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Question 1

The cave represents the situation of people who blindly accept appearances (especially appearances that come from the senses).

A group of people who have lived chained to the wall of a cave all of their lives, facing a blank wall. The people watch shadows projected on the wall from objects passing in front of a fire behind them. The shadows represent these appearances. The chains represent the inability of most people to go beyond appearances and investigate reality.

Later one prisoner is freed and sees the outside world and blinding sunlight. The escape from the cave represents the difficult process of going beyond the appearances, and coming to have an understanding of reality (especially through philosophy). The sun, with its blinding rays, represents philosophical truth. The prisoner returns to the cave but the rest of the prisoners do not desire to leave the cave. The return to the cave represents how some people are afraid to question appearances and reflect philosophically about the truth, and therefore react negatively when exhorted to do so.

The experience machine is a machine that one can go into and have fake experiences of whatever they want. The purpose of the thought experiment is to show that reality, and not just enjoyment, is important. If a person is hesitant to enter the machine, that shows that she values reality more than just pleasant experiences. If a person jumps into the machine, that shows she values pleasant experience more than reality.

In Allegory of the Cave, people, after blindly accepting the appearances, are then exposed to reality, and they are facing the choice of going back to blindness or accepting the different and new reality. In the experience machine, people are given choice in the first place between “blindly” (to some extent) accepting the appearances and living in the reality.

Appearance is how things seem to be, how they look from a certain perspective. Reality, on the other hand, is what there actually is. The two thought experiments lead us to think how we should consider appearance and reality and how we should choose in between. The Allegory of the Cave teaches us that we should not blindly accept appearances as truth, and we have to somehow pursue the reality. The experience machine lets us think that appearances may be “fake” and different from reality, but they still have value for us, and it’s reasonable to choose appearance over reality.

Question 2

The nature of mind is thinking and the nature of body is extension.

Descartes thinks we are fundamentally identified with mind.

Descartes thinks that although we might be deceived about pretty much everything by the evil demon, we cannot be deceived that we do not exist whenever we think we exist. In other words, when I assert I exist, it cannot be that I do not exist. And this thinking thing is the mind.

Descartes believes that God created us and is good, and therefore he believes that God would not give us a totally deceptive capacity. Therefore, having perceptions as of an external world proves that there is an external world, including the body.

He takes it to be the case that God could create a disembodied mind and unthinking matter, as he can imagine that, mind and body are separable. As such, they are distinct substances. In other words, it’s conceivable/imaginable that a mind exists without a body, and therefore mind and body are distinct. Also, Descartes holds that if two things have entirely non-overlapping essences, they are distinct substances. The essence of mind is to think, and not to be extended. The essence of body is to be extended. and not to think. Their essences are entirely separate from one another, so they must be distinct substances.

Question 3

Our life is absurd since nothing we do has meaning - all the justification for meaning forms a chain and the chain never ends - but we still live our life seriously. In other words, the absurdity is the discrepancy between the aspiration with which we live our lives and the destination of our lives.

First, we cannot consciously abandon self-consciousness and self-transcendence, therefore we necessarily recognize the discrepancy. Second, we might be able to abandon one’s earthly individual human life. However, that will also require will-power and that one take oneself seriously as an individual-that one be willing to take considerable trouble to avoid being creaturely and absurd. Therefore, the absurdity persists. Consequently, the final escape might be suicide.

Nagel thinks the absurdity of life is a neutral thing and we should just live with it. It’s one of the fundamental feature of human-being.

Camus recommends defiance or scorn. We can salvage our dignity, he appears to believe, by shaking a fist at the world which is deaf to our pleas, and continuing to live in spite of it. This will not make our lives un-absurd, but it will lend them a certain nobility.

In contrast, Nagel thinks such approach is romantic and slightly self-pitying, and the absurdity warrants neither that much distress nor that much defiance. Nagel suggests that absurdity should not evoke any resent or defiance or any other dramatics. “We can approach our absurd lives with irony instead of heroism or despair.”

