

Philosophy: God and knowledge

Siddharth Bhat

Monsoon 2019

Contents

1	Introductory class	5
1.1	The problem of psychologism	5
2	Descartes: Meditations, Doubt and Belief	7
3	Lecture 4	9

Chapter 1

Introductory class

The difference between mathematical truths and factual truths.

1.1 The problem of psychologism

Even though mathematics seems objective, we still filter mathematics through our psychology, so it might not be as objective as we want it to be.

Chapter 2

Descartes: Meditations, Doubt and Belief

He begins with *methodic doubt*, where we do not question each and every particular belief. Rather, we question the source of knowledge of our beliefs. If this source of knowledge is open to even the least doubt, then we reject all beliefs which arise from this knowledge.

We start with perception, the most obvious source of knowledge. We know that our perception can easily deceive us — for example, madmen are clearly deceived by their perceptions. We do not need to presuppose such an extreme position, however. Dreams are another example where our perceptions deceive us. Yet another example is that of temperature: We can change our perception of hot or cold, by dipping our hands into a jug of hot or cold water.

As an aside, “neurotics” have some connection with reality, “psychotics” have a clean break with reality. So “madmen” can be subdivided into these two classes, by Freud’s classification. Freud says that normal dreams are wish fulfilment. That is, you are able to fulfil your wishes that have been repressed. Also, nightmares are your subconscious trying to work through some form of trauma. It is the subconscious trying to take trauma and rework it into a manageable form. They had a patient who had a recurrent nightmare of being shot in the head. Clearly, this is not “wish fulfilment”. He creates the explanation that we constantly relive a bad experience to learn how to manage it.

Now, Descartes makes a decisive move — Even if we are dreaming, the *content* of our dreams as mental images are *embedded in reality*. For example, think of an imaginary/fictitious object, such as a unicorn or a fantastic alien, or an orientable mobius strip. Even so, there would be elements which are recognizable.

At the level of mental images, the images cannot be doubted, though what they are images *of* may not exist. The content of the images in terms of shape, figure, and color must exist in our head, for them to *be images*. Hence, we cannot reject the existence of figure and color.

We are also unable to reject time. Dreams can *distort* time, but we can still feel the passage of time in a dream. We are trying to move from something that is mental, to something that is more than our thought process.

Subjective idealism says that it is just my flow of consciousness, and everything is confined to *my* consciousness.

Objective idealism says that to even possess consciousness, we need abstract entities that transcend just our consciousness — for example, time.

Since time is required to be able to dream, time cannot be reduced to dreaming. This is called as **Transcendental philosophy**. “Transcendental” since we find that at the very moment we turn inwards, a different reality. We find a transcendence in imminence (imminence = the inner). That is, me observing myself internally causes me to come across certain structures that I cannot reduce to myself. For example, that of temporality.

Hence, he believes that mathematics contains some measure of certainty. The natural sciences have an element of empiricism mixed into them. They presuppose things existing in the external world. This presupposition is open to doubt. On the other hand, arithmetic does not need to hypothesize the existence of physical numbers. The ideal entity of numbers (in the sense of Plato’s forms) is something which is independent of our subjective experience.

TODO: I left this class to go back home. finish this

Chapter 3

Lecture 4

Descartes is not happy with saying that this is how we are physically constituted. So he's looking for this absolute, indubitable ground. Therefore, he has to actually prove that there is some transcendent source which guarantees your perception. "clear and distinct perception" is what we require, but this is hard to get to.