



Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

Week 2: Descartes 1

Takaharu Oda, PhD (odat@tcd.ie)

Southern University of Science and Technology
SS149 (社会科学中心), Spring 2024

Early Modern Western Philosophy (17th-18th Centuries)

近代西方哲学（十七-十八世纪）



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Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

1 Weekly Quiz

2 Overview and Review

3 Descartes

4 Meditation 1

- Argument from Sceptical Hypothesis

5 Meditation 2

- The *Cogito* Argument
- The Wax Argument

6 Meditation 3

- Argument for the Existence of God

7 Assignments for the Next Lecture



Weekly Quiz

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

1 Weekly Quiz

2 Overview and Review

3 Descartes

4 Meditation 1

■ Argument from Sceptical Hypothesis

5 Meditation 2

■ The *Cogito* Argument

■ The Wax Argument

6 Meditation 3

■ Argument for the Existence of God

7 Assignments for the Next Lecture



A Quiz from the Last Week

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Quiz 1: (P1) All Φ s are Ψ ; (P2) \aleph is a Φ ; therefore, \aleph is Ψ . What is this rule of inference called?

- 1 Existential Generalisation
- 2 Modus Tollens
- 3 Universal Instantiation
- 4 Modus Ponens

This is not related to your final grade, but intended to observe your understanding of the last class.



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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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- 1 Existential Generalisation
- 2 Modus Tollens
- 3 **Universal Instantiation (Check the Socrates argument)**
- 4 Modus Ponens

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Overview and Review

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

1 Weekly Quiz

2 Overview and Review

3 Descartes

4 Meditation 1

- Argument from Sceptical Hypothesis

5 Meditation 2

- The *Cogito* Argument

- The Wax Argument

6 Meditation 3

- Argument for the Existence of God

7 Assignments for the Next Lecture



SS149 Course Objectives

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

Specifically, this course aims to help the students:

- 1 Understand knowledge of **philosophical and logical thinking** by reading and discussing the historical texts;
- 2 Develop comprehensive understanding of the study of philosophy and its history, deeply embedded in the Western intellectual culture in the **early modern to Enlightenment period** (i.e. 17–18th centuries);
- 3 Master **critical writing skills and logical analysis**, which apply practically to a variety of scientific researches and one's ordinary life. This captures one's capable learning and value of philosophy in the university life.

Logical analysis of arguments

- Judge a 'logical truth' (semantics), given a valid proof (syntax).
- Understand that a **sound** argument is a **valid** argument that has all 'true premisses'.



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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Upon completion of this course, students are expected to:

- 1 Read early modern philosophical texts in their historical context.
- 2 Describe some main differences between major philosophers and schools of early modern philosophy.
- 3 **Critically evaluate** philosophical arguments and theories found in early modern philosophical texts.

Three Steps

- 1 Understand the text. (What is the philosopher saying?)
- 2 Extract the **arguments**. (What reasons, i.e. **premisses**, is he/she giving us to believe the **conclusion**?)
- 3 Evaluate the **arguments**. (Are those reasons convincing?)

- The instructor's '**Argument Advice**' and references in it;
» **Evaluating arguments in three steps** (e.g. wax argument)



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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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A Great Companion: Jay Rosenberg's *Practice of Philosophy* (3rd ed. 1996; Chinese tr. 2018)

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Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

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Sceptical Hypothesis

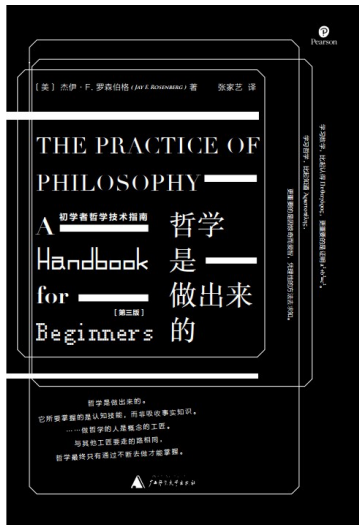
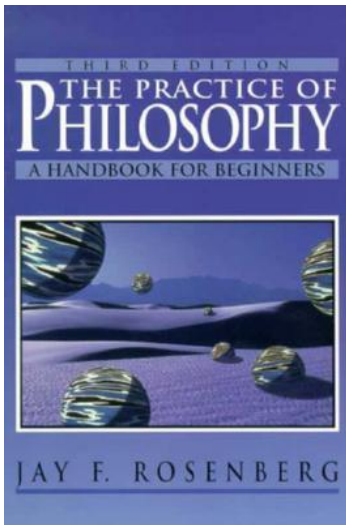
Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments





