

PAPER TOPICS

Philosophy 3300
University of Utah
Fall 2002

1. According to Locke, Hume, and Russell, we have immediate perceptual awareness only of ideas, and only mediate (or indirect) perceptual awareness of objects in the world. This view is known as *indirect realism*. Write a paper in which you do each of the following things: (a) Explain how indirect realism might lead us to a radical skeptical conclusion. (Here, you should provide an argument for skepticism that is at least partly based on indirect realism.) (b) Explain how Locke, Hume, or Russell would respond to the skeptical argument you construct in (a). (You need to consider **only one** of those three writers. Please do not consider more than one.) (c) Do you think that the writer you talk about in (b) succeeds in responding to skepticism? Why, or why not?
2. Write a paper in which you do each of the following things: (a) Explain Michael Huemer's theory of memory knowledge, making sure not only to state the theory, but also to recapitulate his argument(s) for that theory. (b) Explain why you think that the theory is mistaken. (This might involve providing examples that highlight a defect in the theory, or you might provide some other reason to think that there are problems with the theory.) (c) Propose an *alternative* theory of memory knowledge, and provide an argument in favor of that alternative. (In this part of the paper, you can choose to argue in favor of a theory Huemer rejects (either the foundational theory or the preservationist theory), or you can propose a theory of your own.
3. On pages 452-453 of "A Causal Theory of Knowing", Alvin Goldman describes two lava cases: a case in which a subject S *does* know, on the basis of seeing solidified lava in a certain area, that a certain nearby mountain erupted long ago; and a case in which a subject S does *not* know, despite seeing solidified lava in a certain area, that a certain nearby mountain erupted long ago. The two subjects have the same evidence, but one has knowledge while the other doesn't. Write a paper in which you do each of the following things: (a) Briefly describe the two lava cases, emphasizing any relevant similarities and any relevant differences. (b) Briefly explain why, according to Goldman's causal theory, S knows in one case but fails to know in the other. (c) Determine whether Keith DeRose's theory, as it's presented in "Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions", can explain why S knows in one lava case but fails to know in the other. If you think DeRose's theory *can* account for this difference, explain how it can. If you think DeRose's theory *cannot* account for the difference between the two lava cases, explain why it can't.
4. Write a paper in which you do each of the following things: (a) As clearly and as succinctly as you can, state Descartes' argument for radical skepticism. (Note: This is harder than it sounds!) (b) Explain why you think the argument is mistaken. (This might involve demonstrating that the argument is invalid, or showing that one of the argument's premises is false. Remember, too, that there are lots of strategies for showing that a

premise is false. You might, for instance, provide examples that show the premise to be false, or you might have some other reason to think that there are problems with the premise.) (c) Having argued that Descartes' argument fails, explain how it is that we *can* know things about the world. (In providing this explanation, it will help to keep in mind reasonable objections that might count against your explanation. In fact, you might in your paper discuss and respond to a few of these objections.)

5. Imagine that you're Neo. Morpheus and Trinity find you, and they tell you that you are in the Matrix. They also claim to be able to help you get to the real world. Write a paper in which you answer each of the following questions: (a) When Morpheus and Trinity first approach you, do you know that you are in the Matrix? If so, *how* do you know, and how could we modify the movie situation so that you don't know? If, on the other hand, you *don't* know that you're in the Matrix, *why* don't you know, and is it nevertheless rational for you to believe that you are now in the Matrix? (b) When you wake up after swallowing the pill, do you know that you are now in the real world? If so, *how* do you know, and how could we modify the movie situation so that you don't know? If, on the other hand, you *don't* know that you're in the real world, *why* don't you know, and is it nevertheless rational for you to believe that you are now in the real world? Give strong reasons in support of each of your responses. (Here again, in providing reasons for your responses, it will help to keep in mind reasonable objections that might count against your claims. In fact, you might in your paper discuss and respond to a few of these objections.)
6. Write a paper on a topic of your own choosing. If you choose this option, you *must* present a paper proposal to me, either verbally or in writing, by noon on Monday, October 7th. An acceptable topic will directly engage one or more of the assigned readings, though you must be sure not to let your paper degenerate into a book report. Make sure that you focus on the issues, and that you consider those issues from different perspectives. Ultimately, however, you should provide a solid argument in favor of one of those perspectives.