert that lemons are yellow, I will err.
 - We can avoid error by not judging in the absence of clear and distinct understanding.
- Descartes account of error presumes that if I clearly and distinctly understand that P then I know that P.
 - Clarity and distinctness, as a criterion, is ensured by the presence of God.
 - The goodness of God ensures that there is no deceiver, no systematic deception.
 - It ensures that there will be a way to discover any mistakes I make.
- There would be no way to discover that there is a demon deceiver making me believe most strongly, say, the theorems of mathematics when they are in fact false.
 - So there can't be a demon deceiver.
- But there are ways to recognize small errors of which I am the source, through misuse of my will.
- If I am careful not to judge hastily, I can be sure to never judge falsely.

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Reclaiming Class III Beliefs

- Let's look back at the three-tiered classification of our beliefs:
 - ▶ 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
- The possibility of a deceiver eliminated all of our Class III beliefs.
- Having eliminated the deceiver, we can reclaim the ones we perceive clearly and distinctly.

Mathematics and Mathematical Properties

- Descartes reclaims mathematical truths in Meditation Five, 58b-59a.
- 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, but mathematical knowledge is not impugned, even in dreams.
- Consequently, Descartes reclaims the mathematical properties of objects (e.g. length, shape, and anything describable using mathematics).
- This reclamation leads to Descartes' second argument for the existence of God, the ontological argument.

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Definitions of 'God'

- There are various characterizations of 'God', to many of which Descartes alludes.
 - ▶ Whatever necessarily exists
 - ▶ All perfections, including omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence
 - ▶ Creator and preserver
- Anselm (1033-1109) uses a different characterization: 'something greater than which can not be thought'.
- These are definitions of a term, or a word, but not an object.
- There is no presupposition in this characterization that such a thing exists.
 - ▶ Or, so it seems.

Anselm's Ontological Argument

- AO
 - AO1. I can think of 'God'
 - AO2. If 'God' were just an idea, or term, then I could conceive of something greater than 'God' (i.e. an existing God).
 - AO3. But 'God' is that than which nothing greater can be conceived
 - AO4. So 'God' can not be just an idea
 - AOC. So, God exists.
- Anselm further argues that one can not even conceive of God not to exist.

Descartes's Ontological Argument

- Descartes's version does not depend on our actual conception, or on our ability to conceive.
- Existence is part of the essence of the concept of God.
 - ▶ having angles whose measures add up to 180 degrees is part of the essence of a 'triangle'.
 - ▶ the concept of a mountain necessarily entails a valley.
- The essence of an object is all the properties that necessarily belong to that object.
 - ▶ necessary and sufficient conditions for being one of that type.
 - ▶ Something that has all these properties is one.
 - ▶ Something that lacks any of these properties is not one.
 - ▶ A chair's essence (approximately) is to be an item of furniture for sitting, with a back, made of durable material.
 - ▶ The essence of being a bachelor is being an unmarried man.
 - ▶ A human person is essentially a body and a mind.
- The essence of the concept of God is perfection.
 - ▶ the three omnis
 - ▶ existence

Objections to the Ontological Argument

- Caterus (First Objections)
 - ▶ The concept of a necessarily existing lion has existence as part of its essence, but it entails no actual lions.
 - ▶ We must distinguish more carefully between concepts and objects.
 - ▶ Even if the concept contains existence, it is still just a concept.
- Gaunilo (To Anselm)
 - ▶ My idea of the most perfect island does not entail that it exists.
 - ▶ A non-existing island would be free of imperfections.
- Gassendi (Fifth Objections)
 - ▶ Existence can not be part of an essence since is not a perfection.
 - ▶ Kant, later, pursue's Gassendi's assertion.

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For Next Week

- Finish the *Meditations* on Tuesday
 - Proof of the External World
 - Mind-Body Distinction
- Thursday:
 - Objections and Replies
 - Look at Synthetic Presentation