

LANGARA COLLEGE

**Philosophy 2201, Section 001**

**Essay #1**

(Due February 27, 2020, but your outline should be handed in on Feb. 13.)

**Suggested Questions (pick *one*, or make your own)**

1. Thomas Reid criticised representative realism on the following grounds (*Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Essay #2, Chapter 14):

[Representative realism] is directly contrary to the universal sense of men who have not been instructed in philosophy. When we see the sun or moon, we have no doubt that the very objects which we immediately see are very far distant from us, and from one another. ... But how are we astonished when the philosopher informs us that we are mistaken in all this; that the sun and moon which we see are not, as we imagine, many miles distant from us, and from each other, but they are in our own mind.

Write an essay in response to Reid's criticism, either agreeing with him or disagreeing. You might address such issues as:

- Does Reid here agree with the naïve realists who say that (in Hume's words) "the very images that their senses present to them are the external objects that they perceive"? Or is there a more charitable interpretation of what Reid is saying?
  - Why is such naïve realism rejected by almost all philosophers?
  - Does Reid present representative realism accurately in this passage?
2. What are the problems with representative realism that might lead philosophers to accept scepticism, idealism or phenomenalism instead? Are realists able to show that realism is the most reasonable view to hold (being perhaps the best explanation of our sense experiences)? Provide arguments for your conclusion.
  3. Define 'epistemic justification' as understood by internalists generally, and (if you wish) address the question of whether justification requires one to gather all the available evidence. Based on this understanding of justification, do you think that justification is *necessary* for knowledge? (N.B. I did not say *sufficient*.) You might look at BonJour's clairvoyance case, or his case of Emma the dog, or cases where the evidence originally supporting a belief has been forgotten, to tackle this question.

4. Write a paper about the Gettier problem. In addition to describing some Gettier cases, and summarising Gettier's argument, you might address such issues as:
- Has the problem itself been solved? I.e. do we now have an analysis of knowledge that is free from such counter-examples? If there is, then provide details of such an analysis and explain how it works. If not, then critique one or two leading attempts at such a solution.
  - Are there any general lessons that we can now draw from the whole Gettier affair? (For example, can we agree with Plantinga that the Gettier examples refute internalism especially?)
5. It's a matter of common sense that coherence in a belief system can, in some instances, help to justify the beliefs within that system. (Think about the entries in a crossword puzzle, for example.) Thus foundationalists as well as coherentists must explain this justificatory role of coherence, but does foundationalism have the resources to do so? Explain your answer in detail, including a definition of foundationalism (both classical and modest) and an account of what it means for a belief system to be coherent.
6. Bonjour states the 'isolation problem' as follows:
- Why couldn't a system of beliefs be perfectly coherent while nonetheless entirely impervious to any sort of influence or input from external reality, thus being completely isolated from it? But if this were so, it could seemingly be only an unlikely accident or coincidence if the beliefs in question happened to be true.
- It appears therefore that coherentists require that a justified belief system be somehow constrained to fit the external world, but does coherentism allow this? Can coherentists give perceptual beliefs the necessary epistemic weight or authority, without sliding into foundationalism? Explain your answer in detail.
7. Foundationalism makes heavy use of what we might call the 'architectural metaphor', that compares beliefs to components of a building, and relations of epistemic support to upward forces between such components. How suitable is this metaphor? Does it work perfectly, partially, or not at all? Argue for your answer by considering concrete examples, such as crossword puzzles or beliefs based on multiple fallible witnesses. You should also consider the use of the metaphor to describe modest foundationalism, not just classical foundationalism.