

**Philosophy 203**  
***History of Modern Western Philosophy***

**Russell Marcus**  
**Hamilton College**  
**Spring 2014**

Class #2 - Meditation One

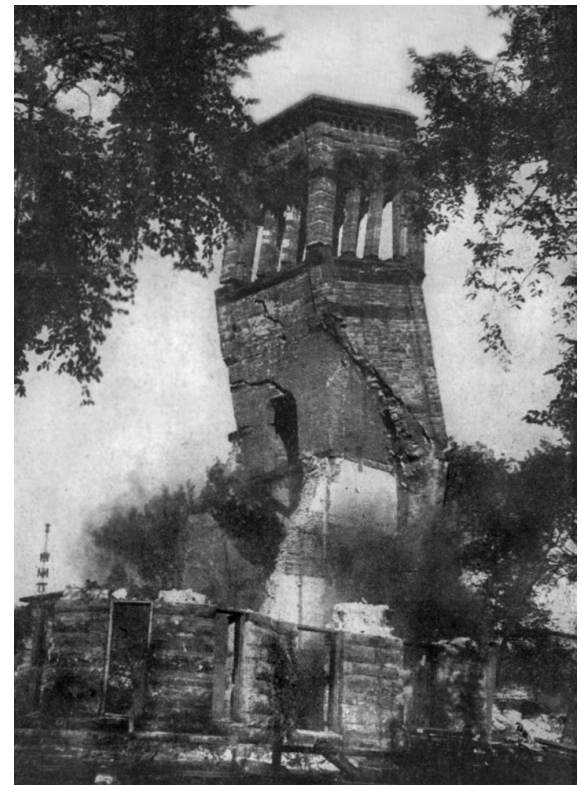
# Business

- Panel presentation sign-ups
  - ▶ Send three choices to me by email **by tomorrow, Friday, 4pm**
  - ▶ Check dates of presentation *and practice session*
- Sean (TA)
  - ▶ Wednesdays, 7:30pm in Philosophy Building (202 CHR)
    - Paper topics
    - Reading guide questions
    - Test prep
    - Or whatever
  - ▶ I do the grading for the course.
- Today:
  - ▶ A little more background?
  - ▶ Some talk of Descartes's method and goal
    - knowledge
  - ▶ The doubts of Meditation One

# 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).

Note: no deference to authority



# What is Knowledge?

## Descartes's Goal

- Knowing a person vs knowing a fact
  - put aside the former
- Knowledge-How vs Knowledge-That
  - KH: Riding a bicycle or making an omelet
  - KT: That the square root of 25 is 5, that Albany is the capital of New York
  - Q: Is all KH just complicated KT?
  - Focus on knowledge-that (propositional knowledge)
- Knowledge-that appears to be related to belief.
- Both belief and knowledge are relations between people and propositions.

# Knowledge and Belief



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

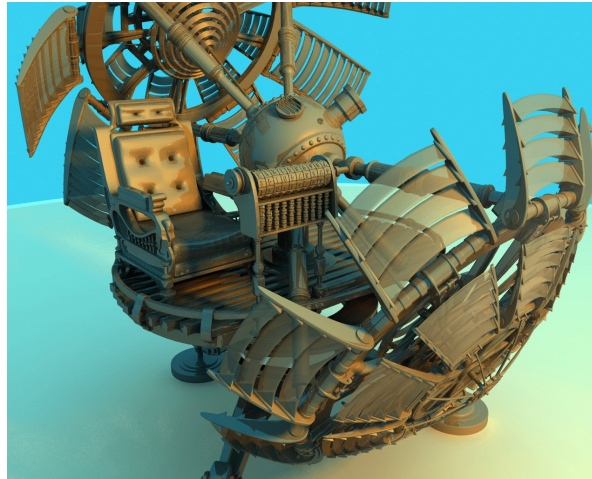


“I *believe* that the sun revolves around the earth.”

# 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

- If you know that  $p$ , then  $p$  is true.
- We can have false beliefs.
- We can not have false knowledge.
  - ▶ We can be wrong, of course.

