

February 6, 2002

CENTRAL PROBLEMS IN PHILOSOPHY

FIRST PAPER

Is it possible that all your experiences are deceptive, and that they are being produced not by a world much as it appears to you to be, but in some completely different way? If it is not possible, why not? If it is possible, do you have to show that it is false in order to justifiably continue believing what your senses tell you about the world?

Write a four-page, double-spaced paper on this topic. You may refer to Descartes, but you don't have to. The paper should be an attempt to reflect on the problem yourself. Don't just say what you think, but try to argue for the position you take, and against alternatives. You should have as few quotations in the paper as possible – preferably none – and anything quoted or derived from another writer should be fully cited to its original place of publication.

There is an excellent set of recommendations called “Guidelines on writing a philosophy paper” at the following web location:

<http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~jpryor/general/writing.html>

You should look at it if you haven't written many philosophy papers before.

The paper is due in class on Wednesday, February 20. Please write only your ID number on the paper, to permit blind grading. Late papers should be put in Professor Nagel's mailbox at the philosophy department, 503 Main, and the time of receipt should if possible be entered by someone on the office staff.