

Philosophy 93

First Paper Assignment

Instructions

Due in class Tues., Feb. 7.

Please choose *one* of the following arguments from Descartes' *First* or *Second Meditations* and, in approximately 2–3 pages (double spaced), do the following: (1) briefly explain in your own words what the argument is supposed to prove and how; (2) bring up an apparently serious objection to the argument; (3) explain how Descartes would respond to the objection. (Needless to say this should be your own original work.)

Note: to do this well you need to come up with an objection that is serious *and* think of a good way for Descartes to respond to it. The worse you can make things look for Descartes—as long as you can still get him out of it in the end!—the better your paper.

Also note: in order to explain the argument properly, you may well need to refer to the context it occurs in, not just the exact text I have quoted below. Still, your ultimate objective is to explain *just that part*. (I.e., don't start with a detailed summary of everything up to that point—you don't have room for that!)

Please write the number of the argument you have chosen at the beginning of your paper (you don't need to quote it).

1. "Some years ago I was struck by the large number of falsehoods that I had accepted as true in my childhood, and by the highly doubtful nature of the whole edifice that I had subsequently based on them. I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last." (AT 17, p. 76)

2. "Reason leads me to think that I should hold back my assent from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable just as carefully as I do from those which are patently false. So, for the purpose of rejecting all my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt." (AT 18, p. 76)

3. “But such people are insane, and I would be thought equally made if I took anything from them as a model for myself. A brilliant piece of reasoning! As if I were not a man who sleeps at night, and regularly has all the same experiences while asleep as madmen do when awake—indeed sometimes even more improbable ones.” (AT 19, p. 77)
4. “But perhaps God would not have wished me to be deceived in this way, since he is said to be supremely good. But if it were inconsistent with his goodness to have created me such that I am deceived all the time, it would seem equally foreign to his goodness to allow me to be deceived even occasionally; yet this last assertion cannot be made [in French: “yet I cannot doubt that he does allow this”]” (AT 21, p. 78)
5. “But I have convinced myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Does it now follow that I too do not exist? No: if I convinced myself of something then I certainly existed.” (AT 25, p. 80)
6. “But there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that case I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me; and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something.” (AT 25, p. 80)
7. “I am, I exist—that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. For it could be that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally cease to exist. At present I am not admitting anything except what is necessarily true. I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks.” (AT 27, p. 82)
8. “But what then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions.” (AT 28, p. 83)
9. “For example, I am now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. But I am asleep, so all this is false. Yet I certainly *seem* to see, to hear, and to be warmed. This cannot be false; what is called ‘having a sensory perception’ is strictly just this, and in this restricted sense of the term it is simply thinking.” (AT 29, p. 83)