LANGARA COLLEGE

Philosophy 2201, Section 001

Essay #2

(Due March 26, 2020, but your outline should be handed in on March 12. There'll be some class time to discuss your outline with peers.)

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

Remember the basics: your essay will have a thesis, and argue for it. It will include some exposition as well, as needed to give context to your own position and arguments.

1. Write an essay about the debate between internalism and externalism. Initially you will convey the basic areas of disagreement between these views, perhaps using suitable examples for illustration. Then you will explain why internalism (or perhaps externalism) is the correct approach to take in constructing a theory of knowledge, giving arguments for your conclusion.

2. Among the externalist theories we've discussed, which is the most successful? You should describe this theory, and present one or two arguments in its favour, as well as discussing (and ideally disposing of) the main objections to it.

3. Scepticism is generally considered a good thing up to a point, but not if carried too far. A particular worry for philosophers are the arguments that purport to show that we have no good reason to believe that the external world is anything like our understanding of it. Feldman considers a number of these arguments, and seems to prescribe fallibilism as an antidote to most of them (though not all, if you look at Chapter 7). Do you agree with Feldman's assessment of these arguments?

4. Rationalism has a bad reputation in philosophy, largely perhaps due to the excesses of some of its proponents. (We're looking at you, Descartes and Kant.) In particular, some rationalists have claimed to establish physical laws with *a priori* certainty, only for these 'beautiful laws' to be later slain by 'ugly facts'. On the other hand, other philosophers (e.g. Leibniz, BonJour) have pursued more moderate forms of rationalism with the aim of avoiding such problems. In your essay you might describe some of the elements of such a moderate view, and assess the arguments for and against it.

5. David Hume states rather confidently:

> I venture to assert, as true without exception, that knowledge about causes is never acquired through a priori reasoning, and always comes from our experience of finding that particular objects are constantly associated with one other.

However, there is also a long tradition of distinguished physicists giving (what appear to be) *a priori* arguments for physical laws that specify the effect of a given cause. In some cases, these laws were first argued for on rational grounds, and only later found to agree with experience. Can Hume's position be defended against these apparent counter-examples? Explain your answer in detail.

6. Write an essay about the 'problem of induction'. This will involve first saying what the problem is, and then saying something about possible solutions to it. You might, for example answer such questions as:

- How did Copernicus argue for heliocentrism? Was his argument primarily empirical? Was his conclusion reasonable, or probable, given the evidence available to him? What general conclusions (if any) about inductive inference can we draw from this example?
- How does inductive inference work, from a Bayesian perspective? What premises are needed, in this probabilistic framework, in order to draw a scientific conclusion? Does the Bayesian framework point toward a solution to the problem of induction? (E.g. perhaps it demonstrates a need for *a priori* knowledge, or alternatively it might show that *a priori* knowledge is not needed due to the 'washing out of the priors'.)
- Can anyone today answer Hume's challenge to "produce the reasoning" that allows us to infer scientific theories, and predictions about the future, from empirical data? For example, does the method of 'inference to the best explanation' fit the bill? Or will Bayesian reasoning perhaps suffice? Discuss one possible response to Hume's challenge, explain how the reasoning is supposed to work, and assess whether it shows inductive conclusions to be justified.
- Hume and Feldman regard induction as "reasoning that relies on observed patterns to draw conclusions about what occurs in other cases" (Feldman), and claim that "… all inferences from experience are based on the assumption that the future will resemble the past, and that similar powers will be combined with similar sensible qualities" (Hume). However, this kind of induction is exactly what Leibniz called a mere "shadow of reasoning" that occurs in the minds of animals. According to Leibniz, humans can use *a priori* knowledge (as well as observation) to understand the underlying causes of observed regularities, and predict things no one has seen. Who is right about how science works?