Descartes

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

1 Weekly Quiz

2 Overview and Review

3 Descartes

4 Meditation 1

■ Argument from Sceptical Hypothesis

5 Meditation 2

■ The *Cogito* Argument

■ The Wax Argument

6 Meditation 3

■ Argument for the Existence of God

7 Assignments for the Next Lecture



René Descartes (1596–1650)

Renatus Cartesius



'Descartes Is Not Our Father' (?)
(Christia Mercer, NY Times)

- **1606** – A new Jesuit college, La Flèche
- **1633** – Plans to publish *The World* abandoned after Galileo condemned.
- **1637** – *Discourse on Method*, including *Optics* and *Geometry*
- **1641** – *Meditations on First Philosophy*, with *Objections* and *Replies* (1647 in French)
- **1643** – The Protestant University of Utrecht, the Netherlands, bans the teaching of Cartesian philosophy.
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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

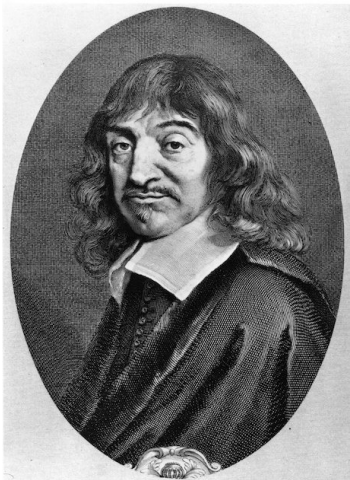
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Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

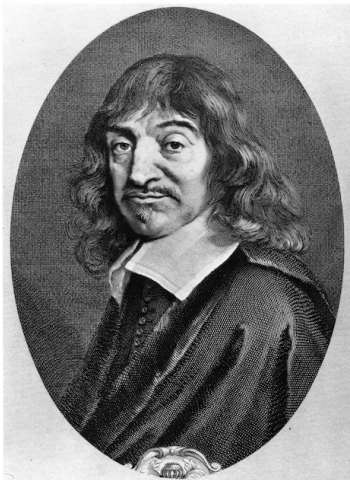
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Existence of God

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Descartes 1

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Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

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Cogito Argument
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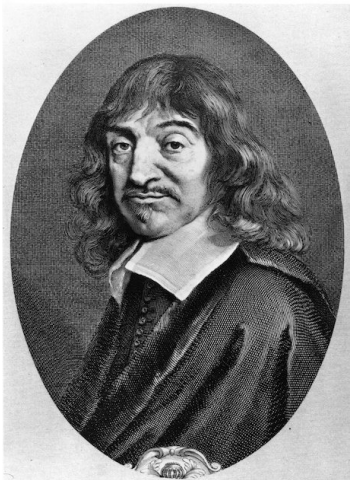
Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments



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Index of Prohibited Books
(Roman Catholic Church)

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments



Meditations on First Philosophy

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

1641 in Latin: *Meditationes de prima philosophia*

1647 in French: *Méditations métaphysiques*

Book Subtitle: *in which are demonstrated the **existence of God** and the **distinction between the human soul and the body***

As regards the soul, many people have considered that it is not easy to discover its nature, and some have even had the audacity to assert that, as far as human reasoning goes, there are persuasive grounds for holding that the soul dies along with the body and that the opposite view is based on faith alone. But in its eighth session the **Lateran Council** under Leo X [Pope, the head of the Catholic Church in 1513] condemned those who take this position and expressly commanded Christian philosophers to refute their arguments and use all their powers to establish the **truth**.

– Dedicatory Letter, CSM [i.e. first letters of the translators' names, *Philosophical Writings*] II [i.e. volume II] 4

M1 Subtitle

What can be called into doubt



Meditations on First Philosophy

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

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Meditation 1

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

1 Weekly Quiz

2 Overview and Review

3 Descartes

4 Meditation 1

- Argument from Sceptical Hypothesis

5 Meditation 2

- The *Cogito* Argument

- The Wax Argument

6 Meditation 3

- Argument for the Existence of God

7 Assignments for the Next Lecture



Meditation 1: The Method of Doubt

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

Some years ago I was struck by **the large number of falsehoods that I had accepted as true in my childhood**, and by the highly doubtful nature of the whole edifice that I had subsequently based on them. I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last. [...] But to accomplish this, it will not be necessary for me to show that all my opinions are **false, which is something I could perhaps never manage. Reason** now leads me to think that I should hold back my assent from opinions [...]. So, for the purpose of rejecting all my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt.

