

Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

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Class 2 - Meditation One

Five dogmas undermined by the new science

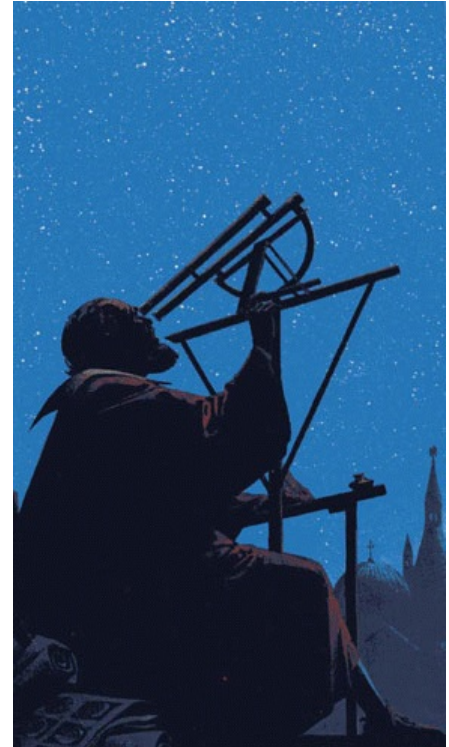
D1. The heavens are constant.

D2. The Earth is at the center of the universe.

D3. Causes are (partially) explained teleologically, by purposes.

D4. The heavens contain starry perfect spheres (stars and planets) which revolve in perfect circles around the Earth.

D5. There are two kinds of motion: linear and circular.



Scriptural circularity

I have always thought that two issues - namely, God and the soul, are chief among those that ought to be demonstrated with the aid of philosophy rather than theology. For although it suffices for us believes to believe by faith that the human soul does not die with the body, and that God exists, certainly no unbelievers seem capable of being persuaded of any religion or even of almost any moral virtue, until these two are first proven to them by natural reason... Granted, it is altogether true that we must believe in God's existence because it is taught in the Holy Scriptures, and, conversely, that we must believe the Holy Scriptures because they have come from God. This is because, of course, since faith is a gift from God, the very same one who gives the grace that is necessary for believing the rest can also give the grace to believe that he exists. Nonetheless, this reasoning cannot be proposed to unbelievers because they would judge it to be circular (AW 35).

A circular graphic with the text "because circular reasoning works" written in a bold, black, sans-serif font, curving around the perimeter of a white circle.

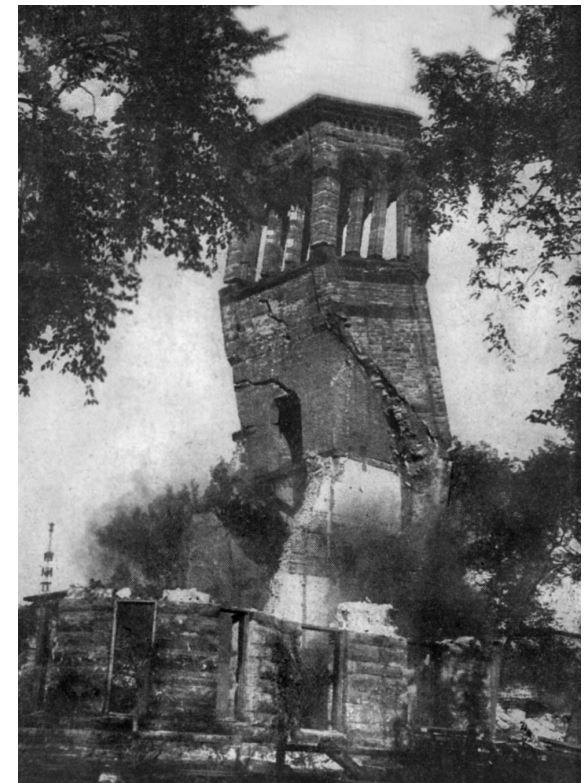
Letter of Dedication

- A difficult piece to interpret
- *Le Monde*, and Galileo's condemnation
- The letter of dedication is clearly an attempt to appease the Church.
- Some historians take Descartes's claims in the letter to be insincere.
- Some interpretations of Descartes's *Meditations* impute insincerity to much of its content.
- We will not pursue such interpretations.

Descartes's Method

To raze everything to the ground and begin again from the original foundation.

- Principles for doubting will call swaths of beliefs into question.
- The method of doubt will lead to certain knowledge.



Descartes's Rules

From *Discourse on Method*

R1. Never to accept anything as true that I did not plainly know to be such;

R2. Divide each difficulty into as many parts as possible;

R3. Conduct my thoughts in an orderly fashion, commencing with the simplest and ascending to the most composite; and

R4. Everywhere to make complete enumerations (AW 31).



