

Philosophy 300

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Quiz — True or False?

(if false, explain why)

- 1. Descartes believes that the possibility of veridical dreams undermines our faith in our senses.
- 2. Descartes believes that the possibility of veridical dreams undermines our faith in reason.
- 3. Descartes finds it easy to control his will so that it won't assent to falsehoods.
- 4. Whenever Descartes entertains the possibility that he is being deceived, this counts as further evidence that he is thinking.
- 5. It is best to interpret Descartes as giving an argument to the effect that: Premise I - he is thinking; Conclusion - therefore, he exists.
- 6. The point of the piece of wax example is to prove conclusively that both God and the Wax exists independently of Descartes.
- 7. Descartes believes that he knows the wax best by means of the senses.

Let's review:

- Apply the wax example to a new case (some item of food, or your chair). Go through the steps, and see what results you get.
- Bonus: see if you can reproduce the reasoning which concludes that we are not able to tell whether we are dreaming or not.

Meditation 3

If you were going to attempt to prove the existence of God, using only your senses, how would you do it?

- Meditation 3 begins by taking stock of what Descartes knows, and what he thinks he knows.
- At this point, he is certain that he is a thinking thing. And he has certain knowledge of what his thinking consists in.

- Now, Descartes takes stock of things he thinks he knows.
- Does he have certain knowledge of physical things yet? Why?
- What about mathematical knowledge?

- Descartes realizes that **any ground of doubt for mathematical knowledge depends on the idea that there is a God who put some kind of imperfection into him.**
- So the next task is to investigate whether God exists, and what God's nature is like.

Descartes' strategy is
to inventory his ideas,
and see where they
came from.

Where did he get his idea of the sun?

- From the senses?
- From astronomical reasoning?



The overall argument in Meditation 3

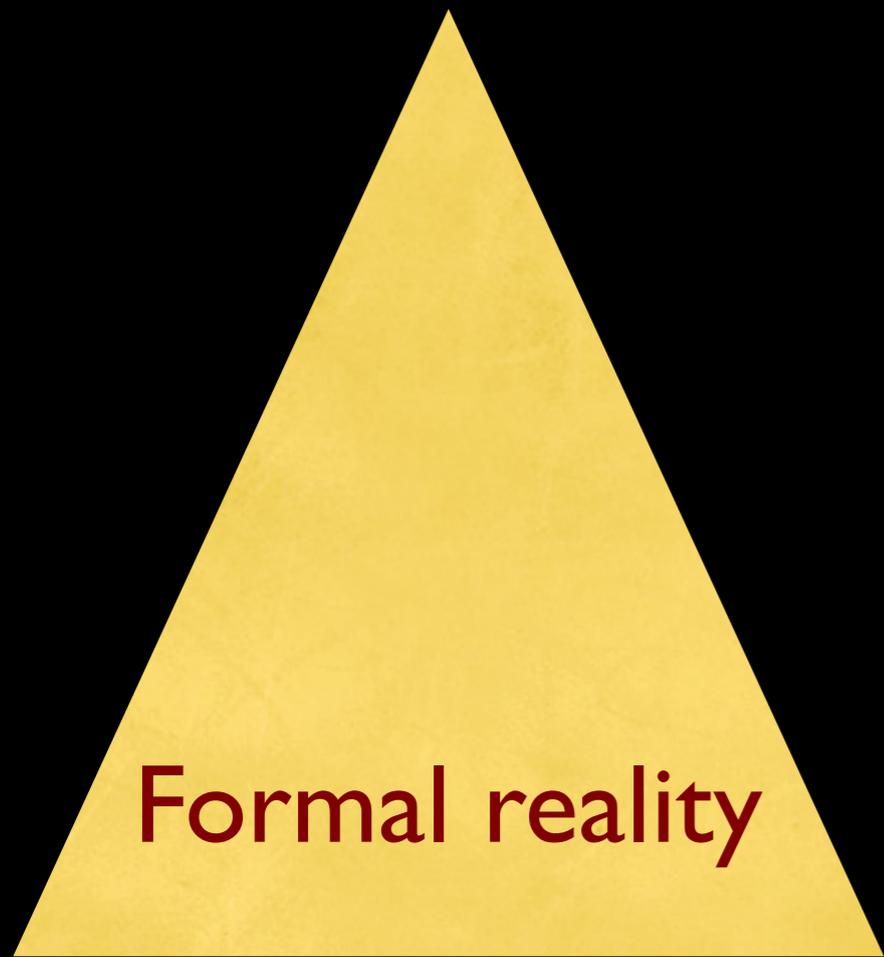
- 1) Something cannot come from nothing
- 2) CP (things): there must be at least as much reality in the cause as in the effect
- 3) CP (ideas): there must be at least as much reality in the cause of my idea, insofar as my idea represents it as being real.
- 4) I have the idea of God.
- 5) The idea could not have arisen from myself, others, the senses, or the evil genius.
- Therefore, God is the cause of the idea.
- Therefore, God necessarily exists.

