

Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

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Hamilton College
Spring 2015

Class #5 - Finish the *Meditations*
Discourse, Part Five

Business

- ▣▶ Today: Finish Descartes's Meditations
 - ▶ and a piece of the Discourse
- ▣▶ Thursday: Objections and Replies
 - ▶ and kick-start your papers
- ▣▶ Papers are due on Thursday, February 12.
- ▣▶ I'm presenting on the Cartesian Circle (and related topics) on Friday:
 - ▶ All-Night Reading Room of Burke
 - ▶ Noon
 - ▶ Lunch

Topics for Today

- ☞ **1. The Solipsistic Barrier**
2. The Causal Argument for God's Existence
3. The Problem of Error and the Two-Faculty Theory of Mind
4. Reclaiming Class III Beliefs
5. The Ontological Argument
6. The External (Material) World
7. The Mind/Body Distinction
8. The Immortality of the Soul
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Clicker Question

With which statement about **sensation** would Descartes *disagree*?

- A. The senses are useful for avoiding getting hit by a truck.
- B. The senses tell us about material objects.
- C. The senses give us knowledge of our minds.
- D. Ideas of sense can not be false.

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)?

The Causal Argument

HT: Tlumak

1. Some objects of my ideas seem to have more formal reality than others (i.e. some ideas have more objective reality than others).
 2. Whatever exists has a cause with at least as much formal reality as itself.
 3. Every idea must have a cause with at least as much formal reality as the idea represents its object as having.
 4. I have an idea of God as an actually infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, all-knowing all-powerful creator and preserver.
 5. I do not have the perfections which my idea of God represents God as having.
 6. So, I am not the cause of my idea of God and the cause of my idea of God is some other being who possesses at least as much formal reality as my idea of God represents.
- C. So, God exists.

Clicker Question

Even if the possibility of global deception is eliminated, which beliefs remain doubttable?

- A. That $7+5=12$.
- B. That bachelors are unmarried.
- C. That there is an external world.
- D. That blueness is a color.

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.
 - 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 (and other eternal truths)
 - 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 of 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.
- GG looks too strong; I do make errors.

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

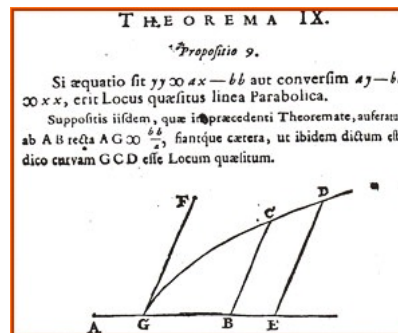
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Reclaiming Class III Beliefs

- 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 human person is essentially a body and a mind.
- The essence of the concept of God is perfection.
 - the three omnis
 - existence

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Dualism and Monism

- Descartes never reclaims specific sense properties of physical objects.
 - They suffer from the problems of the resemblance hypothesis.
 - Inconsistent with Galilean mechanics
- Descartes does reclaim the existence of the material world.
- 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

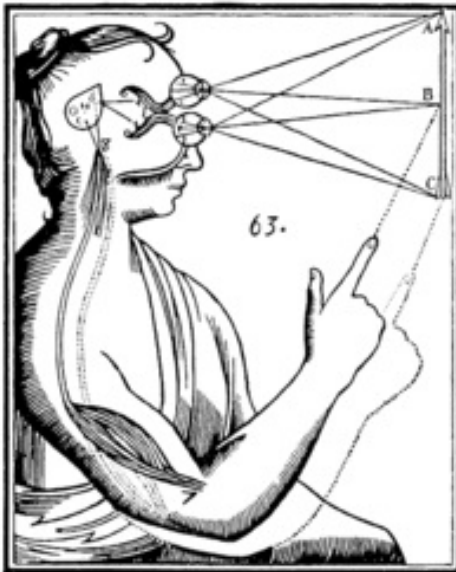
- The world can exist.
 - “I now know that [material things] can exist, at least insofar as they are the object of pure mathematics, since I clearly and distinctly perceive them. For no doubt God is capable of bringing about everything that I am capable of perceiving in this way “(61).
- And it does
- 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.
 - The essential property of a material thing is its extension.
 - The senses mainly just provide natural protection of our bodies.

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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.

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 in the *Discourse*.
- 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.

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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For Thursday

Read the synthetic version of the *Meditations*

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

The *Objections and Replies*

- After completing the *Meditations*, Descartes circulated the manuscript, often through intermediaries.
- The original 1641 edition included six sets of objections and replies.
 - The 1642 edition included a seventh set, as well.
- Threads of argument woven among the different objections and replies
 - Each objector saw the previous objections.
 - The objections build on each other.
- Often lively, concrete examples
- Some scholars insist that the *Objections and Replies* are integral parts of the work, essential parts of the text, and not mere auxiliaries, or commentary.

The Objectors

1. Johannes Caterus
 - ▶ Catholic Dutch theologian
2. Various theologians and philosophers collected by Marin Mersenne
 - ▶ friar and mathematician
 - ▶ handled the remaining circulation of the manuscript
3. Thomas Hobbes
 - ▶ exiled and living in France, in his 50s,
 - ▶ still ten years before *Leviathan*, and a year before *De Cive*
4. Antoine Arnauld
 - ▶ philosopher and theologian, and Jansenist
 - ▶ co-author of *The Port-Royal Grammar*
5. Pierre Gassendi
 - ▶ atomist
6. Various theologians and philosophers collected by Mersenne, again
7. Pierre Bourdin, Jesuit priest
 - ▶ These only appeared in the second edition
 - ▶ I haven't included these, yet.
 - I also want to include the letters - project for student research

Topics in the Re-organization

- I. To the Illusion and Dream Arguments
- II. To the Cogito
- III. To the Idea of God
- IV. To the Causal Argument for God's Existence
- V. To the Ontological Argument
- VI. To the Nature of Knowledge and the Criteria for Certainty
- VII. To the Nature of Reason and the Classification Our Ideas
- VIII. To Innate Ideas and Necessary Truths
- IX. To the Account of Error and Free Will
- X. To the Nature of the External World
- XI. To the Arguments for the Mind-Body Distinction
- XII. To the Nature of the Self, and the Faculties of the Mind
- XIII. To the Immortality of the Soul
- XIV. To the Differences Between Humans and Animals
- XV. To the Method

The Exercise

- Form groups (of 3 or 4) using the puzzle pieces.
- Choose one set of Objections and Replies
 - 2-4 objections and replies in each set
- Find a place to work.
- Three (or 4) roles for each group
 - Descartes, the Objector, Judge/Scribe
 - The person playing the objector reads the objection aloud
 - The person playing Descartes reads Descartes's response.
 - The judge/scribe facilitates a judgment, and writes down a summary.
 - Adjudications may end in a verdict, or they may just point to topics for further research.
 - Work together
- You may switch for the next objection/reply.
- The goal is to decide who is right, not to win the debate.
- Return to class at 10am

Adjudication Summaries and First Paper

- Papers are due next Thursday
- You may work on the objections and replies you see on Thursday or others
- All of the handouts, and more, are available on the website.