

Central Problems in Philosophy: Paper One

Requirements

You are to submit one 6–8 page research paper on Tuesday 17 March, addressing one and only one of the questions listed below. A printed copy of the paper must be submitted in class.

Guidelines

Essay guidelines are available here: <http://goo.gl/jrx25>

Questions

- In *Meditation One*, Descartes writes: “I have noticed that the senses are sometimes deceptive; and it is a mark of prudence never to place our complete trust in those who have deceived us even once.” (Descartes [1641] 2006, p. 10). 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, pp. 10–11).
- Explain and evaluate the argument for scepticism about the external world that Stroud (1984) attributes to (Descartes [1641] 2006), 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 these proposals.

- Explain and evaluate the argument against scepticism about the external world presented by Vogel (1990), addressing at least one of the following questions:
 - Explain and evaluate Vogel’s claim that the *real-world hypothesis* provides a better explanation of our experiences than the hypothesis that our experiences were caused by a demon.
 - Explain why Vogel claims that there are reasons to reject the hypothesis that our experiences were caused by a demon that are not reasons to reject the *computer-sceptical hypothesis*.
 - Explain and evaluate Vogel’s claim that the *real-world hypothesis* provides a better explanation of our experiences than the *computer-sceptical hypothesis*.
- Explain and evaluate the argument presented by Chalmers ([2003] 2005) that the *matrix hypothesis* is not a sceptical hypothesis.
- Explain and evaluate the argument for the existence of God given by Anselm ([1077] 2011), according to the interpretation provided by Conee (2005).
- Explain and evaluate the “First Cause Argument” for the existence of God given by Aquinas ([1274] 2006), according to the interpretation provided by Conee (2005).
- Explain and evaluate the likelihood version of the organismic design argument as presented by Sober (2003), addressing the following questions:
 - What is the Likelihood Principle, and what role does it play in the argument?
 - What is Sober’s objection to the claim that the design hypothesis has a higher likelihood than the mindless chance process hypothesis, given the observation that the vertebrate eye has the features it does?
- Explain and evaluate the most important argument in Pascal ([1669] 2004), according to the interpretation provided by Hájek (2012), addressing at least one of the following questions:
 - Explain and evaluate the “many Gods” objection to the argument.
 - Explain and evaluate the objection that the argument is invalid, due to the possibility of mixed strategies.
 - Explain and evaluate the objection that we cannot adopt beliefs at will.

References

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- David Chalmers. [2003] 2005. “The Matrix as Metaphysics”, in *Philosophers Explore the Matrix*, edited by Christopher Grau, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 132–176.
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- William A. Dembski and Michael Ruse. 2004. *Debating Design: From Darwin to DNA*, edited by William A. Dembski and Michael Ruse. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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- Alan Hájek. 2012. “Pascal’s Wager”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Stanford University, Stanford. URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pascal-wager/>.
- William E. Mann. 2005. *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by William E. Mann. Malden MA: Blackwell.
- Blaise Pascal. [1669] 2004. *Pensées*, edited by Roger Ariew. Translated by Roger Ariew. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Elliott Sober. 2003. “The Design Argument”, in *God and Design: The Teleological Argument and Modern Science*, edited by Neil A. Manson, Routledge, London, pp. 25–53. Reprinted in Dembski and Ruse (2004, pp. 98–129) and Mann (2005, pp. 117–147).
- Barry Stroud. 1984. “The Problem of the External World”, in *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 1–38.
- Jonathan Vogel. 1990. “Cartesian Scepticism and Inference to the Best Explanation”, in *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 87, No. 11, Nov. 1990, pp. 658–666.