

Philosophical Perspectives: Second Paper Topics

7 February, 2006

Write a five page paper on one of the following topics. Papers are due by 1pm on Monday, 20 February. Good luck!

1. Can someone who is not certain that God exists be certain of anything? The Second Objector thought that Descartes was committed to saying both “yes” and “no” in answer to this question (see pp. 102-3). Explain the Second Objector’s point and why it seems to pose a problem for Descartes. Explain Descartes’s answer (see p. 103). How might the Second Objector reply? Who do you think is right?
2. At the end of the Third Meditation, Descartes concludes that he need not fear that God is a deceiver. How did Descartes think he had shown this? How might someone challenge his claim to have shown it? How might Descartes reply? What do you think: did Descartes prove that God is not a deceiver?
3. In the Fourth Meditation, Descartes contends that “in order to be free, there is no need for me to be capable of going in each of two directions” and that “the indifference I feel when there is no reason pushing me in one direction rather than another is the lowest grade of freedom” (AT 57-8, p. 40). What was Descartes trying to say? How might someone object to Descartes’s contentions about freedom? How might Descartes reply? What do you think: is Descartes right to say that we can be free to make up our minds or act even if there is only one conclusion or action we can choose?
4. Would it have been better if Hamlet had not learned how his father died? Why might someone think that? Why might someone else deny it? What do you think: is that a sensible conclusion to reach about the play?
5. In the nineteenth paragraph of section four, Hume claims that those who try to prove that “the future will be conformable to the past” with “probable arguments” “must evidently be going in a circle, and taking that for granted, which is the very point in question” (p. 115). What does it mean to try to prove this in that way? Why did Hume think those attempts must fail? How might someone reply to Hume? What would Hume say in response? What do you think: does experience give us no reason to believe that the future will resemble the past?