

**Philosophy 203**  
***History of Modern Western Philosophy***

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**Hamilton College**  
**Spring 2014**

Class #5 - The External World and  
The Mind-Body Distinction  
Meditation Six  
*Discourse, Part Five*

# Business

Today: Finish Descartes's Meditations

- ▶ and a piece of the Discourse
- ▶ 39 slides

Thursday: Objections and Replies

- ▶ and kick-start your papers

Papers are due on Thursday, February 13.

# Topics for Today

1. The Problem of Error and the Two-Faculty Theory of Mind
2. Reclaiming Class III Beliefs
3. The Ontological Argument
4. The External (Material) World
5. The Mind/Body Distinction
6. The Immortality of the Soul

# 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.
  - If the proof of God's existence works, then the criterion may secure belief against the most skeptical doubt (more on this now).
  - If the proof does not work, it is mere counsel to careful judgment in the absence of radical skepticism.
- We have a serious reason to doubt many judgments:
  - 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.



# Topics for Today

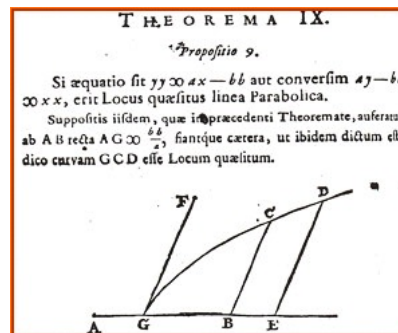
- ✓1. The Problem of Error and the Two-Faculty Theory of Mind
- 2. Reclaiming Class III Beliefs**
- 3. The Ontological Argument
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# Reclaiming Class III Beliefs

- 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.
  - ▶ Ideas are either innate, acquired, or created by me.
  - ▶ Mathematical ideas are not acquired.
  - ▶ Mathematical ideas are not created by me.
- 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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# Dualism and Monism

- Specific sense properties of physical objects will never be reclaimed, since they suffer from the problems of the resemblance hypothesis.
- Descartes does reclaim the material world, though.
- By the end of the *Meditations*, he has defended a dualist view.
- Descartes countenances three types of substances:
  - S1. God (infinite mind);
  - S2. Persons (finite minds); and
  - S3. Extended objects (bodies).
- S1 and S2 are similar in kind.
- We call Descartes a dualist: he believes that there are minds (both finite and infinite) and bodies.
- A monist believes that there is only one kind of substance.
  - ▶ Berkeley is a monist who believes that there are only minds.
  - ▶ Hobbes is a monist who believes that there is only matter.

# Removing the Dream Doubt

- We reclaimed Class III beliefs only after removing the third doubt.
- Descartes does not remove the dream doubt until the very end of Meditation Six.
- “The hyperbolic doubts of the last few days ought to be rejected as ludicrous. The goes especially for the chief reason for doubting, which dealt with my failure to distinguish being asleep from being awake. For I now notice that there is a considerable difference between these two; dreams are never joined by the memory with all the other actions of life, as is the case with those actions that occur when one is awake” (AW 68b).
- Why is this solution acceptable now, but not in the First Meditation?

# The Material World *Can* Exist

- “I now know that [material things] can exist, at least insofar as they are the object of pure mathematics, since I clearly and distinctly perceive them. For no doubt God is capable of bringing about everything that I am capable of perceiving in this way “(61).
- God is omnipotent.
- She can create anything that I can perceive.
- She can create anything that does not create a contradiction.
- She may not be able to create a round square, or a sphere that is both blue and red all over.
- The question remains whether she did in fact create these things.

# The Material World *Does* Exist

(64b)

- MW
  - MW1. I seem to sense objects.
  - MW2. If I seem to sense objects, while there are none, then God is a deceiver.
  - MW3. God is no deceiver.
  - MWC. So, material things exist.
- Only the mathematical properties of this material things are known clearly and distinctly.
  - We never defeat the illusion doubt, in the way that we reject the other two arguments for doubt.
- The essential property of a material thing is its extension.

