

LANGARA COLLEGE

**Philosophy 2203, Section 001**

**Essay #1**

(to be handed in on Feb. 28, but a one-page outline is due on Feb. 12)

**Suggested Questions**

*Pick a topic from the ideas below, and write about 1200 words, double spaced.*

1. Explain what propositions and (possible) states of affairs are supposed to be, and why they are thought to be distinct kinds of entity. Your essay should go on to develop a thesis about these entities, and support it with arguments. For example, your thesis might address one (or more) of the following questions:
  - Do states of affairs objectively exist? Or are they a case where (as Hume put it) “the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects”.
  - Is Frege right in thinking that *propositions* are mind-independent and eternal?
  - If possible states of affairs have no objective existence, then does this mean that there cannot be any objective truth?

2. Robert Koons writes,

Attempts to explain away causation or to replace it with some purely statistical regularity (whether or not supplemented by some kind of psychologistic decoration) have proved to be catastrophic failures.

(“A New Look at the Cosmological Argument”, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1997, pp. 193-211.)

Describe one theory of causation that fits Koons’ description here, and assess whether or not his condemnation of it is reasonable.

3. Summarise some of Anscombe’s arguments for her claim that a cause need not determine its effects. Evaluate the strength of these arguments, either pointing out weaknesses or defending them from objections.
4. Define what is meant by ‘probabilistic causation’ and describe some of its key properties, by means of examples. Can probabilistic causation be identified with Anscombe’s ‘derivedness’, or ontological dependence, which she sees as the ‘core notion of causation’?

5. Define what is meant by a *necessary* being. Is there any good argument that a necessary being exists? If so, present such an argument and defend it against objections. (You should also say what kind of being this is, e.g. God, propositions, etc.) If there is no good argument for a necessary being, then show this by presenting and criticising one or two of the best arguments of this sort.
  
6. God is sometimes claimed to be a 'first cause', or an 'independent' being. Define the meaning of this term, and present one or more arguments that a first cause really exists. Is the argument cogent? Either criticise the argument, or defend it from objections.
  
7. Write an essay about the argument from design. You should summarise at least one version of this argument (e.g. from Paley, or Behe, or Hume's argument from analogy) and criticise it. How successful is the argument, in your view?
  
8. Richard Dawkins writes (p. 2 in our reading)

We now know that the order and apparent purposefulness of the living world has come about through an entirely different process, a process that works without the need for any designer and one that is a consequence of basically very simple laws of physics.

Present and evaluate one or two of Dawkins' arguments for this claim, and discuss whether Plantinga's objections (or any other objections) to them have any merit.