

Lecture 08: Descartes

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1. Do the Senses Deceive?

Sensory perceptions of tastes, smells, sounds, heat, cold, light, colors and the like ‘do not represent anything located outside our thought’ (Descartes 1984a, p. 219, AT VIII:35 cited by Simmons 1999, p. 348)

‘from time to time I have found that the senses deceive’ (Descartes 1984b, p. 17, AT VII:18)

Sensory perceptions of tastes, smells, sounds, heat, cold, light, colors and the like ‘do not represent anything located outside our thought’ (Descartes 1984a, p. 219, AT VIII:35 cited by Simmons 1999, p. 348)

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‘there may be some occurrence, not in the foot but in one of the other areas through which the nerves travel in their route from the foot to the brain, or even in the brain itself; and if this cause produces the same motion which is generally produced by injury to the foot, then pain will be felt as if it were in the foot. This deception of the senses is natural’ (Descartes 1984b, p. 61, AT VII:88).

2. Descartes’ Aim in The Meditations

‘these six meditations contain all the foundations of my physics. But please do not tell people, for that might make it harder for supporters of Aristotle to approve them. I hope that readers will gradually get used to my principles, and recognize their truth, before they notice that they destroy the principles of Aristotle.’

3. Aristotelians vs Descartes on the Essential Nature of Bodies

‘in the whole history of physics up to now people have only tried to imagine some causes to explain the phenomena of nature, with virtually no success. Compare my assumptions with the assumptions of others. Compare all their real qualities, their substantial forms, their elements and countless other such things with my single assumption that all bodies are composed of parts’ (Descartes 1984c, p. 107 AT 2:199-200 quoted (with incorrect page number) by Sorell 2018).

‘The only principles which I accept or require in physics are those of geometry and pure mathematics; these principles explain all natural phenomena, and enable us to provide quite certain demonstrations regarding them’ (Descartes 1984a, p. 247 AT 2:64)

References

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