

Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

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Hamilton College
Spring 2016

Class #7
Finishing the *Meditations*

Business

- Today
 - An exercise with your papers
 - We'll finish the *Meditations*.
 - I want to make sure that you have the core concepts.
 - We'll save other group activities for end, if there's time.
 - Also if time, I'll say a little about the Circle
- Thursday
 - Start Monism (Hobbes and Spinoza)
 - **RAT2 on Spinoza**
 - Questions about that?
- Final drafts of papers are due next Tuesday, the 16th.

Remaining Descartes Topics

1. Your Papers
2. Free Will
3. Reclaiming Class III Beliefs
4. The Ontological Argument
5. The External (Material) World
6. The Mind/Body Distinction
7. The Immortality of the Soul

Bonuses:

8. Spinoza on the Circle
9. Me on the Circle

Team Activity

Your Papers

- Individually, on your drafts, highlight the topic sentence of each paragraph. (~2 minutes)
- Then, one at a time, read aloud to your teammates:
 - The topic or title of your paper
 - The full first paragraph
 - The topic sentences
- Team: supply constructive suggestions
- Take notes!
- 5 minutes per paper, max.

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Putting the Apples Back in the Cart

- 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.
- The argument for God's existence and goodness secures the criterion.
- We have a serious reason to doubt many judgments.
 - Reliance on the Resemblance Hypothesis
- We'll reclaim only the most secure beliefs:
 - Four: The self (and free will)
 - Five: Mathematics
 - Six: The physical world (and the mind/body distinction)

Defeating the Deceiver

- To secure the criterion (clear and distinct perception), 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.
- We can avoid error by not judging in the absence of clear and distinct 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.
- If I clearly and distinctly understand that P then I know that P.
 - The criterion is ensured by the goodness of God.
 - There is a way to discover any mistakes I make.
- There is no way to discover that there is a demon deceiver making me believe (e.g.) the theorems of mathematics when they are false.
 - So there can't be a demon deceiver.
- There are ways to recognize smaller errors of which I am the source.
 - misuse of my will
- Is that wrong?

Remaining Descartes Topics

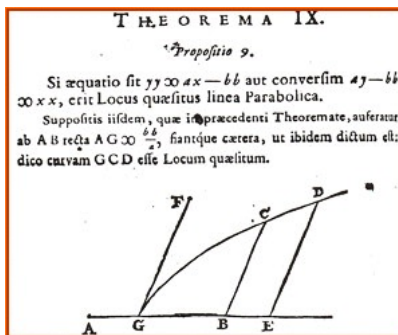
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Reclaiming Class III Beliefs

- The three doubts helped us recognize a 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
 - arithmetic and geometry
 - 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.
 - Ideas are either innate, acquired, or created by me.
 - Mathematical ideas are not acquired.
 - Mathematical ideas are not created by me.
- The problems of the resemblance hypothesis (and the dream doubt) have not been resolved, but mathematical knowledge is not impugned.
- 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'.
 - ▶ Whatever necessarily exists
 - ▶ All perfections, including omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence
 - ▶ Creator and preserver
- Anselm (1033-1109)
 - ▶ 'something greater than which can not be thought'
- These are definitions of a word, not an object.
 - ▶ 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

- 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
- We'll see this argument in Spinoza (to a slightly different end) and in Kant (who rejects it).

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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).
- See, I told you he doesn't care about the doubts!

Dualism and Monism

- Descartes never reclaims specific sense properties of physical objects.
 - Resemblance hypothesis!
 - Inconsistent with Galilean mechanics
- Descartes does reclaim the existence of the material world.
- 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.
 - Spinoza is a monist who believes that there is...

The Material World

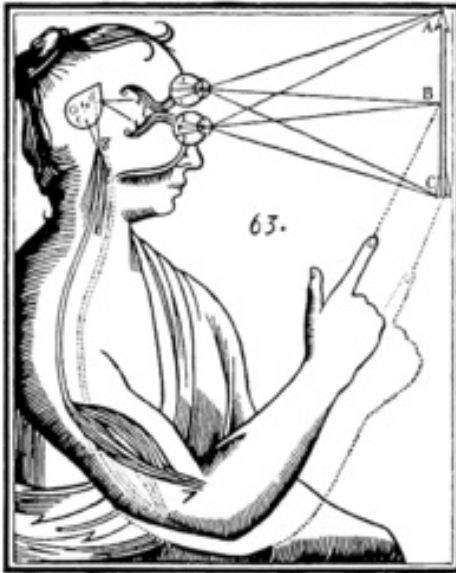
- The world can exist.
 - ▶ “I now know that [material things] can exist, at least insofar as they are the object of pure mathematics, since I clearly and distinctly perceive them. For no doubt God is capable of bringing about everything that I am capable of perceiving in this way “(61).
- And it does.
 - 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

Team Activity

The Mind-Body Distinction

- Compare MB with AO.
 - ▶ 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
 - ▶ 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.
- Consider the following conclusions one might draw from the comparison.
 - A. Since both arguments have the same structure, they are valid or invalid together. MB and AO are both valid. Descartes has established dualism, and Clark Kent is not Superman.
 - B. Since both arguments have the same structure, they are valid or invalid together. MB and AO are both valid. But the premises of AO are false and the premises of MB are true. So Descartes has established dualism even though Clark Kent is Superman.
 - C. Since both arguments have the same structure, they are valid or invalid together. Neither MB nor AO are valid. Since Clark Kent is Superman, there must be something wrong with MB.
 - D. Both arguments seem to have the same structure, but there is a structural difference between them such that AO is valid but MB is not. Clark Kent is not Superman, but the mind is not distinct from the body.
 - E. Both arguments seem to have the same structure, but there is a structural difference between them such that MB is valid but AO is not. Clark Kent is Superman, and the mind is distinct from the body.
- As individuals, determine which choice is best.
- Second, as a team, choose a best interpretation.

