

What is Philosophy: First Paper

- Due: Wednesday 17 March, 5pm Shanghai time.
- Late penalty: One grade point per day.
- Length: 6-8 pages (1500-2000 words).
- Submission: PDF attachment to brad.weslake@nyu.edu
- Address one and only one of the following questions:
 - In *Meditation One*, Descartes writes: “But from time to time I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once” ([Descartes \[1641\] 1996, 12](#)). 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, 10–11](#)).
 - Explain and evaluate the argument for scepticism about the external world that [Stroud \(1984\)](#) attributes to [Descartes \(\[1641\] 1996\)](#), 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 \[1641\] 1996](#)), and Vasubandhu, in *Viṃśatikākārikā and Viṃśatikāvṛtti* ([Anacker 2005](#)), 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?
 - 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

Anacker, Stefan. 2005. *Seven Works of Vasubandhu: The Buddhist Psychological Doctor*. Edited by Stefan Anacker. Revised. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Descartes, René. [1641] 1996. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stroud, Barry. 1984. "The Problem of the External World." In *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, 1–38. Oxford: Oxford University Press.