

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Spring 2005
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Lecture Notes, March 9

I. Finishing Descartes

Last class, we saw Descartes' two arguments for the mind/body distinction.
He argues that we are essentially our minds.
Still, we are tied to our bodies in a remarkable way.
Like a sailor and ship, p 81.
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 (Again)

- 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

II. Starting work on John Locke (1632-1704), 'Simple Ideas of Sensation'.

Locke's work comes in large part as a response to Descartes's position
The basic metaphysical question is 'What exists?'
Descartes says that physical objects both can and do exist.
He defends with the new science of the 17th century.
Locke does as well.
The new science countenances a world of material objects.
But what are these objects like?
We think of these objects through use of the imagination (images).
For Descartes, though, these images are confused.
They are subject to the errors of the resemblance hypothesis.
The only real properties are those we can understand by pure reason.
Locke has worries about this pure reason.

II. Worry #1: How can an idea be innate?

See Meditation Five, pp 64-65.

For Descartes, ideas of God, mathematics, and logic are innate.

But we do not know some of these.

Children do not know lots of them, §I.I.5.

[Note on Locke references:

Our reading has selections from Book I, Chapter I; Book II, Chapter I; and Book II, Chapter VIII.

There are several sections in each chapter.

§I.I.5 means Book I, Chapter I, Section 5.

§II.VIII.15 means Book II, Chapter VIII, Section 15.]

Even the best mathematicians do not know if Goldbach's conjecture is true.

Descartes says that we use reason to discover them.

Today, we might say that a priori ideas are learned independently of experience.

Locke's solution does not rely on innate ideas.

He says we can account for all of Descartes' Class III knowledge on the basis of experience.

We learn particulars, first.

Then, we generalize to find universals, like those of mathematics.

The mind begins as a blank slate, §II.I.2.

Nobody questions whether experience is necessary for us to know these ideas.

The question is whether experience is sufficient to justify them.

Locke says it is sufficient: All knowledge derives from experience.

This is the definition of empiricism.

One problem for empiricists is how we explain the certainty of $2+2=4$.

No possible experience can support it.

2 schminkles + 2 schminkles = 4 schminkles, even if we never experience schminkles.

Descartes says that experience is not sufficient to justify our knowledge of mathematics.

We know a lot about objects we could not possibly sense.

III. Worry #2: Don't we need our senses in order to start reasoning?

It seems that our ideas begin with sensation, §II.I.23.

Then, we can start reasoning, or reflecting, §II.I.4.

Recall how Descartes rejected the resemblance hypothesis, and any sensory information.

Locke claims that we do use the senses to get knowledge.

Consider §II.VIII.21: the water temperature experiment.

What properties do objects really have?

Descartes says we can not trust the senses.

Locke thinks that Descartes throws out the baby with the bath water.

Our senses do give us some misrepresentations.

But some sensory evidence is useful.

If we had no senses, we could not even start to understand the physical objects.