

LANGARA COLLEGE

Philosophy 2203, Section 001

Essay #2

(To be handed in on April 8, but a one-page outline is due on March 26)

Suggested Questions

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

1. Summarise traditional compatibilism, and the standard objections to it. To what extent are these objections defused by more recent versions of compatibilism (e.g. by Harry Frankfurt or Peter Strawson)?
2. Define the ‘principle of alternative possibilities’ (PAP), and give one of Dennett’s arguments that PAP is irrelevant to free will and moral responsibility. Is Dennett’s argument cogent? Consider and evaluate one or two objections to it.
3. Speaking of a person’s actions being caused by their prior beliefs and desires, Chisholm says (p. 721):

... if these beliefs and desires in the particular situation in which he happened to have found himself caused him to do just what it was that we say he did do, then, since *they* caused it, *he* was unable to do anything other than just what it was that he did do. ... he was not responsible ...

Is Chisholm right in rejecting the claim that our free actions can be caused by our own beliefs and desires? Either give arguments against this view of Chisholm’s, or defend his view against such arguments.

4. Explain Chisholm’s *motivation* for saying that free will actions arise by ‘immanent’ (rather than ‘transeunt’) causation. (Make sure you explain that distinction itself.) In your opinion, is this the best way to develop a libertarian view of free will? Give arguments for your verdict, including some discussion of an alternative libertarian view if you wish.

5. Following some remarks of Robert Nozick, and also the ‘Russellian monism’ of Bertrand Russell, we explored in class the idea that intentionality might be incompatible with physicalism, and that, if true, this would clear a path to a new ‘opaque thought’ libertarian theory of free will. Outline how such a libertarian theory could be developed, and consider possible criticisms of it. Evaluate the prospects of such a theory.
6. Define ‘physicalism’, and state Montero and Papineau’s causal closure argument for it. Summarise also some objections to this argument, such as those of BonJour, and evaluate them. Is the argument convincing?
7. Attempts to define what should count as a ‘physical’ property run into Hempel’s dilemma. Summarise this dilemma, and examine two or three responses to it that physicalists have proposed. Is there a suitable definition of ‘physical’? Give arguments for your position.
8. Does quantum physics challenge physicalism in your view? Summarise one or more arguments that quantum mechanics refutes physicalism, and evaluate them. Make sure you define which version of physicalism is being threatened. [I offer this question with some trepidation, BTW. You should only attempt it if you understand the basic formalism of particle quantum mechanics.]
9. In *The Conscious Mind*, Chapter 3, David Chalmers argues that consciousness is very different from properties that have been successfully reduced to physics, and that, in fact, “no reductive explanation of consciousness can succeed”. Summarise some of Chalmers’ arguments for this claim, and consider some criticisms of these arguments. Is Chalmers’ view correct?
10. In “Against Materialism”, Laurence BonJour lists some aspects of the mind that seem difficult at least for a materialist to account for. Pick one of these aspects (e.g. phenomenal qualities or intentionality) and summarise some arguments that physicalism cannot account for it. Are those arguments ultimately successful? Explain your answer.