Second Paper Topics

Write a paper answering one of the sets of questions below. Your paper should be no longer than 1800 words which is about five or six pages. Please turn it in to my box in 208 Pearsons by 10 am on Thursday, November 19. Good luck!

1. Thomas Hobbes, one of Descartes's contemporaries, was not worried about the dream argument.

   > For my part, when I consider that in dreams I do not often, nor constantly, think of the same persons, places, objects, and actions, that I do waking, nor remember so long a train of coherent thoughts dreaming as at other times, and because waking I often observe the absurdity of dreams, but never dream of the absurdities of my waking thoughts, I am well satisfied that being awake I know I dream not, though when I dream, I think myself awake.[1]

   How does Descartes move from observations about dreaming to doubts about his beliefs? Why does Hobbes reach a different conclusion? How might Descartes reply to Hobbes? Which one has the better argument about the relationship between dreaming and our reasons for doubting what we believe on the basis of the senses?

2. Could we be deceived about anything, including what appear to be intuitively obvious statements of logic and mathematics such as a = a and 1 + 1 = 2? Explain why Descartes was drawn in two directions on this question. Which answer did Descartes need for his project of providing foundations for our knowledge? Which answer is the correct one?

[1] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), chapter 2, paragraph 5.

3. 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. 23). 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?

4. Hume claimed two things. First, we have no reason for making inductive inferences, that is, inferences about the future based on past observations. Second, we have no reason for believing reported miracles. Explain why these claims appear to be in tension with one another. How did Hume try to reconcile them? Did he succeed?

5. After Hume's "friend" has presented what he imagines Epicurus could have said, Hume raises an objection. When we see a construction site, we believe there are intelligent beings who started and will finish the job. How is that relevant to Epicurus's argument? What does Hume's "friend" say in response? What is the best defense of the objection against this response? What do you think? Has Hume's "friend" shown that we cannot draw inferences about God's providence and life after death based on our observations of the world or could those inferences make sense despite Epicurus' arguments?