

Philosophy 1000, Fall 2008
Reading Questions: KNOWLEDGE & MIND

All reading questions (assignments) must be typed, 1-2 pages maximum, double-sided is okay, and be turned in during the class scheduled for that reading. See online schedule for details.

Unger: An Argument for Skepticism (and Pollock: A Brain in a Vat)

1. What is skepticism, according to Unger? What is his argument for skepticism?
2. In your own words, provide a brief explanation of Unger's defense of each premise in his argument.
3. Why is certainty connected with claims to knowledge? That is, why think that knowledge requires certainty?
4. Can you provide an argument for why you are NOT simply a brain in a vat (as Pollock's story suggests)?

Descartes (Meditations I and II)

1. What is Descartes goal in the Meditations and how does he propose to attain this goal?
2. Why does Descartes discard the senses, mathematics and God as reliable sources of knowledge? Can you prove you are not dreaming right now?
3. What purpose does the "malicious demon" serve in his argument?
4. What is it that Descartes is certain of and what is the nature of this thing?
5. Briefly describe the episode where Descartes talks about wax. What conclusion does he draw from this example?

Hume: An Inquiry (Sections II and IV)

1. What is the difference between "ideas" and "impressions"? According to Hume, what is the source/origin of our ideas?
2. How does Hume explain the origin of the idea of God? What is the distinction between "relations of ideas" and "matters of fact"?
3. How does Hume explain the idea of causation? What is the problem associated with this idea (i.e., the problem of induction)?
4. What is Hume's proposed solution to this problem? Do you agree with the solution?

Kitcher: Believing Where We Cannot Prove

1. Why is it important to recognize the fallibility of science?
2. What is the popular picture of science that predictive success encourages?
3. Why is "naive falsificationism" hopelessly flawed? What is the more refined picture that Kitcher develops?
4. What are the three characteristics of a successful science and how does creationism match up?
5. Does Kitcher's account of science provide a solution to the challenge of skepticism?
Explain.

Russell and Descartes (Two pdfs)

1. What is Russell's argument by analogy for other minds? How this is suppose to lead to the conclusion that others have minds.
2. Evaluate Russell's argument. Is it a good or bad argument? What are its strengths and weaknesses? (Use the criteria of a good argument and/or what we discussed about arguments by analogy; see Logic handout.)
3. Explain how you might apply this argument to the question about the existence of minds in non-human animals (e.g., chimpanzees, dogs, dolphins, birds, snakes, etc.).
4. Descartes provides at least two reasons AGAINST the idea that non-human animals have minds. Briefly explain these reasons/arguments.
5. Do you agree or disagree with Descartes? Explain.

Searle: Animal Minds

1. Why does Searle reject the Cartesian arguments that conclude animals don't have minds?
2. What is intentionality? Why is it important for understanding minds, according to Searle?
3. What is Searle's general argument for thinking that non-human animals have minds? (Try to put it in Standard Form). Are you persuaded by Searle's argument? Explain.

Lycan: Robots and Minds

1. According to Lycan what is intelligence and in what way is a computer "information sensitive"?
2. Do you think Harry is conscious? What about Harrietta?
3. How does Lycan answer the objection that robots only do what they are programmed to do? Do you think his answer is adequate?
4. How does Lycan answer the objection that robots have no qualitative experience? Do you agree with Lycan?

Searle: Minds, Brains, and Programs

1. What is the difference between weak AI and strong AI? What two claims do defenders of strong AI make?
2. What is the Chinese room? How does the Chinese room address the two claims of strong AI?
3. Why does Searle think the systems reply is wrong?
4. Does Searle believe that man-made machines could be made to think? Do you agree? Explain.
5. (Recommended: How would Searle reply to Lycan's claims regarding "information sensitivity"?)