

## First Paper

**Due:** Friday, October 2, by noon

Papers should be submitted by email attachment to [keith.derose@yale.edu](mailto:keith.derose@yale.edu)

Soon after I receive them, I will check that I can access the file you sent, and send a reply, just verifying that I received your paper.

**Length:** Papers should be 1,750-2,500 words long (about 5-7 pages)

**Subject matter:** Papers must directly, substantially, and critically engage with one or more of the assigned readings for our course on issues we have discussed (by the time of your writing) in class. Our main reading so far has been Descartes's Meditations, and every paper should discuss that work. You may also discuss our secondary readings, and my paper on the Cartesian Circle may be especially useful, and some may find it easier to write about Descartes if they have someone else's writing to work off of—either to oppose my reading, or advance it. You may also discuss the positions of those whose writings I refer to in my paper. For the purpose of this short paper, it is fine to just use my presentation of these other writings as your source on them—though it is also fine to look up those papers, which should be available on-line through the Yale library. It is also fine for the Meditations themselves to be the only writing you discuss and refer to.

**Successful papers will** clearly explain the issues involved and the key argumentative moves made in the readings, and will also advance the discussion/argument in significant ways with new considerations or lines of argument of your own. It is usually a good idea to state what your main conclusion will be in your opening paragraph.

**Possible Topic: The Cartesian Circle:** Explain the problem of the Cartesian Circle, and then present and defend what you think is the best solution to that problem (or, I suppose, defend a claim to the effect that there is no good solution to it). This is the most likely topic for a paper,

since those who want some writings other than Descartes himself to discuss have only this at this point in our course.

***Possible Topic: Descartes's Proof of Bodies:*** Explain how Descartes argues in Meditation Six from the existence of God to the existence of "corporeal things." (Don't explain how Descartes proves the existence of God: We are granting Descartes that, at least for the sake of argument, in this question. Just suppose Descartes has proved the existence of God, and explain how the argument goes from there.) Then explain what seems to you to be the most important potential objection to that argument and evaluate the argument in light of that objection. (Again, since we're granting the Descartes his proof of God, don't object to that proof.) Does the argument succeed (supposing that God's existence has been proved)? Explain and defend your answer.

***Other Topics:*** If there is something in the Meditations that you read or that we have discussed in class that falls outside of the two topics explained above but that you want to address in your paper, you can send me a brief (it could be just a few sentences) paper proposal (Please label your email's subject: "Phil. 263: Proposal for first paper") by Sept. 25, saying what topic you want to write on, and I will let you know ASAP whether that topic is approved. Those writing on the one of the two topics explained above need not submit proposals.

For some good advice on writing philosophy papers, I recommend Jim Pryor's "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper," at:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

It will be important to keep in mind how short these papers are. I suspect some of you will be surprised, when you start writing, of how much space it takes to explain and make your basic points, especially if this is your first philosophy paper. This may affect how much of outline it is wise to make, if you follow Pryor's advice on making one of those. Those who plan on making several key points may find that they have to make cuts and get selective on what to include.