Question 4

(a) The brain and the body are separated. Brain is in a vat and remotely control the body through signals. I am the body since body is my perceptual center. I can see/hear/touch/move with my body, and thus all the subjective experience is centered on the body.

(b) The connection between brain and body is lost. I can still think but can no longer sense/perceive anything. I am my brain since brain is my cognitive center. All I know is I’m thinking, and the center of such thinking is the brain. I can’t even sense/feel/control my body and therefore I’m not my body.

(c) The mind/consciousness is uploaded to a computer. The brain and the computer intermittently control the body, but the computer gives the exactly same command to the body as I think in my mind. When the computer controls the body, we can safely say I am the computer, since the computer has the agency.

(d) The computer starts to give different orders from what I think. I can still sense/feel from my body and all the perceptions are centered on my body but I cannot control it. I can still think with my brain but the thinking and the action of the body are desynchronized. The computer controls my body but I do not think like the computer. In other words, the cognitive center, the perceptual center, and the agency are all separated.

Question5

Propositions that are relations of ideas: Can be true or false by definition, or a priori. Therefore, they are certain, and absolute. Relations of ideas are essentially relationships between definitions. For example, “triangles have four sides” must be false, since triangle, by definition, has three sides. We don’t have to “check” every triangle in the world to get to the conclusion.

Propositions that are matters of facts: Must check with reality to know true or false, can’t know true or false a priori. Thus, they are not very certain or absolute. For example, sun will rise tomorrow morning. You can’t know until tomorrow morning. Sun is not defined to rise in the morning.

Question 6

Uniformity: If a regularity holds in the past, it will hold in the future (at least hold for next instance). In other words, if all As I have experienced are B, then the next A I’m going to experience will be a B.

For example, all apples I have seen are red, the next apple I’m going to see will be red (might be wrong, it’s just a principle).

All explanations for this faces the same problem. How do you know such explanation will hold in the future? And therefore any explanation just pushes the problem one step back and does not really provides the answer.

Basically, inductive reasoning is:

1. All Es I have experienced are G.
2. I’m going to experience an E.
3. The E that I’m going to experience is a G.

Hume thinks 1 and 2 do not logically entail 3. But 1 and 2 plus Uniformity logically entail 3. Therefore, Uniformity is a fundamental premise of inductive reasoning. If Uniformity itself is not rational, then inductive reasoning is not rational.

Question 7

Example: I hit a ball with certain angle and certain force, and then the ball flies with a certain speed and certain direction.

Explanandum: The phenomena/event to be explained. In the example, “the ball flies with a certain speed and certain direction”.

Explanans: The explanation for the cause/reason of the explanandum. Consisting of a set of antecedent conditions and general laws.

Antecedent conditions: The events/things that realize prior to explanandum, and, in some sense, cause the explanandum to happen. In the example, “I hit a ball with certain angle and certain force”.

General laws: The laws that are used to explain a type of phenomena. General laws have to be general, and can’t be only capable of explaining this specific event. A general law provides the necessary logical connection between antecedent conditions and explanandum. In this example, Newton laws (the relation between force and acceleration, relation between acceleration/speed/velocity/location, etc).

“logically deducible from” means that if the general laws are correct, and the antecedent conditions are satisfied, then the explanandum would necessarily be true, or impossible to be false. In this example, whenever I do hit the ball with a certain angle A and a certain force, and the Newton laws are indeed correct, then the ball would necessarily fly away in that specific direction with that specific speed. No matter how many times I do, the results will be the same.

Question 9

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | God exists  Chance: A>0 | God does not exist  Chance: 1-A | Expected Out Come |
| Believe in God | Infinite happiness  +infinity | Finite loss  -k | +infinity\*A-(1-A)\*k = +infinity |
| Does not believe in God | Infinite suffering  -infinity | Finite Gain  +g | -infinity\*A+(1-A)\*g=-infinity |

Pascal, after concluding God’s existence cannot be proven or disproven, argues that we should believe in God based on practical rationality. In other words, to believe in God yields the higher expected outcome. Pascal thinks:

If God exists, believers will be rewarded with infinity happiness, and those that do not believe will suffer infinitely. If God does not exist, then believers only lose a finite amount, and those that do not believe gain insignificantly many. He also thinks that the chance of God’s existing and not existing are equal. Therefore, the expected outcome, as shown in the chart above, is infinity for believers and negative infinity for non-believers.

