Example of a Bad Essay

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Prompt: Present and explain External World Skepticism. Present, explain and evaluate the Argument from Sensory Error.

External world skepticism is the view that you can’t really be certain about the external world (or even if there is such a thing) – you can only be certain the internal world, and the internal world is whatever is in your mind.

The argument from sensory error is the first skeptical argument that Descartes talks about. It goes like this:

1) My senses have deceived me in the past.
2) If my senses have deceived me in the past, then they could be deceiving me now.
3) If my senses could be deceiving me now, then I can’t know anything about the external world.
4) I can’t know anything about the external world.

This is a valid argument. The idea is that our senses have deceived all of us in the past, so we can’t be sure that they aren’t deceiving us now. And if we can’t be certain they’re not deceiving us now, then we don’t know anything about the external world.

However, Descartes says that, even if my senses have deceived me in the past, that was always when I was in “non-optimal” conditions. So, I could still place confidence in them now, provided that I’m in optimal conditions this time.