

Central Problems in Philosophy: Paper One

Requirements

You are to submit one 6–8 page research paper on Tuesday 15 March, addressing one and only one of the questions listed below. A printed copy of the paper must be submitted in class.

Guidelines

Essay guidelines are available here: <http://goo.gl/jrx25>

Questions

- In *Meditation One*, Descartes writes: “I have noticed that the senses are sometimes deceptive; and it is a mark of prudence never to place our complete trust in those who have deceived us even once.” (Descartes [1641] 2006, p. 10). This passage suggests an argument for the conclusion that we cannot be certain of any belief formed on the basis of the senses. Formulate this argument, and explain and evaluate Stroud’s reasons for rejecting it (Stroud 1984, pp. 10–11).
- Explain and evaluate the argument for scepticism about the external world that Stroud (1984) attributes to (Descartes [1641] 2006), addressing at least one of the following questions:
 - Explain and evaluate Stroud’s argument for the claim that dreaming that something is the case is incompatible with knowing that it is the case.
 - Stroud considers three proposals for a “simple and obvious fact about knowledge” which entails that to know anything about the external world, you must know that you are not dreaming. Explain and evaluate at least one of these proposals.

- Both Descartes, in *Meditation One* (Descartes [1641] 2006), and Vasubandhu, in *Viṃśatikākārikā* and *Viṃśatikāvr̥tti* (Anacker 2005; Kochumutto 1982), appeal to the possibility of dreaming to support some of their arguments. Explain the similarities and differences between these arguments, addressing at least one of the following questions:
 - How do the conclusions of the arguments differ?
 - Do Descartes and Vasubandhu both require the claim that every type of experience might be had in a dream? Why, or why not?
 - According to Siderits (2007, Chapter 8), one of the most important objections considered by Vasubandhu involves the claim that certain patterns in our experience are best explained by the existence of mind-independent objects. Explain and evaluate this objection, and consider how it might also be used to reply to the argument in Descartes.

References

- Stefan Anacker. 2005. *Seven Works of Vasubandhu: The Buddhist Psychological Doctor*, edited by Stefan Anacker. Revised. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- René Descartes. [1641] 2006. *Meditations, Objections and Replies*, edited by Roger Ariew and Donald Cress. Translated by Roger Ariew and Donald Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Thomas A. Kochumutto. 1982. *A Buddhist Doctrine of Experience: A New Translation and Interpretation of the Works of Vasubandhu, the Yogācārin*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Mark Siderits. 2007. *Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Ernest Sosa et al. 2008. *Epistemology: An Anthology*, edited by Ernest Sosa et al. 2nd edition. Malden MA: Blackwell.
- Barry Stroud. 1984. “The Problem of the External World”, in *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 1–38. Reprinted in Sosa et al. (2008, pp. 7–25).