

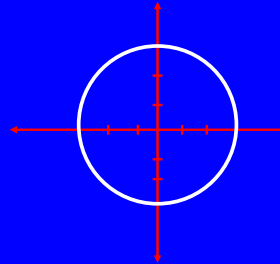
Descartes' "Meditations"

Rene Descartes
(1596-1650)

French
Philosopher &
Mathematician



Descartes



Circle

Cartesian
coordinate
system

$$x^2 + y^2 = 9$$

"Reduce" geometry to algebra.

Meditations on First Philosophy 1641

- Impressed by *method* of science & math.
- Disgusted by philosophy.
- Seek a solid foundation for beliefs:
- Philosophy needs a *method*.
- What can I know with *absolute certainty*?

Meditations

- Personal endeavor: search for certainty
- Like personal search for God

St. Ignatius of Loyola
(1491-1556)
"Spiritual Exercises"
(1551)



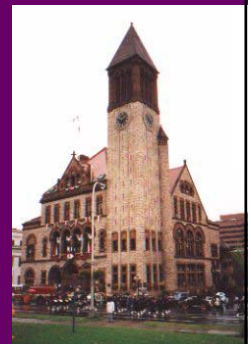
Meditations

- Envisioned the whole process while sitting by a fire in November, 1619.



Meditations

- "The general demolition of my opinions."
- Radical doubt: withhold assent from any of his beliefs that *can* be doubted.
- Architectural metaphor.



Four Methods of Doubt

- My senses can mislead me.



Four Methods of Doubt

- My senses can mislead me.
- I might be crazy.

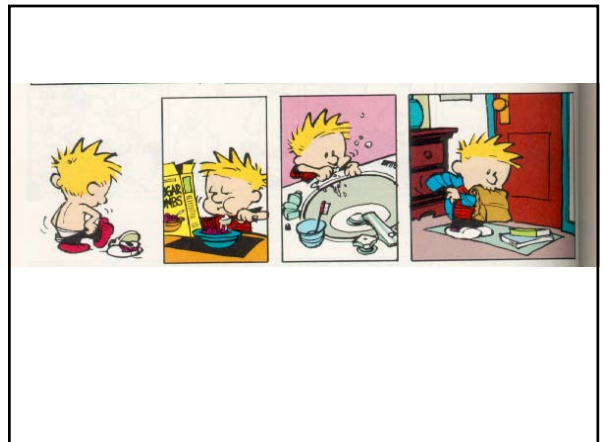
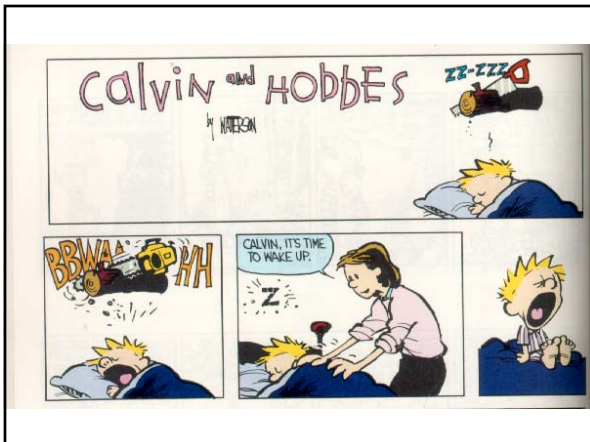


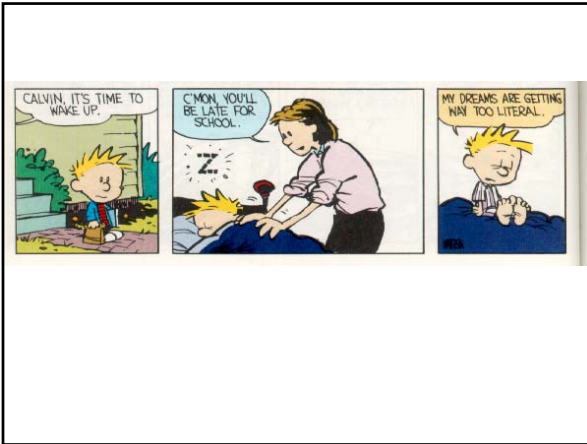
Shakespeare, *MacBeth V, v:*

“Life...is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

Four Methods of Doubt


- My senses can mislead me.
- I might be crazy.
- I might be dreaming.





Four Methods of Doubt

- My senses can mislead me.
- I might be crazy.
- I might be dreaming.
- An evil genius might be fooling me.



“The Matrix”



Demolishing my Beliefs



Is anything left standing?



Reading for next class:

- **Descartes' Second Meditation**