

Essay Guideline: The Cartesian Circle

Essay Topic: Present, explain, and evaluate Descartes's argument for god's existence.

Before beginning this essay, be sure to read the relevant parts of the Descartes chapter in the textbook (i.e., the section on the 3rd Meditation).

Outline:

- I. Explain why Descartes needs to prove god's existence
 1. He is arguing against skepticism; he wants to show that we know most of what we ordinarily think we know.
 2. He began with the indubitability criterion of truth, but this leads to the egocentric predicament. (explain the criterion and the predicament)
 3. To move forward with his case against skepticism, he must change his criterion of truth. He decides to use the clearness and distinctness criterion.
 4. Before he can use this new criterion of truth, he must show that it is reliable. Descartes needs to prove god's existence in order to show that god would not let us be deceived about clear and distinct ideas (i.e., in order to show that clear and distinct ideas must be true).
- II. Present and explain Descartes's argument for god's existence.
 1. Begin by explaining the scale of reality and the causal principle.
 2. Present the argument, explaining each step.
 3. Make clear how god's existence is used to prove the reliability of the clearness and distinctness criterion of truth.
- III. Evaluate the argument
 1. Explain what a circular argument is.
 2. Show why Descartes's argument for god's existence is circular.