# The Utility of the Senses

## 66a and 68a

- The senses are not useful for determining truth.
- It seems puzzling that God would give us senses.
- Descartes resolves this puzzle by claiming that the senses provide natural protection of our bodies.
- Since the body must have a method for transmitting information to the brain, it is bound to be imperfect.
- It is better to be deceived once in a while, than not to have any information for the protection of the body.

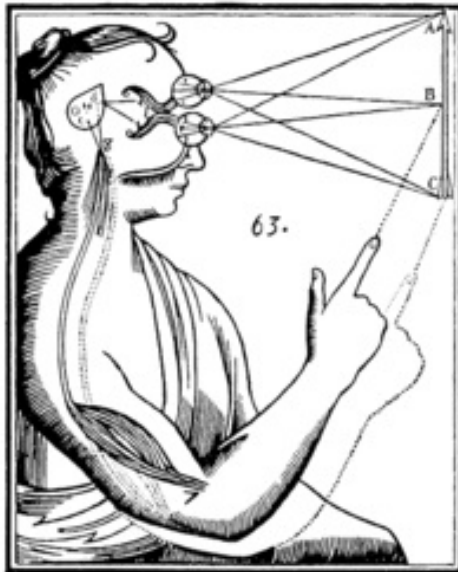


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# The Mind/Body Distinction

We are, essentially, thinking things



- “From the fact that I know that I exist, and that at the same time I judge that obviously nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing, I rightly conclude that my essence consists entirely in my being a thinking thing” (AW 64a)
- Descartes provides two arguments, though most attention gets paid to the first.



# MB

MB1. I have a clear and distinct understanding of my mind, independent of my body.

MB2. I have a clear and distinct understanding of my body, independent of my mind.

MB3. Whatever I can clearly and distinctly conceive of as separate, can be separated by God, and so are really distinct.

MBC. So, my mind is distinct from my body

# The Major Premise

MB3. Whatever I can clearly and distinctly conceive of as separate, can be separated by God, and so are really distinct.

- MB3 is especially contentious.
- The ability of an omnipotent God to separate two objects may not be relevant to the nature and relations of those objects.
- Even if there were a God who could separate my mind from my body, perhaps my mind is, in fact, just a part of, or an aspect of, my body.
- We could weaken the premise to remove reference to God.
  - MB3\*. Whatever I can clearly and distinctly conceive of as separate are really distinct.
  - MB3\* supports a weaker conceptual dualism.

# Conceptual Dualism

- Conceptual dualism says that we have distinct concepts for the mind and the body.
- It is, essentially, a semantic thesis, and not a metaphysical one.
- In contrast to substance dualism, conceptual dualism is not very controversial.
- We might express the original MB3 as saying that conceptual dualism entails substance dualism.

# Substances and Essential Characteristics

- MB1 and MB2 rely on characterizations of the mind and body.
- “To each substance there belongs one principal attribute; in the case of mind, this is thought, and in the case of body it is extension. A substance may indeed be known through any attribute at all; but each substance has one principal property which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all its other properties are referred. Thus extension in length, breadth and depth constitutes the nature of corporeal substance; and thought constitutes the nature of thinking substance. Everything else which can be attributed to body presupposes extension, and is merely a mode of an extended thing; and similarly, whatever we find in the mind is simply one of the various modes of thinking” (*Principles of Philosophy* 53).
- The core characteristic of thought is consciousness.
- Bodies are mere machines.
- Our bodies are no different in kind from those of the higher animals.

# Persons and Animals

- The most obvious distinction between humans and animals is our ability to reason, our mental qualities.
- Descartes appeals to language use and behavioral plasticity, 33a.
- There are many ways in which particular animals are better than humans in particular tasks (e.g. smart chimps).
- Humans perform a wider range of tasks.
- Descartes concluded that humans were different in kind, having souls.
- Cartesians were notorious vivisectionists.
- Descartes's observations remain in debates over artificial intelligence.



