

Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

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Spring 2016

Class #4
The Real Point of the Doubts
The Cogito and Self-Knowledge
The Wax and the Resemblance Hypothesis

Topics for Today

1. Finish Discussion of Descartes's Method of Doubt
2. The Cogito and Self-Knowledge
3. The Wax Argument and the Resemblance Hypothesis
4. Descartes's Rule and the Cartesian Circle
5. The Solipsistic Barrier/Axis Paragraph/Narrative Climax
6. The Causal Argument for the Existence of God
7. Free Will

Descartes's Doubts

A Review

- Descartes presents a quite-high standard for knowledge.
 - Beyond JTB
 - Not possible to doubt
 - Perhaps even KK
- While we are often nearly certain that we are not dreaming, our belief that we are awake seems not quite knowledge in light of the doubt.
- The deceiver trumps dreaming in any case, to establish external world skepticism.
- But skepticism is not the main point of the doubts, actually.

Team Activity

The Three Doubts

- Toward the end of the First Meditation, Descartes writes, “There is nothing in all that I formerly believed to be true, of which I cannot in some measure doubt, and that not merely through want of thought or through levity, but for reasons which are very powerful and maturely considered.”
- Descartes’s three reasons for doubt are, in order of strength:
 - ▶ A. We sometimes have illusions.
 - ▶ B. There is no reliable mark to indicate whether I am awake or dreaming.
 - ▶ C. A demon deceiver could put false ideas directly into my mind.
- Sort each of the following beliefs into exactly one of three groups or piles.
 - ▶ Group A: Claims which are called into question by the illusion doubt.
 - ▶ Group B: Claims which are not called into question by illusion, but are called into question by the dream doubt.
 - ▶ Group C: Claims which are not called into question by illusion or dreaming, but are called into question by the deceiver doubt

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).

Doubts

- 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
 - Eternal truths
- Questions, about this or anything else from the skeptical moment?

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The Cogito

- “Archimedes sought but one firm and immutable point in order to move the entire earth from one place to another. Just so, great things are also to be hoped for if I succeed in finding just one thing, however slight, that is certain and unshaken” (AW 43a-b).
- One belief resists doubt.
- Whenever I am thinking, even if I am doubting, I must exist.
- ‘Cogito’ is Latin for ‘I think’.
- At least my existence, as long as I am thinking, can not be seriously doubted.
- See Unit Notes for Honor Code violation by Descartes (Augustine)

Is the Cogito an Inference?

- In the *Meditations*, Descartes does not write, “I think; therefore I am.”
- That formulation presumes a syllogism:
 - NC1. Whatever thinks, exists.
 - NC2. I think.
 - NCC. So, I exist.
- 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, right?
 - *Big* question: Do we have logic or do we not?
- Descartes calls the cogito a pure intuition.
 - Augustine reasoned to his conclusion.
 - Doubting is self-defeating.
 - Is that a logical result?

Team Activity

Self-Knowledge

- “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).
- I am going to project a series of propositions.
- Each team has two slips of paper to display:
 - Knowable
 - Still in Doubt
- For each proposition, you have 20 second (more if necessary) to decide which slip to display.
- Remember: all three doubts are still in effect here!
- Ready?

The sky is blue.

I doubt that the sky is blue.

I affirm that the sky is blue.

I imagine a blue sky.

I sense a blue sky.

Seven and five are twelve.

**I affirm that seven and five
are twelve.**

**I understand that seven and
five are twelve.**

Apples are red.

I imagine red apples.

I deny that apples are red.

**I refuse to believe that
apples are red.**

I imagine a hippogryph.



I imagine a hippogryph.

**I am working toward a
degree from Hamilton
College.**

**I want a degree from
Hamilton College.**

The Next Step

What Do We Learn About the External World
By Examining our Thoughts?



- No luck; let's come back the other way.

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Knowledge of Bodies Comes 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.
- Not so fast, says Descartes:
 - “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).





Aristotle on Perception



- Aristotle took sensory qualities to be properties of external objects.
 - “What can perceive is potentially such as the object of sense is actually” (Aristotle, *De Anima* ii 5, 418a3-4),
 - In perception, our sense organs change to match 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.
- 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.
- This is not just Aristotle being crazy.
- We could call it a natural or naive view of perception.
 - The resemblance hypothesis.



The Resemblance Hypothesis

- 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 Galilean mechanics

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).

Team Activity

The Wax Argument

- Decide whether each of the claims is true or false.
 1. The wax changes all of its sensory properties.
 2. It is the same wax before and after melting.
 3. The wax experiment can be done with any physical object.
 4. Any physical object thus can not be characterized by its sensory properties.
 5. Physical objects are known by the mind alone.

For Next Week

- Finish (most of?) the *Meditations* on Tuesday
 - Proof of the External World
 - Mind-Body Distinction
- Thursday:
 - Objections and Replies