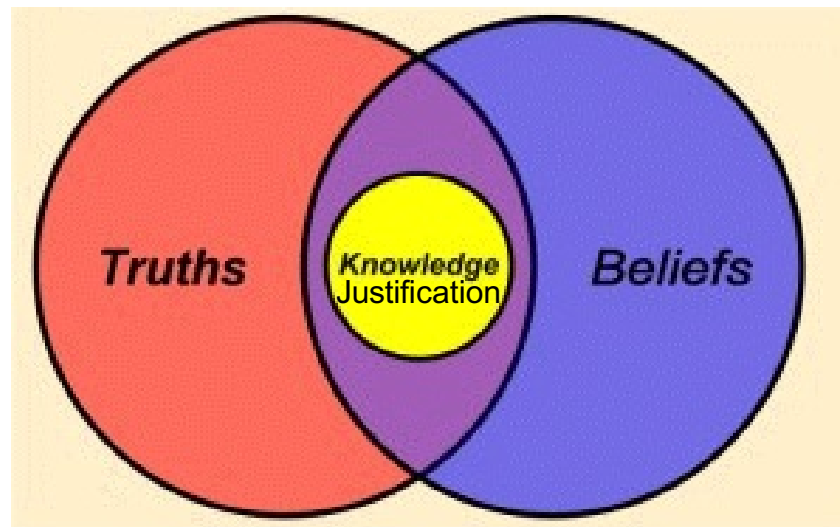


# Knowledge as True Belief

- Let's say that I believe that there are exactly 6,592,749,256,111 grains of sand on the beaches of the Earth.
- Let's further imagine that there are, in fact, exactly 6,592,749,256,111 grains of sand on the beaches of the Earth.
- Do I know this fact?
- We need some account, some justification of how we know.

# Knowledge as Justified True Belief

- Plato's *Theaetetus*
- Gettier counter-examples: rare cases



# Descartes's Criteria for Knowledge

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).

- If I know  $p$ , I can not doubt it.
  - Or, equivalently: if I can doubt it, I do not know it.
- That's stronger than JTB.
- KK thesis: In order to know  $p$ , you must know that you know  $p$ .
  - Also stronger than JTB
- Is Descartes asserting the KK thesis?
- Is the KK thesis true?
  - 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.
- Some knowledge comes directly from experience, like knowing that it is hot outside.
- Other knowledge requires reasoning in addition to sense experience.
  - knowledge of mathematics
  - 'Bachelors are unmarried'
  - *a priori*
- Does all knowledge come from experience?
- 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?

# Waking and Dreaming Experience

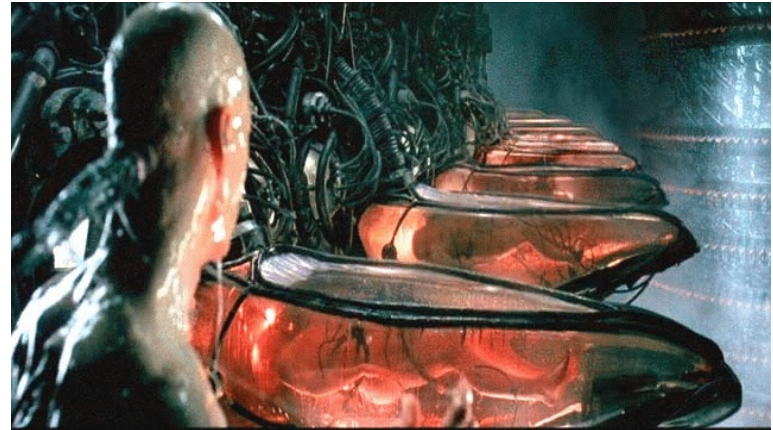
- There is no obvious mark.
- Anything we can do when we are awake, we can dream we are doing.
- We might be able to know that some state was a dream.
- We can not be sure that our current state, if it has no obvious dream-like qualities, is a waking state.
- If we can not be sure that we are not dreaming,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



# What Survives the Dream Doubt?

- Mathematical claims
  - $7+5=12$
  - the tangent to a circle intersects the radius of that circle at right angles'
- Logic
- Semantic facts
  - 'Bachelors are unmarried.'
- Universals/properties
  - color, shape, quantity, place, time
  - the "building blocks"
  - 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



- What if there were a powerful deceiver who can place thoughts directly into our minds?
- The *Matrix* (and similar)
  - 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.

# Seeking Firm Foundations

- 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 arithmetic and geometry
    - Beliefs about logical and semantic truths
    - Descartes calls these the eternal truths.
- In order to rebuild his beliefs, Descartes seeks a single starting point.
  - ▶ Archimedes and the lever