– First Meditation, CSM II 12



Meditation 1: The Method of Doubt

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Rationalist by means of 'reason' (?)

– First Meditation, CSM II 12



Doubting the Senses

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

Although the usefulness of such extensive doubt is not apparent at first sight, its greatest benefit lies in freeing us from all preconceived opinions, and providing the easiest route by which **the mind may be led away from the senses.**

– Synopsis, CSM II 9.

Rationalist without recourse to 'sense' (?)

Whatever I have up till now accepted as most true I have acquired either from the senses or through the senses. But from time to time I have found that **the senses deceive**, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once.

– First Meditation, CSM II 12



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Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
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Descartes's Sceptical Scenarios

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

- 1 Argument from Illusion – doubting the senses (ordinary errors)
- 2 Argument from Dreaming – doubting all sensory beliefs
- 3 Evil Demon Argument – doubting remaining beliefs (mathematical/logical)

[...] I have found that **the senses deceive**, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once.

– First Meditation, CSM II 12



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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

- ② Argument from Dreaming – doubting all sensory beliefs
- ③ Evil Demon Argument – doubting remaining beliefs (mathematical/logical)

Big Question – Can you know that you are awake right now?

How often, asleep at night, am I convinced of just such familiar events – that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire – when in fact I am lying undressed in bed! [...] Suppose then that **I am dreaming**, and that these particulars – that my eyes are open, that I am moving my head and stretching out my hands – are not true. Perhaps, indeed, I do not even have such hands or such a body at all.

– First Meditation, CSM II 13



Descartes's Sceptical Scenarios

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

③ Evil Demon Argument – doubting remaining beliefs (mathematical/logical)

What is more, since I sometimes believe that others go astray in cases where they think they have the most perfect knowledge, may I not similarly **go wrong every time I add two and three or count the sides of a square**, or in some even simpler matter, if that is imaginable? But perhaps God would not have allowed me to be deceived in this way [...]. I will suppose therefore that **not God, who is supremely good and the source of truth, but rather some malicious demon** of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me.

– First Meditation, CSM II 14–15



Descartes's Sceptical Scenarios

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

- ① Argument from Illusion – doubting the senses (ordinary errors)
- ② Argument from Dreaming – doubting all sensory beliefs
- ③ Evil Demon Argument – doubting remaining beliefs (mathematical/logical)

Argument from sceptical hypothesis

- ① I cannot be certain I am not in scenario S .
 - ② If I cannot be certain I am not in S , then I cannot be certain of ***any proposition that would not be true if I were in S .***
 - ③ **If I were in S , it would not be true that the things I perceive by my senses exist.**
- C Therefore, I cannot be certain that the things I perceive by my senses exist. [by modus ponens and ***universal*** instantiation]



Descartes and Augustine

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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So in future I must withhold my assent from these former beliefs just as carefully as I would from obvious falsehoods, if **I want to discover any certainty**.

– First Meditation, CSM II 15

[O]ur distinguished author has laid down as the basis for his entire philosophy exactly the same principle as that laid down by St Augustine – a man of the sharpest intellect and a remarkable thinker, not only on theological topics but also on philosophical ones.

– Antoine Arnauld, Fourth Objections to the *Meditations*, in CSM II 139

I shall not waste time here by thanking my distinguished critic for bringing in the authority of St Augustine to support me.

– Descartes, Fourth Replies, CSM II 154



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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

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Existence of God

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Meditation 2

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

1 Weekly Quiz

2 Overview and Review

3 Descartes

4 Meditation 1

■ Argument from Sceptical Hypothesis

5 Meditation 2

■ The *Cogito* Argument

■ The Wax Argument

6 Meditation 3

■ Argument for the Existence of God

7 Assignments for the Next Lecture



Meditation 2: In Search of Certain Knowledge

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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M2 Subtitle

*The nature of the human **mind**, and how it is better known than the **body***

Three big achievements:

- ① The existence of the mind
- ② The essence of the mind
- ③ The essence of body (note, this does not establish its existence until much later)



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Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
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What Cannot be Doubted

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Anything which admits of the slightest doubt I will set aside just as if I had found it to be wholly false; and I will proceed in this way until I recognize something certain, or, if nothing else, until I at least recognize for certain that there is no certainty. Archimedes used to demand just one firm and immovable point in order to shift the entire earth; so I too can hope for great things if I manage to find just one thing, however slight, that is certain and unshakeable.

