

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Spring 2005
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Lecture Notes, March 2

I. Kant's objection to the ontological argument

Kant claims that existence is not a predicate.
That is, existence is not a property, the way that the perfections are properties.
So, the form of this argument is wrong.
Existence can not be part of an essence, since it is not a property.
Hume made, essentially, this criticism prior to Kant, but Kant gets the credit.
This objection accounts for Caterus' objection.

Kant's support for his assertion, that existence is not a predicate, is thin.
He relies on the belief that logic should make no existence assertions.
In many cases this is true.
But Descartes (and Anslem) might respond that this is an exception to that rule.

II. Some problems with 'God'

- 1) Evil, which seems to conflict with omni-benevolence.
- 2) Error, which seems to conflict with omnipotence.
- 3) Free will, which seems to conflict with omniscience.

Another problem with omni-benevolence, from Leibniz:

- 1) God is omnipotent so he can create the best possible world.
 - 2) God is omni-benevolent, so he wants to create the best possible world.
 - 3) The world exists.
- So, this is the best of all possible worlds.

A corollary:
If this is the best of all possible worlds, then all of the evil in it is necessary.

We shall put the objections aside, and for the purposes of understanding the remainder of the work, accept that Descartes has established the existence of God.

III. Descartes' metaphysics:

1. God
2. Minds
3. Bodies

In the first sentence of Meditation IV, he says that our quantity of knowledge of these things comes in this

order.

We know a lot about God, some about minds, and very little about bodies.

IV. Getting Rid of the Deceiver, and the problem of error

Once we have a criterion, and God to ensure that it holds, everything else follows.

A perfect God is all good.

The deceiver is not.

Descartes problem of Error, Meditation IV, pp 53-4

1) God exists and is perfectly good.

2) God creates and preserves me.

3) My faculty of judgment therefore comes from God.

So, my judgments never err.

Uh-oh.

Since I do err, there must be a problem with this argument.

Perhaps God is really the deceiver after all!

But, God is no deceiver, p 54:

1) Deception is a defect.

2) God has no defects.

3) So God is no deceiver.

4) God created and preserves me.

So, I am not deceived by God.

Given these two arguments, there is a puzzle about how I could err.

Since the conclusion of the first argument is false, one of the premises must be false, or the conclusion doesn't follow from the premises.

Descartes is committed to all three premises.

So, his solution is to deny that the argument is valid.

That is, the conclusion doesn't follow from the premises.

Still, we need an explanation of how we can err.

Descartes distinguishes between the will and the understanding.

Our power of willing is infinite, pp 56-7.

Our power of understanding is finite, p 57.

So we err when we apply our will (and judge) outside our understanding.

The way to always avoid error, then, is to avoid judging unless you have a clear and distinct understanding.

Remember, clarity and distinctness, as a criterion, is ensured only by the presence of God.

This, and the goodness of God, ensures that there is no deceiver, no systematic deception.

I am the source of my error, and if I am careful not to judge hastily, I can be sure to never judge falsely.

Now, we shall begin to reclaim the world.

V. What kinds of knowledge are clear and distinct?

The deceiver eliminated knowledge of math and of universals, all Class III knowledge, as we called it. Now, we can reclaim them.

See Meditation V, pp 64-5.

We can be sure of mathematical truths themselves, and mathematical properties of objects (e.g. length, shape, and anything describable using mathematics).

This leads to Descartes' second argument for the existence of God, the ontological proof, pp 65-6.

These objects are known by proof, and are not sensory.

They are a priori, or, 'innate', as Descartes calls them.

Sensory information is still in doubt, since the dream argument lingers, even with the defeat of the deceiver.

The problems of the resemblance hypothesis have not been resolved.

Mathematical knowledge remains, even in dreams, pp 70-71.

VI. Descartes topics for review

1) Three doubts:

Illusion

Dream

Deceiver

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