

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Fall 2004
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Lecture Notes, October 18

I. Knowledge of physical objects

Descartes argued that physical objects exist, since God would be a deceiver if they did not.

What are these objects like?

Only their mathematical properties are clear and distinct.

This is primarily their extension, p 80.

Their sensory properties are in doubt.

That is, we never defeat the illusion doubt, in the way that we reject the other two arguments for doubt.

The Resemblance Hypothesis is our major source of error.

So what good are the senses, then?

II. The role of the senses

The senses provide natural protection of our bodies, p 81.

This is just the best structure for humans.

It is far better to be deceived once in a while, pp 83-4; also pp 88-9.

The important point is that bodies are perceived by the mind alone, and only have extension as a real property.

The others are confused representations.

Locke and Berkeley take up this topic.

Still, doesn't allowing us to err make God deceptive?

He could prevent it.

But understanding the mind/body distinction blocks this accusation.

III. The mind/body distinction

Descartes first argues that we are thinking things, i.e. minds alone, p 78.

That is, the mind is distinct from the body.

1) I have a clear and distinct understanding of my mind, without my body.

2) I have a clear and distinct understanding of my body, without my mind.

3) Whatever I can clearly and distinctly conceive of as separate, can be separated by God, and so are really distinct.

So, my mind is distinct from my body

Another proof of the distinctness of the mind and body, from the divisibility of body, pp 85-6.

1) Whatever two things have different properties are different objects.

2) The mind is indivisible.

3) The body is divisible.

So, the mind is not the body.

Still, we are tied to our bodies in a remarkable way.

Like a sailor and ship, p 81.

Sour essence is mind, though.

We have a clear and distinct understanding of ourselves without our bodies, p 78.

Does this mean that our bodies are just imagined?

But then God would be a deceiver

Descartes topics for review

- 1) 3 doubts
 - A) Illusion
 - B) Dream
 - C) Demon
- 2) Rationalism (Innate Ideas)
- 3) Empiricism
- 4) Skepticism
- 5) A priori, or innate, knowledge
- 6) A posteriori, or empirical, knowledge
- 7) Clarity and Distinctness as criteria for knowledge
- 8) Resemblance hypothesis
- 9) Ontological proof of god's existence
- 10) Cause of error (will and understanding)
- 11) The real role of our senses
- 12) Knowledge and nature of physical objects
- 13) The mind/body thesis