– *Second Meditation*, CSM II 16



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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

Yet apart from everything I have just listed, how do I know that there is not something else which does not allow even the slightest occasion for doubt? Is there not a God, or whatever I may call him, who puts into me the thoughts I am now having? But why do I think this, since I myself may perhaps be the author of these thoughts? In that case am not I, at least, something? But I have just said that I have no senses and no body. This is the sticking point: what follows from this? Am I not so bound up with a body and with senses that I cannot exist without them? But I have convinced myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Does it now follow that I too do not exist? No: if I convinced myself of something then I certainly existed. But there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that case I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me; and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something.

– Second Meditation, CSM II 16–17.



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Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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The *Cogito*

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.

– Second Meditation, CSM II 17

I noticed that while I was trying thus to think everything false, it was necessary that I, who was thinking this, was something. And observing that this truth '*I am thinking, therefore I exist*' was so firm and sure that all the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics were incapable of shaking it, I decided that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking.

– *Discourse on Method*, Part 4, CSM I 31



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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

Syllogism

- ① I am thinking. [Minor (particular) premise]
- ② Whatever thinks exists. [Major (general/universal) premise]
- C **Therefore**, I exist.

And when we become aware that we are thinking things, this is a primary notion which is not derived by means of any syllogism. When someone says 'I am thinking, therefore I am, or I exist', he does not deduce existence from thought by means of a syllogism, but recognizes it as something self-evident by a simple intuition of the mind. This is clear from the fact that if he were deducing it by means of a syllogism, he would have to have had previous knowledge of the major premiss 'Everything which thinks is, or exists'; yet in fact he learns it from experiencing in his own case that it is impossible that he should think without existing.

– Second Replies, CSM II 100



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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

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The *Cogito* Argument

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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The *Cogito* Argument

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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The *Cogito* Argument

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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The *Cogito* Argument

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

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The *Cogito* Argument

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Evaluating Arguments in Three Steps

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

Step 1: Identify conclusion and audience, *then* the explicit premisses.

Step 2: Make sure the argument is **valid**.

- ⚠ A valid argument is one whose premisses guarantee the conclusion, or where *if* the premisses are true then the conclusion *must* be true.
- ⚠ It is often necessary to paraphrase.
- ⚠ Any argument can be made valid by adding additional premisses. If all else fails, you can always write 'if [the other premisses] then [the conclusion]'.

Step 3: Is the argument sound and convincing? Should the audience accept *all* of the premisses?

– The lecturer's 'Argument Advice'



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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

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Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

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Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

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Existence of God

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Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

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♣ Any argument can be made valid by adding additional premisses. If all else fails, you can always write 'if [the other premisses] then [the conclusion]'.

Step 3: Is the argument sound and convincing? Should the audience accept *all* of the premisses?

– The lecturer's 'Argument Advice'



Evaluating Arguments in Three Steps

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

Step 1: Identify conclusion and audience, *then* the explicit premisses.

Step 2: Make sure the argument is **valid**.

♣ A valid argument is one whose premisses guarantee the conclusion, or where *if* the premisses are true then the conclusion *must* be true.

♣ It is often necessary to paraphrase.

♣ Any argument can be made valid by adding additional premisses. If all else fails, you can always write 'if [the other premisses] then [the conclusion]'.

Step 3: Is the argument sound and convincing? Should the audience accept *all* of the premisses?

– The lecturer's 'Argument Advice'



Meditation 2

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

Let us take, for example, this piece of wax. It has just been taken from the honeycomb; it has not yet quite lost the taste of the honey; it retains some of the scent of the flowers from which it was gathered; its colour, shape and size are plain to see; it is hard, cold and can be handled without difficulty; if you rap it with your knuckle it makes a sound. In short, it has everything which appears necessary to enable a body to be known as distinctly as possible. But even as I speak, I put the wax by the fire, and look: the residual taste is eliminated, the smell goes away, the colour changes, the shape is lost, the size increases; it becomes liquid and hot; you can hardly touch it, and if you strike it, it no longer makes a sound. But does the same wax remain? It must be admitted that it does; no one denies it, no one thinks otherwise. [...]

