



## SUGGESTED ESSAY TOPICS

1. An important response to skepticism is what is known as the "G. E. Moore Shift". After reading section 5 of chapter II and section 2 of chapter III of Michael Huemer's *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, briefly summarize Michael Huemer's exposition and defense of the G. E. Moore Shift, and then discuss whether or not that response to skepticism is satisfactory.
2. In section 3 of chapter III of *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, Michael Huemer considers an objection advanced by Barry Stroud to G. E. Moore's argument against skepticism. Offer a clear and concise summary of Stroud's response to Moore, and then of Huemer's response to Stroud. Can Stroud's criticism of Moore be sustained, or is Huemer right in arguing that it is unsound?
3. A crucial distinction within epistemology is that between inferential knowledge (or inferentially justified beliefs), on the one hand, and non-inferential knowledge (or non-inferentially justified beliefs), on the other. But how is the crucial concept of inference to be analyzed? In chapter 9 of *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*, David Armstrong offers an analysis of the relevant concept of inference. Carefully set out Armstrong's account, and then discuss whether it is sound.
4. In chapter 9 of *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*, David Armstrong offers an analysis of the concept of non-inferential knowledge. After setting out a concise summary of his analysis, discuss Armstrong's defense of that account. Do you think that his analysis of the concept of non-inferential knowledge is sound or not?
5. In chapter 7 of *Perception and the Physical World*, David Armstrong offers an account of the nature of sensory illusion. After offering a clear and concise description of Armstrong's account, consider what objections might be directed against it. Do you think that his account of sensory illusion is sound or not?
6. In chapter 9 of *Perception and the Physical World*, David Armstrong develops an account of the nature of perception. Carefully set out Armstrong's account, and then discuss whether or not it is satisfactory, focusing upon one or two important objections to it.
7. In chapter 10 of *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*, David Armstrong defends the view that perception is, as a first approximation, basically just the acquiring of beliefs about the external world. After carefully setting out Armstrong's account of perception, indicate what objection or objections might be directed against it. Is the account tenable or not?
8. In section IV of chapter 11 of *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*, David Armstrong discusses a very important objection to the account of perception that he has offered. What the objection claims is that there can be differences in perceptions without differences in behavior, contrary to Armstrong's account. Offer a concise

summary of Armstrong's response to this objection, and then discuss whether he has successfully rebutted the objection.

9. In chapter 12 of *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*, David Armstrong offers his account of the nature of the secondary qualities, and then considers eleven objections that might be directed against it. After concisely outlining Armstrong's account of the secondary qualities, focus on two or three of the objections that Armstrong considers, and that strike you as among the strongest. Then discuss whether Armstrong's responses to those objections are satisfactory.

10. In section 1 of chapter IV of *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, Michael Huemer, in explaining the concept of awareness, introduces the idea of representational content. Then later, in section 4.1 of chapter IV, Huemer introduces the idea of qualia, and there he advances an important thesis, namely, that "qualia are something over and above representational content" (p. 67). He then sets out an argument for that thesis, which he summarizes on pages 69-70. What objections might be directed against that argument? Do you think that the argument is sound or not?

11. Near the beginning of section 4 of chapter IV of *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, Michael Huemer says that perceptual experiences typically have three aspects: (1) they involve qualia; (2) they have representational content; and (3) they are characterized by 'forcefulness'. In section 4.2, Huemer argues in defense of the view that perceptual experiences have representational content. After explaining what Huemer means by the claim that perceptual experiences have representational content, outline, and then critically evaluate, his defense of that thesis. Do you think that his defense is sound or not?

12. In chapter V of *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, Michael Huemer defends the view that one can have noninferential knowledge of physical states of affairs by appealing to a principle he calls "Phenomenal Conservatism", and which he sets out in section 3. Then, in section 4, he offers a defense of the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism. Offer a concise summary of his defense, and then discuss whether it is sound or not.

13. Michael Huemer's principle of Phenomenal Conservatism is an important answer to the question of what the criterion is for when a belief is non-inferentially justified. After offering a concise statement of that principle, set out and discuss one or two objections that might be directed against it. Is there a good objection to the principle, or is the principle sound?

14. In chapter VI of *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception* – "Objections to Direct Realism" – Michael Huemer considers eight objections to direct realism. Choose one that seems to you interesting and important, and then, after carefully setting out both the objection and Huemer's response, discuss whether you think that the objection is sound or not.

