

Final Paper Prompt

Persons, Minds, and Bodies, fall 2017

Due: in class on December 6th

In approximately 1,500 words, address one of the following prompts. Your goal should be developing your own original contribution to the debate, rather than merely summarizing what other philosophers have said. If you do not understand the arguments of all the relevant readings, it's going to show. But that said, your goal is not to summarize every single point, or check off all the boxes. Instead, it is to develop the strongest case for your own view, and to address what you think are the strongest points on the other side. For example, a paper on topic (1) might argue that the desire account has a good reply to Marquis' objections, or instead that a pro-choice view of abortion needs to give up on the desire account in favor of a different view that avoids his objections, or instead that any pro-choice view of abortion will face similar objections, and so on. A paper on topic (2) might argue that the functionalist has available a single convincing reply to both Searle and Nida-Rümelin, or instead that there is a good reply to one of these authors, but it doesn't work for the other one, or instead that the strongest functionalist reply doesn't succeed because..., and so on.

(1) Arguing that fetuses have a right to life in virtue of possessing a future like ours, Don Marquis rejects an alternative 'desire account' of what confers a right to life. What is the account, and what are Marquis' objections to it? What is the broader significance of these objections for the question of what confers moral status, as discussed by Marquis, Mary Anne Warren, and Peter Singer? (For example, are Warren's and Singer's views subject to the objections? Why?) What is the best response to Marquis' objection available to the desire account, and does it succeed? Is there any way to modify or replace the desire account in an attempt to support a pro-choice view of abortion, which avoids Marquis' objections?

(2) What is functionalism, and what supervenience thesis are functionalists like David Armstrong committed to? Why? Martine Nida-Rümelin and John Searle present what they take to be counterexamples to functionalism. Explain how they are supposed to show that functionalism is false. What should a functionalist say in response to these alleged counterexamples? Are these replies successful?

(3) Rene Descartes and Frank Jackson present two versions of the Modal Argument for Dualism. How might the materialist appeal to the distinction between properties and concepts, discussed by Ned Block in connection to Jackson's Knowledge Argument, to object to the Modal Argument? What is the dualist's strongest reply to this objection, and is it successful?

(4) Princess Elizabeth raised the interaction problem for dualism, as discussed by Karen Bennett and Daniel Dennett. Many materialists take science to have discovered that physics is causally closed. Assuming for sake of argument that this is correct, is it possible for dualists to allow the mind and body to interact, as Descartes did? Can they plausibly accept epiphenomenalism, as Frank Jackson did? All things considered, what is the dualist's strongest reply to the interaction problem, and does it succeed?

(5) Some theories of personal identity, like the psychological continuity theory, allow for processes that have the potential for branching, like teleportation, to nevertheless preserve identity. The character Gretchen Weirob raises an objection to different views of this kind in the Second and Third Night's of John Perry's dialogue, which is originally due to the philosopher Derek Parfit. Explain the objection, and develop what you think is the strongest reply to it.