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Subject: Follow-up remarks (GLUE temporarily down)

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Hi all-

On the off-chance you're also visiting the section website, GLUE server is temporarily down <http://www.helpdesk.umd.edu/> Oct 20 10:00pm-11:00pm. Let's hope they're true to their word concerning the temporary time frame.

Well, there's at least one of us livin' la vida loca spending Friday nights attempting to babysit our section website (yours truly). Since I was thwarted by OIT, I'll just circulate by email what I originally intended to post, as follow-up remarks to today's discussion section.

1. For starters, several of you asked insightful questions and/or made insightful comments, which I believe merit circulation:
 - **Ayal Robkin (Sect 0205, 10:00am)** expressed a general and very insightful worry concerning reading Descartes' *Meditations*, which, if I may paraphrase (correctly, I hope) seems to be that Descartes defines all his terms in such a manner that --at the outset--seem to force his conclusions. In other words, the so-called arguments Descartes present all seem fundamentally circular, or beg the question for his case. One point Ayal made was that this disturbing tendency seemed inextricably interwoven with Descartes' initially extremely skeptical position. Descartes seemed to set the bar so high in terms of what he considered as 'clear and distinct' and immune from any doubt, that his initially reasonable claim--he cannot doubt that he is a thinking thing--gives way to his rather contentious metaphysical claims that certainty, knowledge, and truth, are all founded on this idea of infinite perfection ("[I]t's clear to me that there is more reality in an infinite than in a finite substance and, hence, that my grasp of the infinite must somehow be prior to my grasp of the finite---my understanding of God prior to my understanding of myself. For, how could I understand that I doubt and desire, that I am deficient and imperfect, if I don't have an idea of something more perfect to use as a standard of comparison?" *Med III* p125) This is a fundamentally question-begging (or circular) maneuver. In other words, what Ayal was pointing out, is that by relegating all representations (including all those of sensory experience) to the doubtful, and therefore to the metaphysically unreal, Descartes begs the question for ultimate reality-as-absolute perfection.
 - **Jonathan Miller (Sect 0203, 12:00pm)** Similar to Ayal's comment, Jonathan asked what warranted Descartes' maneuver from basing his claim that God exists because of this idea of infinite perfection he has. Aside from his (Aristotelean)

notion, that the reality of a cause is at least as great as the reality of its effect ("I see that an idea's presentational being must be produced, not by mere potentiality, ...but by what is actual." -Med III, p126) a central problem in Descartes was his confusing the properties of the *representation* of something, with the *actual* properties of that something. For instance, though my idea (an *effect*, according to Descartes) of God, or anything, may exhibit properties like infinite perfection, this doesn't mean the actual referent (or whatever the idea represents) has the same properties. For instance, this problem with Descartes was something that worried Locke, and others. Locke tried to solve this problem in his distinction of primary versus secondary qualities. Only primary qualities refer to the object's actual properties. For example: I see an object change color, based on background lighting. This color-change is a property of a representation of that object, namely, what I see. It doesn't mean the object's *actual* color changes. Simply because, for Locke, color isn't a property that the object *actually* has in the first place! Color is a *secondary* quality, only the shape, size, matter, and motion of the object's atoms are the *primary qualities* of the object. Such properties of the object remain, no matter how much I divide up the object: (See, for instance, Paragraph 9, p. 141)

- **Erin Lavelle (Sect 0206, 1:00pm)** Erin asked her question in lecture (Monday, Oct 16) which concerned the skeptical argument involving different perspectives (which questions how we can know what an object's properties are...recall Prof Odell's remarks concerning the change of the table's shape, based on different perspectives.) Erin's point was that by corroborating different sensory information, (i.e. information from our other senses besides sight) we could establish what, for instance, the table's actual shape is. (For instance, one could use touch and sight as a basis to claim that the table's actual shape is rectangular.) Erin's point essentially expresses Aristotle's notion of *sensus communis*, the idea that objective information can be better achieved by (lit.) 'common sense,' or in other words, by investigating what sensory information *all my senses share in common*. A mirage, for instance, would only give visual information. But an actually existent object would yield information corroborated across all five senses. The *sensus communis* argument is a good answer to the 'differing perspectives' argument, however, it doesn't satisfactorily answer the skepticism inherent in the causal theory of perception, what both Locke and Descartes maintained...that all sensory information is a 'representation,' or 'idea' which is an effect of a causal chain, *whose primary causes I have no direct sensory experience of*. For instance, I run into a table. The sensory experience result in the effect (my sense-datum of table) was produced by the table's atoms interacting with my atoms, causing all sorts of reactions in my nerves, yielding the eventual representation of the object in my consciousness. I have no sensory access to any of those processes (Locke referred to these as 'powers') Locke writes: "But ...we are apt to imagine that our ideas [the representations or our perception of objects] are resemblances of something in the objects, and not the effects of certain powers placed in the modification of the primary qualities [in this case, the objects atoms/molecules interacting with the molecules/atoms of my nerves, tissues, etc.] with which primary qualities the ideas produced in us have no

resemblance." (paragraph 25, p. 144) In other words, we're still stuck in the "tower of our representations of the world," (recall Odell's lecture Oct 18) whether or not those representations were produced from sight alone or other senses. Unfortunately for Locke, the actual properties of objects lie outside our sensory experience. This produces a tension in his empirical philosophy (that all knowledge is derived fundamentally from experience) that Berkeley and Hume sought to answer--without (in their minds) throwing the baby out with the bath water, that is, without being forced to give up empiricism.