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.
- Is conceivability a guide to possibility?

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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Team Activity

Spinoza on the Cartesian Circle

We can be certain of nothing not merely as long as we are ignorant of God's existence (for I have not yet spoken of this), but as long as we do not have a clear and a distinct idea of him. Hence if anyone should desire to oppose my conclusion, his argument should be as follows: We can be certain of nothing before we have a clear and distinct idea of God. But we cannot have a clear and distinct idea of God as long as we do not know whether or not the author of our nature is deceiving us. Therefore, we cannot be certain of anything as long as we do not know whether or not the author of our nature is deceiving us, etc. to this I reply by conceding the major premise but denying the minor. For we have a clear and a distinct idea of a triangle although we do not know whether or not the author of our nature is deceiving us; and provided we have such an idea (as I have shown abundantly above), we will be able to doubt neither his existence, nor any mathematical truth (Spinoza, AW 96–97).

- Which of the following represents Spinoza's interpretation best?
 - A. Descartes reasons in a circle, but the circle is a virtuous one. His argument for the existence and goodness of God is secure.
 - B. Descartes reasons in a circle, and so does not succeed in proving the existence and goodness of God.
 - C. Descartes argues that to defeat the deceiver, we must know of God's nature clearly and distinctly, but that's not possible, nor is knowledge of mathematics.
 - D. Descartes appears to reason in a circle, but we can know that God is good without eliminating the deceiver hypothesis.
 - E. Descartes appears to reason in a circle, but since we can understand the nature of a triangle without knowing whether God is a deceiver, the argument shows that we can doubt God's existence and mathematical truth.
- First, as individuals, pick one of the above.
- Then, agree on a group choice. Be prepared to defend your choice or argue for different interpretation, if you think it necessary.

Circles: The Problem

- Arnauld (4th Objections):
 - ▶ I have one further worry, namely how you avoid reasoning in a circle when you say that we are sure that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true only because God exists. But we can be sure that God exists only because we clearly and distinctly perceive this. Hence, before we can be sure that God exists, we ought to be able to be sure that whatever we perceive clearly and evidently is true (*Fourth Objections*, AT VII.214).²
- Descartes's Reply:
 - ▶ I was not guilty of circularity... We are sure that God exists because we attend to the arguments which prove this; but subsequently it is enough for us to remember that we perceived something clearly in order for us to be certain that it is true. This would not be sufficient if we did not know that God exists and is not a deceiver (*Fourth Replies*, AT VII.171).

Lots of Good Circles

- Goodman on deductive logic
 - ▶ How do we justify a *deduction*? Plainly by showing that it conforms to the general rules of deductive inference. An argument that so conforms is justified or valid, even if its conclusion happens to be false... Principles of deductive inference are justified by their conformity with accepted deductive practice. Their validity depends upon accordance with the particular deductive inferences we actually make and sanction. If a rule yields unacceptable inferences, we drop it as invalid. Justification of general rules thus derives from judgments rejecting or accepting particular deductive inferences (Goodman: 1979: 63-4).
- (Bertrand) Russell on mathematics
 - ▶ When pure mathematics is organized as a deductive system - i.e. as the set of all those propositions that can be deduced from an assigned set of premises - it becomes obvious that, if we are to believe in the truth of pure mathematics, it cannot be solely because we believe in the truth of the set of premises. Some of the premises are much less obvious than some of their consequences and are believed chiefly because of their consequences. This will be found to be always the case when a science is arranged as a deductive system. It is not the logically simplest propositions of the system that are the most obvious, or that provide the chief part of our reasons for believing in the system (Russell 1924: 325).
- Reflective Equilibrium as a Method
 - ▶ Chomsky on linguistics
 - ▶ Rawls on theories of justice
 - ▶ Mathematics

The Demarcation Problem

- BR1. Correctness and accuracy of observable prediction;
- BR2. Precision of those predictions and breadth of the range of phenomena for which such predictions are forthcoming, or more generally, of interesting questions for which answers are forthcoming;
- BR3. Internal rigour and consistency or coherence;
- BR4. Minimality or economy of assumptions in various respects;
- BR5. Consistency or coherence with familiar, established theories;
- BR6. Perspicuity of the basic notions and assumptions;
- BR7. Fruitfulness, or capacity for being extended to answer new questions.
(Burgess and Rosen 1997: 209).

The Real Problem

- Not the form of the *Meditations*
- The arguments for the existence of God.
- It's not invalid, it's unsound.