

Philosophy Paper 101: History of Philosophy from Descartes to Kant

2. *The Cartesian Circle*

“I cannot but admit that it would be easy for [God], if he so desired, to bring it about that I go wrong even in those matters which I think I see utterly clearly with my mind’s eye.” (*Third Meditation*, CSM p. 25). How does Descartes seek to allay this reason for doubt, and is his attempt damagingly circular?

READING

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy (with Selections from the Objections and Replies)*, translated and edited by John Cottingham, Cambridge University Press, 1986 (revised edition 1996), *Third Meditation* (especially pp. 24-5), *Fifth Meditation* (especially pp. 47-9), and relevant *Objections and Replies* (pp. 102-6).

Gary Hatfield, *Descartes and the Meditations* (Routledge, 2003), pp. 141-9, 169-81, 223-34 (or, if you are not planning to work through Hatfield’s book and would prefer an independent article on the topic, Hatfield also has a recent paper “The Cartesian Circle” in Stephen Gaukroger (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Descartes* (Blackwell, 2006), pp.122-41.)

John Cottingham, *Descartes* (Blackwell, 1986), pp. 64-73.

Louis Loeb, “The Cartesian Circle”, in John Cottingham (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 200-35.

Samuel C. Rickless, “The Cartesian Fallacy Fallacy”, *Nous* 39:2 (2005), pp. 309-36 (available online).

Janet Broughton, *Descartes’s Method of Doubt* (Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 97-107, 146-8, 162-70, 175-86

Lex Newman and Alan Nelson, “Circumventing Cartesian Circles”, *Nous* 33:3 (1999), pp. 370-404 (available online), especially pp. 386-96.

E. M. Curley, *Descartes Against the Skeptics* (Blackwell, 1978), chapter 5

If time permits, another perspective on the issue, linking it with Descartes’ doctrine of the creation of the eternal truths, is given by: Margaret Dauber Wilson, Descartes (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 120-36.