

Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

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Class #6
The Causal Argument
Objections and Replies

Business

- Today
 - A few activities, including an exercise on the *Objections and Replies*
- Tuesday
 - Bring a draft of your paper.
 - We'll finish the *Meditations*, for sure.
 - If time, I'll tell you what I think about the Cartesian Circle.
- Thursday
 - Start Monism (Hobbes and Spinoza)
 - RAT2 on Spinoza
- Final drafts of papers are due the following Tuesday, the 16th.

Remaining Descartes Topics

1. The Causal Argument for the Existence of God
 2. Free Will
 3. **Group Exercise on the Objections and Replies**
 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
- Bonus Topics:
- Spinoza on the Cartesian Circle
 - Me on the Cartesian Circle

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.

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, and the Easter Bunny does not.

Team Activity

The Causal Argument

- 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 as 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.

Reflections on the Causal Argument

- For the causal argument to succeed, as Descartes wants it to succeed, the principles on which it is founded need not only be true.
 - They have to be clear and distinct perceptions
 - Like the cogito
- Descartes seems to be using logical principles to infer.
 - Those principles are brought into question by the deceiver hypothesis.
 - The inferences would have to be self-justifying to be legitimate.

What Can We Salvage from the Causal Argument?

- The structure of the argument is importantly precedental.
 - poverty of the evidence
- Descartes starts by observing that we I have some ideas.
- We don't know how to account for their origins on the basis of our experiences.
- So, we have to posit a non-experiential source of some ideas.
- Linguistics and mathematics
 - We have no sense experiences of mathematical objects, and yet we have knowledge of them.
 - Our knowledge of language seems to be inexplicable on the basis of behavioral conditioning.
 - So, we seem to have some kind of non-sensory cognitive capacities.
 - Chomsky: language is not so much learned as grown in the brain, as a limb is grown on the body.

The Innateness of the Idea of God

- Other causal arguments proceed from the premise of the existence of the world, backwards, toward a first cause.
 - Aquinas
 - Such arguments start with an observation.
 - The origins of the Earth
 - Or the galaxy.
 - Empirical premises off limits to Descartes here
- Descartes argues backwards from just his ideas.
 - “All that remains for me is to ask how I received this idea of God. For I did not draw it from the senses; it never came upon me unexpectedly, as is usually the case with the ideas of sensible things when these things present themselves (or seem to present themselves) to the external sense organs. Nor was it made by me, for I plainly can neither subtract anything from it nor add anything to it. Thus the only option remaining is that this idea is innate in me, just as the idea of myself is innate in me. To be sure, it is not astonishing that in creating me, God should have endowed me with this idea, so that it would be like the mark of the craftsman impressed upon his work...” (AW 53b)
- Again, notice the poverty of evidence form of the argument.

Problems for 'God'

- G1. There seems to be **evil** in the world, and that seems to conflict with God's infinite benevolence
- G2. We make **errors**, which seem to conflict with God's omnipotence.
 - G1 and G2 are often conflated.
- G3. We seem to have **free will**, which may be taken to conflict with God's omniscience.
- Also, the best of all possible worlds.
- We will pursue these questions more in the weeks ahead.
 - Free will next.

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.

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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.
- GG looks too strong; I do make errors.
- Descartes's solution leads to his view about free will.

Team Activity

Descartes's View of Free Will

- Here are six possible statements of Descartes's view about free will.
 - A. I am never free to act because my will depends on God's will at all times.
 - B. I am never free to act because I am God, and God is always constrained to be perfect.
 - C. I am sometimes free to act, when my understanding is clear.
 - D. I am sometimes free to act, but I can never know whether I am acting freely.
 - E. I am always free to act, but sometimes choose badly.
 - F. I am always free to act and I never err because my understanding comes from God.
- Which best captures Descartes's view?

The Two-Faculty Theory of the Mind

- 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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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

Team Activity

Objections and Replies Exercise

- Choose one set of Objections and Replies
 - 2-4 objections and replies in each set
- Three roles for each group
 - Descartes, the Objector, Judge/Scribe
 - Share roles
- Process
 - The objector reads the objection aloud.
 - Descartes reads Descartes's response.
 - The judges/scribes facilitates a judgment, and writes down a summary.
 - Adjudications may end in a verdict.
 - They may just point to topics for further research.
- Switch roles for the next objection/reply.
- The goal is to decide who is right, not to win the debate.

First Paper

- Bring a draft of your paper (750 words minimum) to class on Tuesday; we'll do an exercise with them.
 - ▶ You may work on the objections and replies you saw today or others
 - ▶ All of today's handouts, and more, are available on the website.