– Second Meditation, CSM II 20



The Wax Argument

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

[...] So what was it in the wax that I understood with such distinctness? Evidently none of the features which I arrived at by means of the senses; for whatever came under taste, smell, sight, touch or hearing has now altered – yet the wax remains. [...] I must therefore admit that the nature of this piece of wax is in no way revealed by my imagination, but is *conceived* by the mind alone [*mon entendement seul qui le conçoit*].

– Second Meditation, CSM II 20–21; AT IX 24 (clar. added)

Evaluation

1. Conclusion? Audience?
2. Valid?
3. Sound and convincing?



The Wax Argument

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Evaluation

- 1 Conclusion? Audience? Explicit premisses?
- 2 Valid?
- 3 Sound and convincing?



The Wax Argument

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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[...] So what was it in the wax that I understood with such distinctness? Evidently none of the features which I arrived at by means of the senses; for whatever came under taste, smell, sight, touch or hearing has now altered – yet the wax remains. [...] I must **therefore** admit that **the nature of this piece of wax is in no way revealed by my imagination, but is conceived by the mind alone [*mon entendement seul qui le conçoit*]**.

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The Wax Argument

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Evaluation

- 1 Conclusion? Audience? **Explicit premisses?**
- 2 Valid?
- 3 Sound and convincing?



The Wax Argument

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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The Wax Argument

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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- ① Everything revealed by sense/imagination changed.
- ② The wax itself did not change. [It is still the same piece of wax.]
- C Therefore, the wax itself is not revealed by sense/imagination.
[Universal Instantiation]

Evaluation

- ① Conclusion? Audience? Explicit premises?
- ② Valid?
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The Wax Argument

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

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Existence of God

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- ① Conclusion? Audience? Explicit premises?
- ② **Valid?**
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The Wax Argument

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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The Wax Argument

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Is the Wax Argument Sound and Convincing?

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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 - 2 The wax itself did not change. [It is still the same piece of wax.]
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Things that Changed



Revealed by Sense/Imagination

The Wax Itself



Is the Wax Argument Sound and Convincing?

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

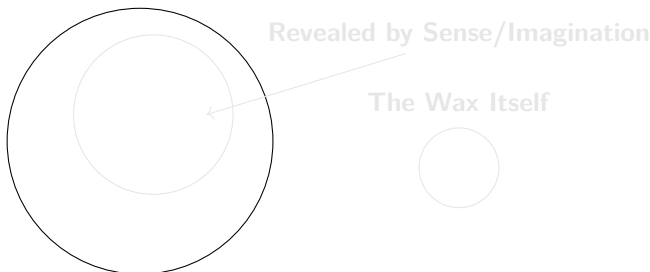
Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

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Things that Changed





Is the Wax Argument Sound and Convincing?

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

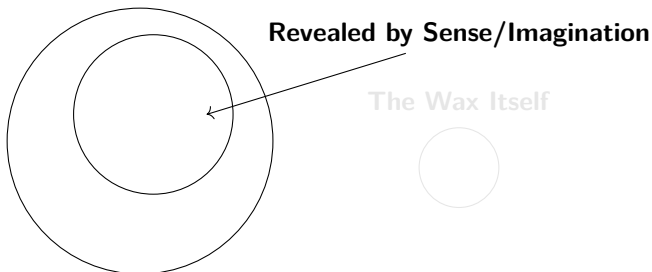
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Things that Changed





Is the Wax Argument Sound and Convincing?

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

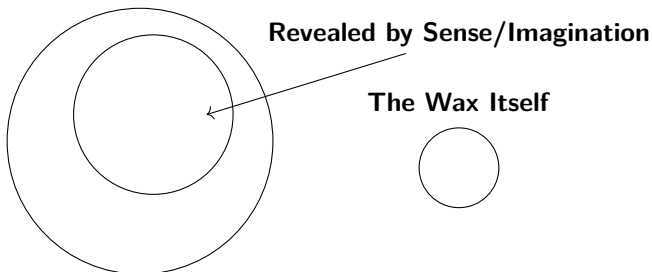
Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

The wax argument

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Things that Changed





Is the Wax Argument Sound and Convincing?

