

Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

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Hamilton College
Spring 2016

Class #5
The Causal Argument for the Existence of God
Applying the Criterion
Free Will

Business

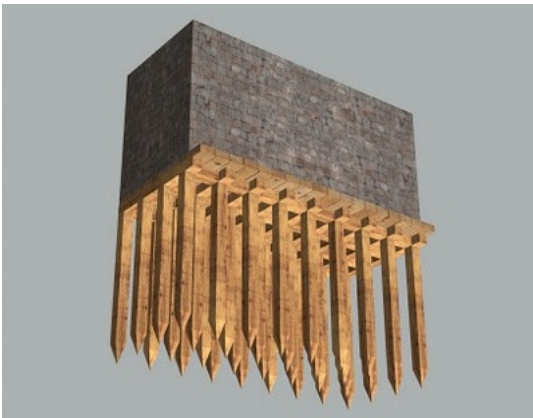
- ▣▶ Today: Mostly Finish Descartes's *Meditations*
 - ▶ Our first team activity today is at slide 20.
- ▣▶ Thursday: Objections and Replies
 - ▶ kick-starting your papers
- ▣▶ Draft of paper is due in class next Tuesday, 2/9
- ▣▶ Next Tuesday, we'll...
 - ▶ Do an activity with the paper drafts.
 - ▶ Finish the *Meditations*
 - ▶ Talk about my view about the Cartesian Circle (if there's time)
- ▣▶ Then, next Thursday (2/11): Start Unit 2
 - ▶ Spinoza RAT
- ▣▶ Final draft of paper due on Tuesday 2/16

Remaining Descartes Topics

1. Finish the Wax Argument and the Resemblance Hypothesis
2. Descartes's Rule and the Cartesian Circle
3. The Solipsistic Barrier/Axis Paragraph/Narrative Climax
4. The Causal Argument for the Existence of God
5. Free Will
6. Reclaiming Class III Beliefs
7. The Ontological Argument
8. The External (Material) World
9. The Mind/Body Distinction
10. The Immortality of the Soul

Real and Apparent Properties

- We saw in our last class that the wax argument concludes that objects are not identifiable by their sensory properties.
- It remains for us to distinguish between the real and the apparent properties of objects.
- Real properties of objects will have to be lasting.
 - All of the sensory properties of objects are subject to changes like those we saw with the wax.
 - The real properties are somehow behind or underneath the sensory properties.
 - They must be available to our understanding without first appearing in our imagination.
 - Apprehended by the mind alone



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
 - ▶ But it's not Descartes's claim.
- Strong claim: the senses are irrelevant to knowledge.
 - ▶ Knowledge of physical objects comes from the intellect (or mind) alone.
 - This is Descartes's claim.
 - ▶ 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 innumerably many different forms.
 - knowledge

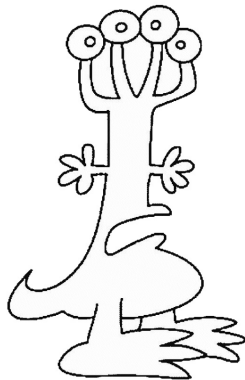
Galilean Physics



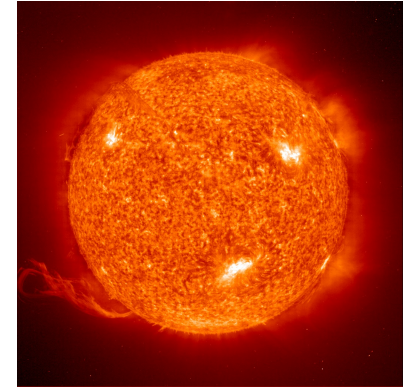
- One of Galileo's central achievements was the replacement of the Aristotelian view of perception, and its concomitant resemblance hypothesis.
- The doctrine of enformation seems scientifically implausible.
- Galilean physics: all causes are impetus.
 - collisions of billiard balls
 - transfers of momentum
- 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.
 - "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).

Appearance and Reality

- On Galilean science, 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.



Against the Resemblance Hypothesis



- On the RH, 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).

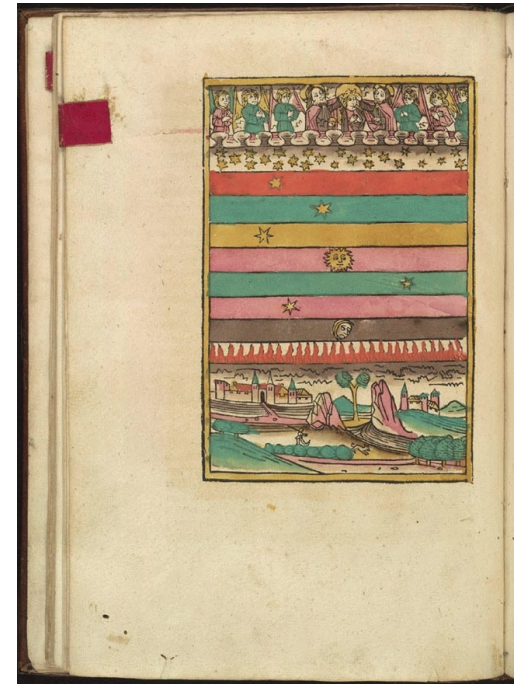
The Primary/Secondary Distinction

- 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.



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 Megenberg, Buch der Natur (Book of Nature). Augsburg: Johannes Bämmler, 1481

From the Mind Alone

Trying to make Descartes's claim plausible



- We have two different types of beliefs about the wax.
 - ▶ It has a particular shape, color, and other sense properties.
 - not knowledge
 - ▶ It can take on innumerably many different forms.
 - knowledge
- We couldn't acquire the latter belief from the senses.
 - ▶ (It's modal.)

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).

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.
- Postulate 1 of the Synthetic Presentation (Second Replies)
 - “I ask first that readers take note of how feeble are the reasons why they have up until now put their faith in their senses, and how uncertain are all the judgments that they have constructed upon them; and that they review this within themselves for so long and so often that they finally acquire the habit of no longer placing too much faith in them...” (AW 73)
 - That’s the point of the doubts.
- So, we have a serious account of our earlier errors.
 - None of this silly doubt stuff

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Descartes's Rule

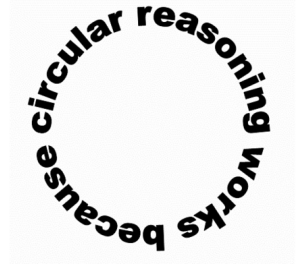


- We are trying to put the apples back in the apple cart.
- We need some kind of mark, or rule, which enables us to separate knowledge from mere belief.
- Descartes starts with the Cogito.
 - ▶ Like an axiom
 - ▶ What makes it so special?
- “Surely in this first instance of knowledge, there is nothing 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).
- How can we apply this rule?

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.
- Soon, 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.

Approaching the Climax of the *Meditations*

- We 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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Team Activity

The Solipsistic Barrier

The Axis Paragraph

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

- We have been introspecting and trying to find a way out to the world.
- Descartes discovers an idea which he thinks can not be invented.
 - ▶ Since I am finite and 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 which prohibits something coming from nothing.
 - ▶ (as clear and distinct as the cogito)
 - ▶ “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 idea of God must come from God.