

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

**Russell Marcus**  
**Hamilton College**  
**Spring 2016**

Class #3 - Doubts, Minds, World

# Business

- ▶ Grading
  - ▶ Drop the lowest RAT?
  - ▶ I've only put two End of Unit Writing Assignments on Blackboard; there may be a third.
  - ▶ Peer Evaluations:
    - 3% on the midterm
    - 7% on the final

## Teams

### **Philosoraptors**

Javier Barreto  
Ryan Bloom  
Daniel Finger  
Sam Fogel  
Ram Franqui  
Darby Philbrick

### **CABAM**

Ayo Adjibaba  
Annaliese Mugele  
Conor O'Shea  
Marquis Palmer  
Betsy Ramirez

### **WOT**

Dan Farina  
Nikolas Guevara  
Helena Laporte-Burns  
Felipe Suarez  
Ava Tankala  
Emily Teichman

### **CWEOJ**

Cooper Halpern  
Erik Johansson  
Jake McDougall  
Olivia Melodia  
Will Royal

### **The First Meditation**

Chris Contreras  
Carlo Esquivia  
Mitchel Herman  
Hans Lynn  
Robbie Murden  
Nick Silvestri

### **Best Friends 5 Ever**

Ian Baize  
Brett Bracco  
Andi Dickmeyer  
Luke Gernert  
Ashleah Yzaguirre

### **Philosofours**

Pelumi Fasola  
Matthew Laurence  
Emily Magruder  
Sam Mengual  
Harry Thomas

### **Roll Kants**

Steven Falco  
Marchel Holle  
Young Kim  
Brad Marston  
Zach Oscar  
Alex Straus

# Topics for Today

1. The Principle of Charity and the Letter of Dedication
2. Descartes's Goal: Knowledge
3. Descartes's Method of Doubt
4. The Cogito and Self-Knowledge
5. The Wax Argument

# Charitable Interpretation and the Letter of Dedication

“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”

- Circular reasoning seems terrible.
  - Modern Philosophy is what Modern Philosophers do.
  - The trust circle
- Charitable interpretations seem good.
  - Interpret speakers as holding true beliefs wherever it is plausible to do.
  - Especially trustworthy people
- The Cartesian Circle

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# Knowledge and Belief

# Descartes's Goal

- At the beginning of the First Meditation, Descartes says, “I had to raze everything to the ground and begin again from the original foundations, if I wanted to **establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences**” (AW 40a–b).
- At the end of the First Meditation, Descartes writes that he is, “**concentrating only on knowledge**, not on action” (AW 42b).



# Team Activity

## What Do We Know?

- Putting aside Descartes's argument for doubt (for now), divide the following claims into two piles, one for claims you know and the other for claims you do not know.
  1.  $7+5=12$ .
  2. The Earth is round.
  3. Human beings evolved from more primitive animals, partially as a result of natural selection.
  4. It is cold outside.
  5. Food at McEwen is better than food at Commons.
  6. The momentum of an object is the product of its mass and its velocity, while the force it exerts is a product of its mass and its acceleration.
  7. Drinking orange juice right after brushing your teeth is a bad idea.
  8. Adele's "Hello" is a great song.
  9. Adele's "Hello" is sometimes stuck in my head.
  10. My toothache hurts (when I have a toothache).

# Kinds of Knowledge

- Knowing a person and knowing a fact
  - Conocer vs saber
  - put aside the former
- Knowledge-How vs Knowledge-That
  - KH
    - Riding a bicycle
    - Making an omelet
  - KT
    - The square root of 25 is 5.
    - Albany is the capital of New York.
- Descartes is focused on knowledge-that.
  - propositional knowledge
- Big question: Is all KH just complicated KT?

# Knowledge and Belief

- Knowledge-that appears to be related to belief.
  - Relation between people and propositions
- Not all beliefs are knowledge.
- People did believe that the sun revolved around the Earth.

# Knowledge and Belief



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

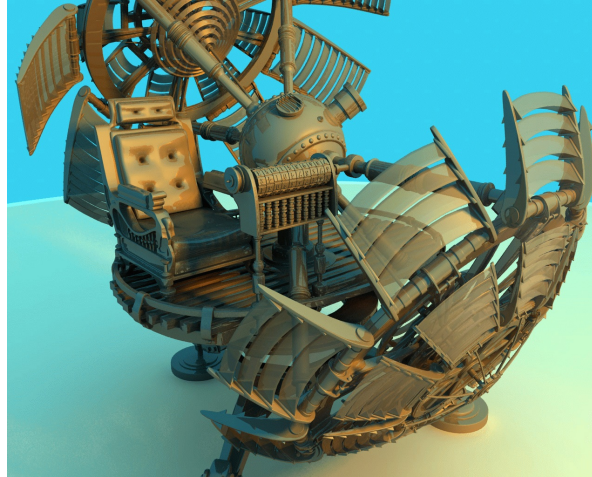


“I *believe* that the sun revolves around the earth.”

# Knowledge and Belief



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



“I *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?