Knowledge and Belief



“I *know* that the sun revolves around the earth.”



“I *believe* that the sun revolves around the earth.”

Knowledge and Belief



“I *know* that the sun revolves around the earth.”



“I *believe* that the sun revolves around the earth.”



Knowledge and Belief



“I *know* that the sun revolves around the earth.”

I now see that I did not know.



“I *believe* that the sun revolves around the earth.”

I really did believe it.



Knowledge is a success term

- Person A recants his claim.
- Person B maintains his claim.
- You can not have false knowledge.
- If we know something, it must be true.
- You can have a false belief.
- Knowledge as justified true belief?
 - JTB
 - Plato's *Theaetetus*
 - Gettier counter-examples

The KK thesis

The first [rule] was never to accept anything as true that I did not plainly know to be such; that is to say carefully avoid hasty judgment and prejudice; and to include nothing more in my judgments than what presented itself to my mind so clearly and so distinctly that I had no occasion to call it in doubt (AW31).

- Descartes is claiming that if I know p, I can not doubt it.
- KK thesis: In order to know p, you must know that you know p.
- Name the capital of Illinois.
- Note, but put aside for now, worries about the KK thesis.

Three Doubts

Illusion, Dream, The Demon Deceiver

- Descartes is seeking firm and lasting knowledge in the sciences by way of doubt.
- Rotten apples
- Distinguish doubt from denial
 - 'I doubt that p' means that I do not know whether p is true or false.
 - 'I deny that p' is an assertion of the falsity of p.
 - At the end of the first Meditation, Descartes asserts that he will deny all of the claims he formerly believed.
 - Why?
- If the three doubts are successful, they will make us doubt, but not deny, everything on the list.

Illusion



- Among the most difficult beliefs to abandon are those which we grasp with our senses.
- Everything he has taken as most true has come either from the senses or through the senses.
- Empiricism
 - all knowledge is a posteriori, derivative from sense experience
 - difficult to reconcile with our knowledge of mathematics, logic, 'Bachelors are unmarried'
- Rationalism
 - some knowledge comes from our ability to reason, independently of the senses
 - Knowledge based on reason is called a priori
 - Some logical, mathematical, and semantic beliefs are often taken to be acquired a priori.
- Illusions undermine our sensory beliefs.
 - knowledge of close objects, like our own bodies, resists doubts about illusions.
 - we approach the mirage

Dreams

We can dream of things that do not exist,
or that things have different properties than they do.

The dream argument elicits three distinct questions:

- A. Is there any way of distinguishing waking from dreaming experience?
- B. What beliefs does the possibility of our dreaming eliminate?
- C. Is there anything of which we can be sure, even if we are dreaming?

Is there any way of distinguishing waking from dreaming experience?

- No obvious mark
- Anything we can do when we are awake, we can dream we are doing.
- The list of beliefs the possibility of our dreaming eliminates will be long and detailed.
- We might be able to know that some state was a dream.
- We can not be sure that our current state, if it has no obvious dream-like qualities, is a waking state.
- If we can not be sure that we are not dreaming, then we can not be sure of anything our senses tell us.

Does any knowledge survive the dream doubt?

- mathematical claims
 - ▶ $7+5=12$
 - ▶ the tangent to a circle intersects the radius of that circle at right angles'
- logic
- bachelors are unmarried
- Universals/properties
 - ▶ from which objects are constructed: the 'building blocks'
 - ▶ color, shape, quantity, place, time
 - ▶ The properties remain, even if only in our minds.
 - ▶ "It is from these components, as if from true colors, that all those images of things that are in our thought are fashioned, be they true or false" (AW42).

The Deceiver

- Even if I am dreaming, there are colors, bachelors are unmarried, and $2+2=4$.
- What if there were a powerful deceiver who can place thoughts directly into our minds?
- Compare the deceiver hypothesis to the *Matrix* or to an equivalent brain-in-a-vat hypothesis.
 - According to such examples, our thoughts really happen in brains.
 - There is a physical reality, but it is unlike the one we perceive.
 - In contrast, the deceiver hypothesis is consistent with the non-existence of the physical world.
- We could be disembodied minds, whose thoughts are directly controlled by an independent source.
- When we apply the deceiver hypothesis to our beliefs, we notice that just about all of them can be called into question.
- Nothing, it seems, is certain.

Summary

- Three arguments for doubt
 1. Illusion
 2. Dream
 3. Deceiver
- Each of the three doubts corresponds to a set of beliefs eliminable on the basis of that doubt.
 - 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.
 - Beliefs about numbers, and geometrical entities.
 - Beliefs about logical and semantic truths.

For Next Class

Meditations Two and Three
Choose presentations