- “Now it is indeed evident by the light of nature that there must be at least as much reality in the efficient and total cause as there is in the effect of that same cause.... Hence it follows that something cannot come into being out of nothing, and also that what is more perfect (that is, what contains in itself more reality) cannot come into being from what is less perfect.”

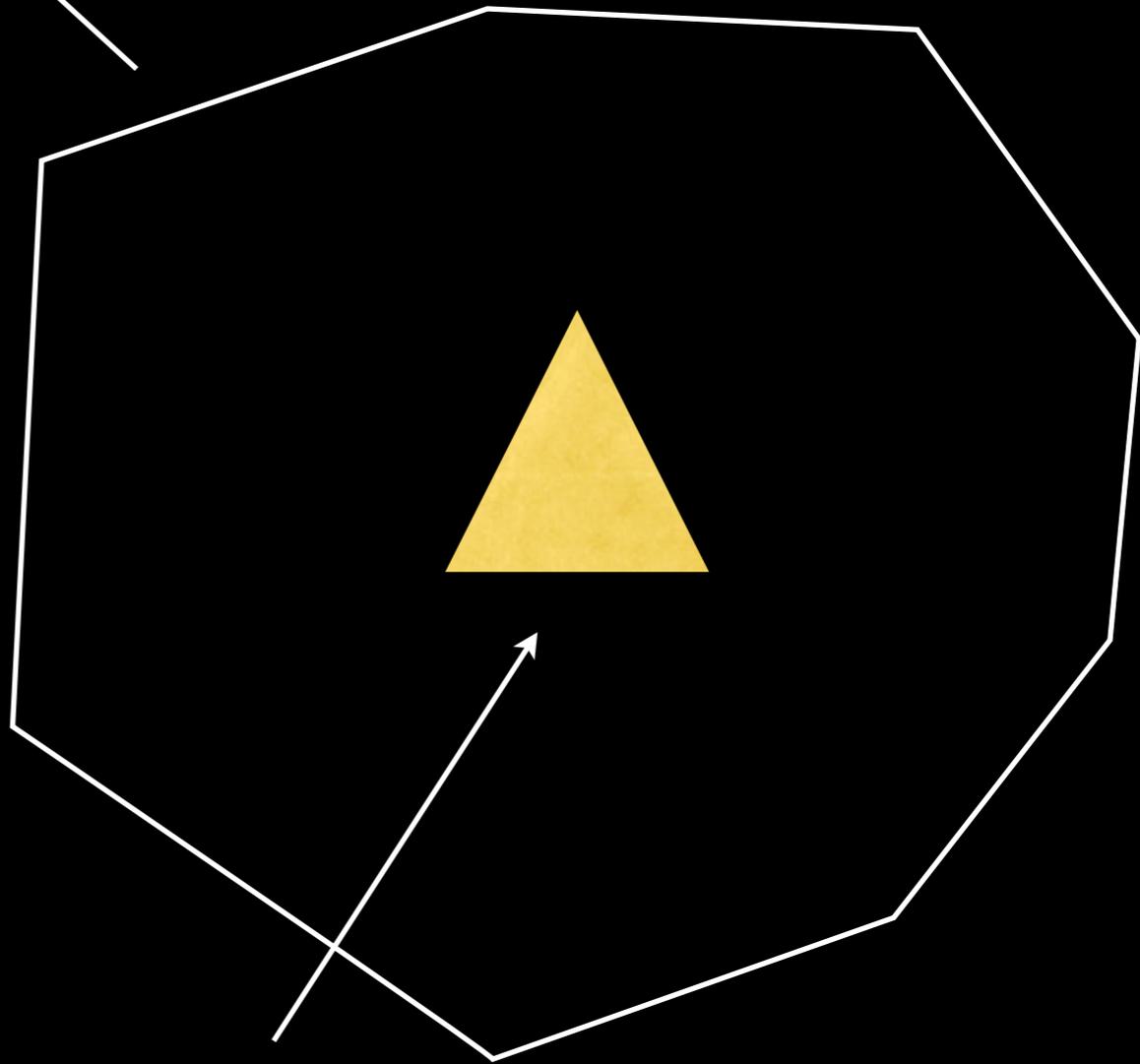


“... nor heat be introduced into a subject which was not already hot unless it is done by something that is of at least as perfect an order as heat...”

- ...“but it is also true that there can be in me no idea of heat, or of a stone, unless it is placed in me by some cause that has at least as much reality as I conceive to be in the heat or in the stone.”



My mind



Represented reality

- This basic strategy is applied to Descartes' idea of God.
- However, recall that Descartes needs to eliminate any possibility of doubt. (In other words, he needs to rule out the possibility that his idea of God came from some other source than God.)

- The next step in the strategy, then, is to go through an extensive process of elimination.
- The key question is this: where did Descartes get his idea of God from?

- “I understand by the name “God” a certain substance that is infinite, independent, supremely intelligent and supremely powerful, and that created me along with everything else that exists — if anything else exists.
- ...“Indeed all these are such that, the more carefully I focus my attention on them, the less possible it seems that they could have arisen from myself alone. Thus, from what has been said, I must conclude that God necessarily exists.”

- “For although the idea of substance is in me by virtue of the fact that I am a substance, that fact is not sufficient to explain my having the idea of an infinite substance, since I am finite, unless this idea proceeded from substance that really was infinite.”

- “But perhaps I am something greater than I myself understand...”
- After all, Descartes says, his understanding keeps improving all the time.
- Why does this allow him to rule himself out as the source of the idea?

- Descartes also rules out that the source of the idea is his parents.
- Why?

- “All that remains is for me to ask how I received this idea of God. For I did not draw it from the senses; it never came upon me unexpectedly, as is usually the case with the ideas of sensible things when these things present themselves (or seem to present themselves) to the external sense organs. Nor was it made by me, for I plainly can neither subtract anything from it nor add anything to it. Thus the only option remaining is that this idea is innate in me, just as the idea of myself is innate in me.”



To be sure, it is not astonishing that in creating me, God should have endowed me with this idea, so that it would be like the mark of the craftsman impressed upon his work, even though this mark need not be something distinct from the work itself