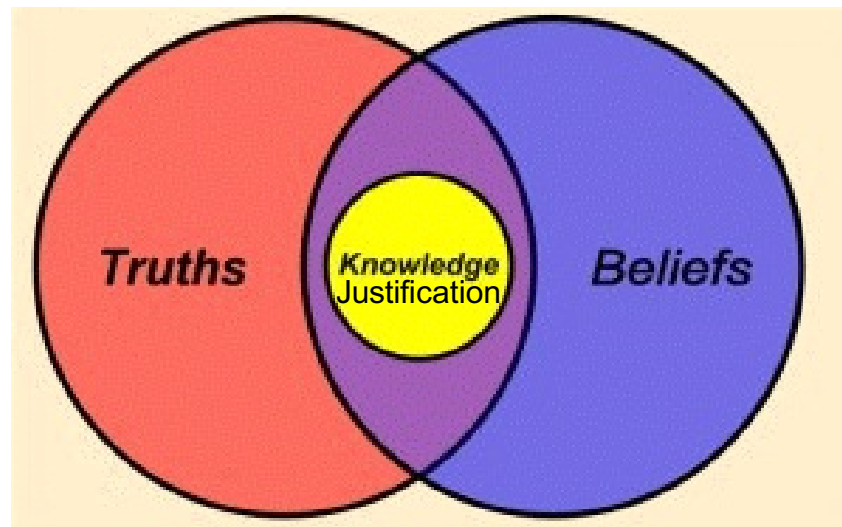
- Knowledge appears not to be just true belief.
- Let's say that you believe that I am flipping a double-headed coin.
- Really, it's just a regular coin.
- You believe that it will come up heads.
- It comes up heads.
- But, you didn't *know* that it would.
- Other cases:
  - ▶ Feeling as if you will win the lottery
  - ▶ Horoscopes
  - ▶ Bad math





# 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.
- Note, also, that some of the claims we think of as knowledge might not pass Descartes's test.
- Descartes is looking for a **firm** foundation.

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# The Method of Doubt

# Descartes's Rules

From *Discourse on Method*

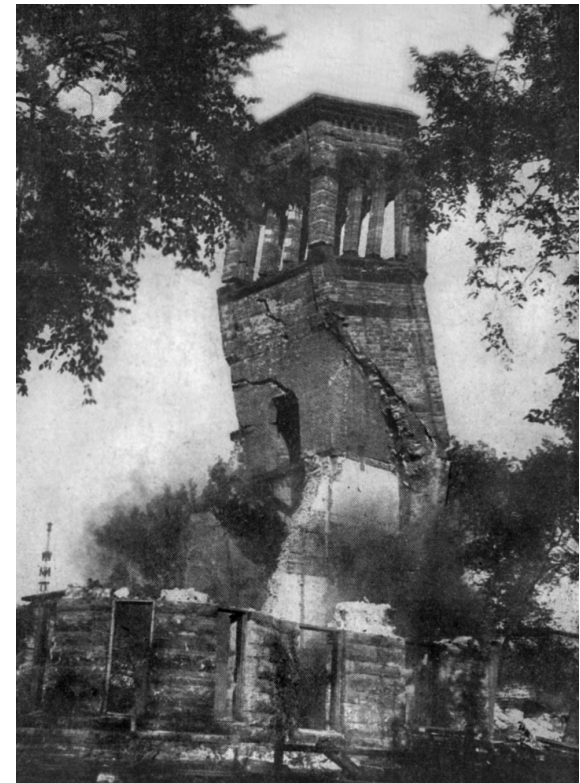


- R1. Never to accept anything as true that I did not plainly know to be such;
- R2. Divide each difficulty into as many parts as possible;
- R3. Conduct my thoughts in an orderly fashion, commencing with the simplest and ascending to the most composite; and
- R4. Everywhere to make complete enumerations (AW 31).
  - No deference to authority

# 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.



# Three Doubts

## Illusion, Dreams, 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?





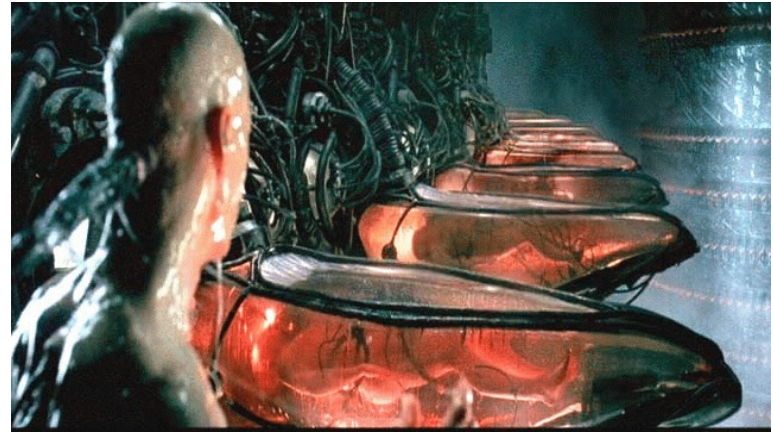
# Team Activity

## The Dream Doubt

In the First Meditation, Descartes claims that we do not know whether we are awake or sleeping.

- “How often does my evening slumber persuade me of such ordinary things as these: that I am here, clothed in my dressing gown, seated next to the fireplace—when in fact I am lying undressed in bed! But right now my eyes are certainly wide awake when I gaze upon this sheet of paper. This head which I am shaking is not heavy with sleep. I extend this hand consciously and deliberately, and I feel it. Such things would not be so distinct for someone who is asleep. As if I did not recall having been deceived on other occasions even by similar thoughts in my dreams! As I consider these matters more carefully, I see so plainly that there are no definitive signs by which to distinguish being awake from being asleep. As a result, I am becoming quite dizzy, and this dizziness nearly convinces me that I am asleep” (AW 41b).
- On your own, write down a number from 1–5 to indicate how well Descartes has convinced you that you do not know whether you are awake or sleeping.
  - 1: “I am certain that I am awake right now”
  - 5: “I have no idea whether I am awake or sleeping,”
- Now, come up with a group score.

# The Deceiver



- What if there were a powerful deceiver who could 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.