

Second paper topics

Write a paper answering one of the sets of questions below. Your paper should be no longer than 1800 words or about five to six pages. Please upload an electronic copy to the dropbox on Sakai *and also* bring a paper copy to my box in 208 Pearsons by 11 am on Friday, November 15 (that is later than the due date in the syllabus). Good luck!

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

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 dreams to doubts about his beliefs? Why does Hobbes reach a different conclusion (pay special attention to the end of the quotation)? How might Descartes reply? 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. 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 with "probable arguments"? Why did Hume think those attempts must fail? Give what you regard as a compelling reply to Hume. What would Hume say

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

in response? What do you think: does experience give us no reason to believe that the future will resemble the past?

3. 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?
4. Near the end of the second part of the section on miracles, Hume contrasts two cases. In one, the sun is said to have failed to rise for eight days. In the other, Queen Elizabeth is said to have succeeded in rising from the dead. Hume believed these cases were clearly different in kind. Describe these cases and explain why Hume believed they were different. Give what you regard as a compelling argument for treating them as similar to one another. Explain how you resolve this disagreement: was Hume right to say that we should treat these cases differently or not?
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's arguments?