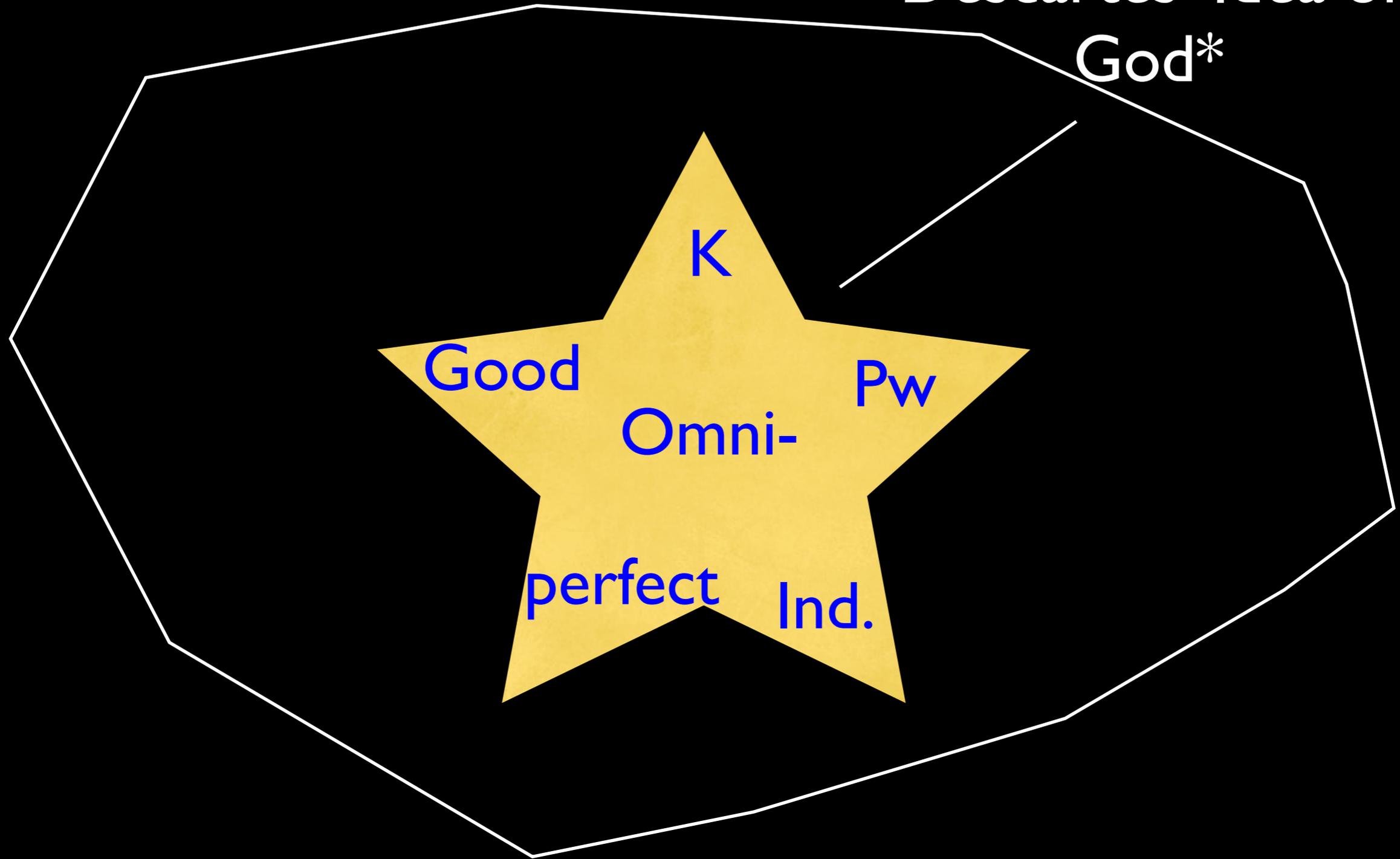
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Are you convinced?

- Do you agree with Descartes' conclusion?
- Is this a sound strategy for proving that God exists?
- If you think the argument took a wrong turn somewhere, what exactly is the problem?

Descartes' Idea of God*



*When clearly and distinctly perceived

Plato and the idea of the perfect square

- On this point, both Descartes and Plato agree.
- If you have the idea, it must have come from somewhere. The idea must have a cause.
- To put it another way: something cannot come into being from nothing.

According to Plato,
How do we acquire
knowledge?

Do you acquire knowledge
from the senses?

Have you ever seen a
perfect square?

Plato's argument goes something like this...

- Do you have the idea of a perfect square?
Yes.
- Where did the idea come from? Have you ever seen one? I'm not sure.
- All of the squares we see around us are imperfect. Yes, you're right.

Plato's argument (cont.)

- Nevertheless, you possess the idea of a perfect square, do you not? *Yes.*
- And that idea must have gotten into your mind somehow. *Yes, that seems to be so.*
- But it did not get into your mind by means of the senses. *Not at all.*
- Therefore, the idea of the perfect square came from another source.