15. One of the most important objections to direct realism that Michael Huemer discusses in chapter VI of *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception* is objection 8, "The Illusoriness of Secondary Qualities". Set out Huemer's response to that objection, and critically evaluate it.

16. Critically evaluate the objection to indirect realism that Michael Huemer sets out in chapter VII of *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception* – "An Objection to Indirect Realism: The Problem of Spatial Properties". How do you think that an indirect realist should reply to this objection? Is the reply satisfactory?

17. Briefly set out, and then carefully evaluate, the answer to skepticism that Michael Huemer defends in chapter VIII of *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception* – "The Direct Realist's Answer to Skepticism". Is this response to skepticism satisfactory or not?

18. In chapter 4 of *Perception: A Representative Theory* – "The Case for Sense Data" – Frank Jackson offers an argument for the existence of sense data. After offering a clear and concise summary of Jackson's argument, discuss whether his argument is sound.

19. In chapter 5 of *Perception: A Representative Theory* – "Color and Science" – Frank Jackson offers a defense of the view that "colour is not a property of material things" (128). Carefully set out Jackson's argument in a step-by-step fashion, and then discuss whether it is sound.

20. Both in his *Principles of Human Knowledge*, and in his *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, Berkeley offers a variety of arguments against the view that there is a mind-independent, physical world. Among them is an argument that he sets out in the *Three Dialogues*, and in which he tries to show not just that we do not have any adequate reason for believing that there are physical objects that can exist outside of any relation to a mind, but that the very idea of a physical object that exists independently of all relations to any mind involves a contradiction. This argument is contained in the following passage:

PHILONOUS: But (to pass by all that has been hitherto said, and reckon it for nothing, if you will have it so) I am content to put the whole upon this issue. If you can conceive it possible for any mixture or combination of qualities, or any sensible object whatever, to exist without the mind, then I will grant it actually to be so.

HYLAS: If it comes to that, the point will soon be decided. What more easy than to conceive a tree or house existing by itself, independent of, and unperceived by any mind whatsoever? I do at this present time conceive them existing after that manner.

PHILONOUS: How say you, Hylas, can you see a thing which is at the same time unseen?

HYLAS: No, that were a contradiction.

PHILONOUS: Is it not as great a contradiction to talk of *conceiving* a thing which is *unconceived*?

HYLAS: It is.

PHILONOUS: The tree or house therefore which you think of, is conceived by you?

HYLAS: How should it be otherwise?

PHILONOUS: And what is conceived, is surely in the mind?

HYLAS: Without question, that which is conceived is in the mind.

PHILONOUS: How then came you to say, you conceived a house or tree existing independent and out of all minds whatsoever?

HYLAS: That was I agree an oversight; but stay, let me consider what led me into it. – It is a pleasant mistake enough. As I was thinking of a tree in a solitary place, where no one was present to see it, I thought that was to conceive a tree as existing unperceived or unthought of, not considering that I myself conceived it all the while. But now I plainly see, that all I can do is to frame ideas in my own mind. I may indeed conceive in my own thoughts the idea of a tree, or a house, or a mountain, but that is all. And this is far from proving, that I can conceive them *existing out of the minds of all spirits*.

PHILONOUS: You acknowledge then that you cannot possibly conceive, how any one corporeal sensible thing should exist otherwise than in a mind.

HYLAS: I do.

Is the argument offered by Philonous sound?

In order to discuss this issue, try to set out Philonous's argument in a careful, step by step fashion, numbering each step, and indicating which steps are premises, and which are conclusions that are supposed to follow from earlier steps. Then, if you think that the argument is basically sound, set out what you think are the one or two most important objections to the argument, and indicate, in each case, what you take to be a plausible response. Alternatively, if you think that the argument is unsound, describe, in a careful and detailed fashion, what you take to be the central flaw in the argument, and defend your claim that that step in the argument is unsound.

This is a tricky argument to evaluate unless you are familiar with a certain distinction in philosophy of language – namely, that between extensional and intensional contexts. So if you would like to tackle this topic, but are not familiar with that distinction, please read the relevant handout on the class web site, and talk to me about anything that is unclear.

21. Two important alternatives with regard to the logical grammar of the language to be used in describing sense experiences are (1) a language of appearing, and (2) a sense datum language. After explaining the difference, carefully discuss the choice between these two alternatives.

22. What do you think is the best response to skepticism concerning the existence of an external, physical, mind-independent world? After carefully outlining that response, set out what you take to be the most important objection to it, and then discuss whether that response to skepticism concerning the existence of a physical world can be sustained.