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

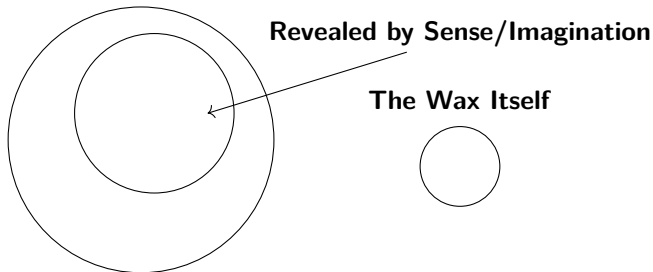
Argument for the
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Things that Changed





The Wax Argument

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

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[Universal Instantiation]

Evaluation

- ① Conclusion? Audience? Explicit premises?
- ② Valid?
- ③ Sound and convincing?



Meditation 3

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

1 Weekly Quiz

2 Overview and Review

3 Descartes

4 Meditation 1

- Argument from Sceptical Hypothesis

5 Meditation 2

- The *Cogito* Argument

- The Wax Argument

6 Meditation 3

- Argument for the Existence of God

7 Assignments for the Next Lecture



Meditation 3: Proof 1 for the Existence of God

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

Synopsis (CSM II 10)

In the Third Meditation I have explained quite fully enough, I think, my principal **argument for proving the existence of God**. But in order to draw my readers' minds away from the senses as far as possible, I was not willing to use any comparison taken from bodily things.

M3 Subtitle

The existence of God

- See the 'Dedicatory Letter' for Descartes's thinking on the importance of his proofs of God's existence (CSM II 3–6).
- God plays an important role in Descartes' epistemology: more on this next week (and in Meditation 4).
- There are a lot of well-known proofs of God in the history of philosophy: cosmological arguments, teleological arguments, ontological arguments, etc.
- The *Meditations* contains two proofs (in M3 and M5).



Meditation 3: Proof 1 for the Existence of God

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

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'Idea' in the History of Philosophy

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

- 'Idea' is one of Plato's two Greek names for the **Forms**.
- Augustine, Aquinas, and many other medieval philosophers said that these ideas existed in the mind of God as **patterns or archetypes of things**.
- Descartes's ideas are (human) *thoughts*, i.e. **representations existing in our minds**.



'Idea' in the History of Philosophy

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Formal and Objective Reality

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

Some necessary concepts

Degrees of Reality Reality is not simply a matter of existing or not. For Descartes, it comes in degrees.

Formal Reality ('FR') The amount of reality that something has on the basis of what it is (i.e. on what form it has).

Objective Reality ('OR') When one thing represents another, the *objective* reality of the representation is defined as the amount of *formal* reality that is **possessed by the object that it represents**.

Definition: OR of an idea (representation) = FR of its object



Formal and Objective Reality

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Note: 'Object' ('*objectum*') is Latin for a target (like for archery).
'Formal' has to do with Aristotle's formal cause, which makes each thing the kind of thing it is.



Formal and Objective Reality

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Definition: OR of an idea (representation) = FR of its object

Example: My idea of Sniff (Moomin 姆明 character) has the same amount of objective reality as Sniff himself has formal reality.

OR (my idea) = FR (Sniff himself)



Descartes's Argument for the Existence of God

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

In so far as the ideas are considered simply as modes of thought, there is no recognizable inequality among them. [...] But in so far as different ideas are considered as images which represent different things, it is clear that they differ widely. [...] Again, the idea that gives me my understanding of a supreme God, eternal, infinite, immutable, omniscient, omnipotent and the creator of all things that exist apart from him, certainly has in it more objective reality than the ideas that represent finite substances.

– Third Meditation, CSM II 27–28

Argument

① I have an idea with infinite objective reality [e.g. God].

② Every idea must have a cause with at least as much formal reality as the objective reality of the idea.

Therefore a cause with infinite formal reality [i.e. God] exists.



Descartes's Argument for the Existence of God

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
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According to Descartes, every substance has a principal attribute ('thought' or 'extension') and all of its features are 'modes' of (i.e. **ways of possessing**) that attribute

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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
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Formal Reality: The idea's own reality, as a mode of thought.