Furthermore, the chart above also shows that as long as A, the chance of God’s existence if greater than one (not matter how small it is) the expected outcomes are the same.

Question 11

“different epistemic starting points”: Different fundamental principles or starting points that affect one’s conclusions, such as fundamental claims about the world or epistemological principles about how to deal with evidence.

It is possible that people with different epistemic starting points, though with the same evidence and equal intelligence, reasonably arrive at different and contrasting conclusions. Then it seems that they are in a reasonable disagreement.

Basically, Feldman thinks that the two parties should discuss the different starting points, and existence of reasonable disagreements is only possible if each side can reasonably maintain its starting point after they have been brought out into the open. And if after discussion, they agree one starting point is better/more reasonable than the other, then the rational choice for them is to take the position of the person with the better starting point, resolving the disagreement. If they cannot conclude which is better, then they should suspend judgement. If they both think their starting point is better than the other person’s, then they should discuss the reason for thinking his/her starting point is better and repeat the process.

Question 12

1. The disagreement has to be a factual disagreement. In other words, if one of the two parties in the disagreement is correct, then is other is necessarily wrong. They cannot be both correct.
2. The two parties in the disagreement have to be epistemically peer. They have to have similar backgrounds, equally intelligent.
3. They have to share every piece of evidence they have.
4. A reasonable disagreement means that while I think I’m correct and you are wrong, I also think that you are reasonable to hold your opinion.

Case 1. Religious disagreement. Atheist and theist college students (they apparently disagrees with each other) think the other party is rational. If you think the other party is rational, then why do you think your position is correct and the other is not? If there is some answer to this question, for example, there is some unshared evidence, then this is not a reasonable disagreement. If there is no answer, then you should suspend judgement, instead of thinking your correct.

Case 2. Political disagreement. I think raising tax will boost the economy and you think cutting tax will boost the economy. The same question applies. If the evidence supports me, then you are not rational. If the evidence supports neither or supports both, then the only rational choice for both of us is to suspend judgement.

Question 14

Basically, Mary is limited in a black-and-white world on purpose. She is confined in a black-and-white room. She is not color blind, and she knows that, but everything that she can see is black-and-white.

She knows complete physics, i.e. everything there is about the physical aspect of the world. Especially, she knows every physical fact about color, the nature of color, the chemical and biological reactions inside human brain after seeing color, etc.

What is missing from her knowledge is what it will be like for herself to see the color. In other words, the qualia of seeing color (for her). When she is let out the black-and-white room the first time, she learns what it is like to see color red, the subjective experience, the feeling that is experiences in a first person perspective,

Question 16:

Attending UNC.

Epistemically transformative: I thought I knew what college courses and research would be like. But actually, I was wrong.

Personally transformative: I held many unrealistic and naïve thoughts before college. For example, I thought my life is all about finding the truth of the universe, and all the other stuff does not matter. Now, my primary goal is to get a job.

Paul thinks that one cannot rationally decide to undergo transformative experiences since

1. The experience is epistemically transformative, i.e. you wouldn’t know what it will be like unless you experience it. Therefore, we cannot accurately evaluate how that experience correspond to our values/desires/morals etc.
2. The experience is personally transformative, i.e. you won’t be the same anymore after that experience. You wouldn’t know what values and desires you would have after the experience. In other words, you will probably see the experience differently. Therefore, you cannot evaluate the experience with your current value/desire/moral etc.

In my example, facing two choices, UNC and another university, I didn’t know what it would be like to attend either university, nor did I know what kind of person I would be like after the four years in either university. Therefore, I could not make rational choice.