# Separating Thought from Sensation

- We may confuse the nature of mind and body because of their union.
- Consider our faculty of imagination.
  - It seems that we first receive images, and then reason about them.
  - Descartes argues that this Aristotelian picture is misleading.
- We can exist, and think, without imagination.
- On Cartesian dualism, the senses have been demoted from their lofty position as the origin of all knowledge.
- The senses merely provide natural protection of our bodies.

# Arnauld's Objection

- AO

AO1. I have a clear and distinct understanding of Clark Kent, as someone who can not fly.

AO2. I have a clear and distinct understanding of Superman, as someone who can fly.

AO3. Whatever I can clearly and distinctly conceive of as separate, can be separated by God, and so are really distinct.

AOC. So, Clark Kent is not Superman.

- The conclusion of SC is clearly false.

- But, the form of SC is the same as the form of MB.



# A Cartesian Reply to Arnauld

- Descartes should respond by finding a difference between the two arguments such that AO is unsound while MB remains sound.
- He could insist that we do not have a clear and distinct understanding of Clark Kent.
  - Our knowledge of him is inadequate.
- Denigrating our knowledge of Clark Kent solves the problem with the Superman argument.
- But, that solution might rebound on the first premise of Descartes's original argument.
- We have to wonder whether our knowledge of the body is also inadequate.
- Perhaps, if our knowledge of the mind were adequate, then we would understand that the mind is the body, and not distinct from it.



# Descartes's Second Argument For the Mind/Body Distinction

based on the divisibility of bodies

- DB
  - DB1. Whatever two things have different properties are different objects.
  - DB2. The mind is indivisible.
  - DB3. The body is divisible.
  - DBC. So, the mind is not the body.
- In response to DB, we might again just not have noticed that the mind is in fact divisible.
- Descartes mentions other attributes.
  - that knowledge of God is innate
  - the distinction between willing and understanding
- We have a complete understanding of the mind, without any material attributes.

# A Return to Plato?

- Plato argued that the world of sensation, or becoming, is not the real world.
  - The real world is the world of being, the world of the forms.
- Arnauld claims that Descartes has returned to Plato's view.
- Descartes denies it.
  - We are primarily our minds.
  - But our bodies are part of us, as well.
- Descartes steers a narrow path between the old Platonic view that our bodies are completely inessential and a materialist view on which we are just our bodies.
- For Plato, the body is at best merely a vessel for the soul.
- For Descartes, we are tied to our bodies in a remarkable way, unlike a sailor and ship, 65a.
- We do not merely observe injury to the body, but have a special relationship to it.
  - Privileged access

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# Immortality

“When one knows how different [the mind and the body] are, one understands much better the arguments which prove that our soul is of a nature entirely independent of the body, and consequently that it is not subject to die with it. Then, since we do not see any other causes at all for its destruction, we are naturally led to judge from this that it is immortal” (34).

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# Some topics for review

1. Three doubts:
  - Illusion
  - Dream
  - Deceiver
2. Skepticism
3. Three classes of beliefs
4. Rationalism and empiricism
5. A priori and a posteriori knowledge
6. The cogito
7. Clarity and distinctness as criteria for knowledge
8. Resemblance hypothesis
9. Three sources of ideas (innate, acquired, produced by me) and their characteristics.
10. The problem of error and Descartes's account of error
11. Descartes's metaphysics: infinite mind, finite minds, bodies
12. Necessary truths (e.g. those of mathematics) and how we know them
13. The ontological argument for God's existence
14. The role of our senses
15. The possibility and existence of physical objects
16. The mind/body thesis

# For Thursday

Read the synthetic version of the  
*Meditations*

In class, a group exercise on the  
*Objections and Replies*