Argument

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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

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Argument for the
Existence of God

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Objective Reality: The reality that the idea attributes to its object

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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
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Premiss 2

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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[I]n order for a given idea to contain such and such objective reality, it must surely derive it from some cause which contains at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality in the idea. For [...] the mode of being by which a thing exists objectively or representatively in the intellect by way of an idea, imperfect though it may be, is certainly not nothing, and so it cannot come from nothing.

– Third Meditation, CSM II 28

Argument

- 1 I have an idea with infinite objective reality [e.g. God].
- 2 Every idea must have a cause with at least as much formal reality as the objective reality of the idea.
- C Therefore, a cause with infinite formal reality [i.e. God] exists.



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Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

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Latin Slogan 1: *Nemo dat quod non habet* (Nothing can give to another what it does not have itself)

Argument

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Premiss 2

Week 2:
Descartes 1

odat@tcd.ie

Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

[I]n order for a given idea to contain such and such objective reality, it must surely derive it from some cause which contains at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality in the idea. For [...] the mode of being by which a thing exists objectively or representatively in the intellect by way of an idea, imperfect though it may be, is certainly **not nothing, and so it cannot come from nothing.**

– Third Meditation, CSM II 28

Latin Slogan 2: *Ex nihilo nihil fit* (Nothing comes from nothing)

Argument

- 1 I have an idea with infinite objective reality [e.g. God].
- 2 Every idea must have a cause with at least as much formal reality as the objective reality of the idea.

C Therefore, a cause with infinite formal reality [i.e. God] exists.



Conclusion

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

By the word 'God' I understand a substance that is infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, and which created both myself and everything else (if anything else there be) that exists. All these attributes are such that, the more carefully I concentrate on them, the less possible it seems that they could have originated from me alone. So from what has been said it must be concluded that God necessarily exists.

– Third Meditation, CSM II 31

Argument for the existence of God

- 1 I have an idea with infinite objective reality [e.g. God].
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Argument for the existence of God

- ① I have an idea with infinite objective reality [e.g. God].
- ② Every idea must have a cause with at least as much formal reality as the objective reality of the idea.
- C Therefore, a cause with infinite **formal** reality [i.e. God] exists.



In Defence of Premiss 2

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument
Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

Argument for the existence of God

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- ② Every idea must have a cause with at least as much formal reality as the objective reality of the idea.
- C Therefore, a cause with infinite formal reality [i.e. God] exists.

Mechanistic explanation

In the Replies this is illustrated by the comparison of a very perfect machine, the idea of which is in the mind of some engineer. Just as **the objective intricacy belonging to the idea must have some cause, namely the scientific knowledge of the engineer**, or of someone else who passed the idea on to him, so the idea of God which is in us must have God himself as its cause.

– Synopsis, CSM II 10; see also First Replies, CSM II 75



In Defence of Premiss 2

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

Argument for the existence of God

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- ② Every idea must have a cause with at least as much formal reality as the objective reality of the idea.
- C Therefore, a cause with infinite formal reality [i.e. God] exists.

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– Synopsis, CSM II 10; see also First Replies, CSM II 75



Assignments for the Next Lecture

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

1 Weekly Quiz

2 Overview and Review

3 Descartes

4 Meditation 1

- Argument from Sceptical Hypothesis

5 Meditation 2

- The *Cogito* Argument

- The Wax Argument

6 Meditation 3

- Argument for the Existence of God

7 Assignments for the Next Lecture



Next Week 3: Descartes 2

Week 2:
Descartes 1

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Weekly Quiz

Overview

Descartes

Meditation 1

Argument from
Sceptical Hypothesis

Meditation 2

Cogito Argument

Wax Argument

Meditation 3

Argument for the
Existence of God

Assignments

- Be aware of the office hours of the instructor (myself) and TAs. Mine are Mondays 2-4pm (Centre for Social Sciences, C111) or appointment by email: odat@mail.sustech.edu.cn
- **Blackboard** (SS149, Spring 2024) contains all the basic info and recommended references.
- Join the **WeCom/企业微信** group for this course's updates.



Assignment 1: *Re-read* the 'Argument Advice' and discuss what you still do not understand with TAs first (then with me).



Assignment 2: Read Descartes's *Meditations*, MM4–6 (CSM II 37–62); Objections and Replies (*optional*, II 63ff). Secondary: Sarkar, *Descartes's Cogito*, 'The Five Ways' (2003, 148ff), etc.