**Which Glove Do You Like Best?**

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. How do we know what we know? What do know for certain?

Epistemology is often a good source of humility—

*line* humans, it turns out, don’t know very much with

*5* absolute, undeniable objectivity. Even perception is **dubitable**. Things in the natural world are **inevitably** filtered through our (limited) sense. We have mountains of evidence that the brain is not a neutral observer of the world around it; perception is not

*10* some transparent glass through which we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell things are they *really* are. Perception is an imperfect mirror with countless, sometimes surprising, **warbles**. Our brains edit and consolidate information. We perceive the present in a

*15* biased way, and our memories of the past get fudged even more.

Okay, fine. Our brains aren’t perfect, disinterested recorders of the outside world. We can’t know that much about the external world for sure. We can, at

*20* least, know what’s going on inside of our own minds, if nothing else? Our brains can at least tell us about what’s going on in our brains, right?

Well, recent studies are showing that even that might not be the case. First-person introspection, the act of

*25* a person scanning his or her own brain to see what going on in there, might not be as unquestionable as once thought.

An experiment was completed in which four red gloves were lined up on a table. Participants were

*30* simply asked to choose whichever glove they liked best and then explain their choice. A comfortable majority chose the glove on the far right. They explained that this glove was the most attractive to them because it was the softest or the most colorful

*35* or the most well-hemmed.

All of the gloves, however, were exactly the same: none of the gloves was softer or more or more neatly sewn. The implication was that simply chose the glove on the far right because of some

*40* unacknowledged bias towards the right. After all, this was a random sample of the population, so most of the participants would have been right-handed.

Why did none of the participants attribute their choice correctly? It seems as if they chose a glove, then

*45* **reverse-engineered** a logical reason for preferring it to the other only after the fact. They chose their favorite glove, then explained that choice to themselves incorrectly. No one can really say whether or not their first order thinking (“I like the glove on the

*50* right the best…”) was flawed, but it certainly appears like their second order thinking (“... because it was the softest.”) was fictionalized.

The discovery that we might not know why we like the things we like or why we chose the things we chose

*55* opens a bunch of interesting avenues of inquiry in the fields of psychology, philosophy, literature, politics, economics, sociology— pretty much every single topic related to human behavior. This study is begging for follow-up experiments. For example, it

*60* would be interesting to know how participants in this or a similar study might react to being informed of their mistakes. The human brain is famous for its adaptability: maybe participants could learn to interrogate their thoughts processes more carefully?

*65* Hopefully, epistemologists are inspired to jump down this and countless similar rabbit holes. Maybe we’ll come to know about more fields of knowledge we can’t put out faith in.

**Questions**

1. What is the main point of this passage?

A) We can never trust anything our brains ever tell us.

B) Human knowledge is fallible, even with regards to types of knowledge we once thought were unquestionable.

C) Our second order thinking is imperfect, but our first order thinking is always beyond question.

D) Epistemology is a threat to the storehouse of human knowledge.

2. The author sees the human brain as:

A) a neutral, faithful observer of the world-at-large.

B) intentionally misleading.

C) essentially useless

D) a somewhat flawed filter for the world around us.

3. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

A) Lines 6-11 (“Things… are.”)

B) Lines 19-21 (“We can… else.”)

C) Lines 28-29 (“An experiment… table.”)

D) Lines 62-64 (“The human… carefully.”)

4. As used in line 15, “fudged” most nearly means:

A) blurred

B) perfected

C) a chocolate confection

D) lied

5. The writer uses the phrase “Okay, fine” in line 17 to:

A) directly quote the reactions of the participants in this study to being shown its findings.

B) verify the accuracy of the studies underpinning the claims made in the first paragraph.

C) introduce a line of thinking which the writer expects to be a normal layperson’s response to the preceding information.

D) transition to a field of knowledge we can still put our faith in.

6. As used in line 31, “comfortable” most nearly means:

A) sizeable

B) wealthy

C) **complacent**

D) pleasant

7. According to the author, participants misattributed the reasons behind their glove preferences because they:

A) were embarrassed, so they wanted to seem like they made a more reasonable than they actually were.

B) wanted to fit in with the reports of the other participants in the study.

C) didn’t trust the people running the study.

D) didn’t fully understand their own decision-making.

8. Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

A) Lines 32-35 (“They… well-hemmed.”)

B) Lines 36-38 (“All… sewn.”)

C) Lines 46-48 (”They… incorrectly.”)

D) Lines 62-64 (“The human… carefully.”)

9. Which of the following would constitute a second order, introspective thought?

A) “I think my teacher has a bias towards student athletes.”

B) “I like the color red.”

C) “I like the glove on the right.”

D) “I like this perfume because it reminds me of my mother.”

10. The author reacts to the findings in the study with:

A) excitement and humility

B) complete devastation

C) skepticism and enthusiasm

D) keen interest mixed with anger

11. The main point of the final paragraph (lines 53-69) is to:

A) give an exhaustive list of all of the follow-up studies that have been completed after this study.

B) explain how this study, while interesting on its own, is really the beginning of a line of inquiry which might stretch over several fields.

C) tamper any possible enthusiasm about the study discussed in the passage.

D) indict the researchers in various fields who haven’t had the courage to do the necessary follow-up studies the author suggests.