

Class #4 - Experience

I. *Inception*

The relevance of *Inception* to our work is in the difference between waking states and dreaming states. In the movie, some of the characters have a totem, an indicator of whether they are in a waking state or a dream state.

Moll puts away her totem, choosing to live in a dream state.

It seems that she controls her beliefs, that she is making a decision to believe that the dream state is real. Would this decision be inconsistent with the doxastic involuntarism we discussed earlier?

We know from reading Descartes that any totem is impossible.

We would need to know that the totem is a true indicator of the difference between waking and dream states.

If the totem continues to spin, one can be sure that one is in a dream state.

But, why couldn't we dream that the totem stops spinning?

I was trying to put this problem in terms of Type 1 and Type 2 errors, but I haven't been able to figure that out.

II. Why Do You Believe?

C1. You exist.

C2. You are taking a philosophy class.

C3. Your best friend likes you.

C4. Gabrielle Giffords was shot by Jared Lee Loughner.

C5. Shakespeare wrote *The Tragedy of Macbeth*.

C6. The sun will rise tomorrow.

C7. An object in motion will remain in motion, an object at rest will remain at rest, unless acted upon by an unbalanced force.

Look for general principles.

Are these things that we know?

How do we know what we know?

III. Sense Experience

The question that divides empiricists from rationalists is whether sense experience is sufficient for knowledge.

It might be useful to look more closely at sense experience itself.

Kolak and Martin suggest that sense experience might be identical to thought.

They start by distinguishing sensation from thought in the case of burning one's hand on the stove.

When they look at sensation more closely, it looks to have a significant thought component: daydreaming (visual fantasies); auditory images of mental chatter.

These are internal causes of sensation, but sensations nonetheless.

It looks like thought is significantly sensation.

Next, Kolak and Martin consider the content of our thought when we press on the book. When we eliminate the content of our thought, which is a mental contribution to the experience, the contribution of sensation to experience seems very thin.

K&M conclude that there is an interactive effect between thought and sensation which yields experience, 63-4.

IV. Descartes's Wax

In the later portions of the Second Meditation, Descartes presents a worry about experience.

Consider a ball of wax in two distinct states.

First, it is cold, hard, yellow, honey-flavored, and flower-scented.

Then, we bring the wax near a fire.

After it is melted, the wax becomes hot and liquid, and loses its color, taste, and odor.

In short, all of its sensory properties have changed.

We have images of the wax, in several incompatible states.

But we do not have an image of what the wax is, independent of these mutable appearances: the essence of the wax, or wax in general.

Such an image would have to represent to us all the possible states of the wax.

Our knowledge of bodies, as they truly are, must therefore be distinct from our sensory images of them.

I grasp that the wax is capable of innumerable changes of this sort, even though I am incapable of running through these innumerable changes by using my imagination... The perception of the wax is neither a seeing, nor a touching, nor an imagining...even though it previously seemed so; rather it is an inspection on the part of the mind alone (AW 46a).

According to the new science, the wax is just a body which can take various manifestations, hot or cold, sweet or tasteless, etc., but is identified with none of these particular sensory qualities.

Perhaps the wax was what I now think it is: namely that the wax itself never really was the sweetness of the honey, nor the fragrance of the flowers, nor the whiteness, nor the shape, nor the sound, but instead was a body that a short time ago manifested itself to me in these ways, and now does so in other ways... Let us focus our attention on this and see what remains after we have removed everything that does not belong to the wax: only that it is something extended, flexible, and mutable (46a).

Bodies are things that can have sensory qualities, but which need not have any particular ones.

The same object may have many different appearances.

The moral of Descartes's claim is that sense experience does not lead to knowledge.

In our next class, we will look at two different empiricist approaches to this problem.