Philosophy Debate Write-Up

Debate Topic: **You [dear member of the audience] do not know whether you have hands."**

**Definitions & Interpretive Issues**

We’ll be debating if you do not know whether you have hands. There are two different definitions for what “hands” are and what it means to “know” something. For the pro team the definition of hands will be an “extremity located at the end of an arm used primarily for the purpose of grasping objects” and for the con team the same definition with the added context of “dream-hands or matrix-simulated-hands count as "hands".” As far as what it means to know, for the pro team it is “you must be able convinced of, despite your mental state, and is un-argued amongst most individuals” and for con team “you are fairly certain beyond a reasonable doubt.”

**Victory Conditions**

To achieve victory for the pro team we will need to clarify that perception isn’t always reality, how do you separate perception from reality? What is the definition of perception? Perception is simply, the interpretation of sensory information, which we know from simple visual examples from intro psychology classes that some images look as if they are moving when in reality they are not, thus proving perception can be wrong. When it comes to reality, does anyone know beyond a reasonable doubt anything? As Descartes’ said, the only two things you can be sure of is that “I think, therefore I am” and “I am, therefore I exist” must be true. What exactly exists of you? Is it simply the mind, body, or both together? In dualism the mind and body are different, if we can’t know that the mind and body are one, then the mind does not equal your body and thus hand.

For the con team, how do we know hands exist? For example, if you put your perceived hand in a box of which you cannot see into, can you identify an unknown object with simply your hand? How do we know we exist? In order to do that we must believe that the mind and body are one, thus perception *almost* always then equals reality. That means though that we must at least accept some doubt, but not enough that you’re not reasonably convinced. We are not going to debate whether we are dreaming or in a matrix or not, as the con team is taking the stance that whether you are in a dream or matrix, a hand is a hand. It’s simply a conceived idea of an extremity of which you can grasp objects in a dream, matrix, or reality. Why, if you didn’t have hands, would the world be designed around the ability to be used by hands?

**Pro Game Plan**

In our opening argument, us as the pro team, would use a deductive argument. We know this because if we want to convince people that they do not know whether they have hands or not we need to have your premises true as well as our conclusion. Deductively valid arguments come with a similar guarantee: “if all the premises are true, then the conclusion must be true. Since perception isn’t always reality, how do you figure out the difference? For example,

(1) To know whether you have hands, you'd need to be able to tell the difference between actually having hands and all possible ways that you might lack hands.

(2) One possible way you might lack hands is if you're an amputee dreaming you have hands.

(3) You can't tell the difference between actually having hands and being an amputee dreaming you have hands.

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(C) So you don't know whether you have hands.

The main argument that we are going to focus on is the fact that we cannot be sure of anything. Since there are either two possibilities: you either have a hand or you don't; then if we are able to prove that you could potentially not have hands, we would be able to say that we can't know whether have hands or not.

What can we know for sure? We don't even *know* what "know" means. Knowledge is more than just a true justified belief; there is never a real solid answer for this. Are there any beliefs that we can be absolutely certain are true? One thing we can be certain of is that we can think.  How else would I be writing this paper right now if I didn't have a mind to help me think of these things.  “I think, therefore I am.”  There are not many things that people can be certain of, however, Descartes thinks that you can be certain that you exist as well as what's happening in your mind. Any foundation for our knowledge must be immune to doubt, therefore, we must be able to tell for sure that it is true. Since we cannot know for sure that anything exists other than myself and my mind, then there is no way to think that my hands exist.  I could be dreaming that I have hands when in fact I lost my hands in a tragic accident.  In dualism, the mind and the body are different. If we don’t know the mind and body are one, then the mind does not equal your body (thus hand).  On the evidence of introspection alone, then, we might be inclined to conclude that the mind is something quite separate from, and deeply distinct from, the physical.  Since the mind and physical body are not one, then with Descartes beliefs, we cannot know for sure that the hand exists.

**Pro’s Anticipation of Con’s Response**

The con team might prove that we can know that we have hands because we are familiar with what their daily uses are.  If I drop a pencil, my initial reaction is to pick it up with my hand. Even if I don't have a hand, I still have the urge to pick it up with one. Since we can be certain of what's happening in your own mind, then what if our mind thinks that I have a hand or that I feel this pencil in my hand.  I as a Pro would argue that even though you may think you feel something or see something, that doesn’t mean it is real. You can think you still have a hand however your arm was chopped off in an accident. You could be dreaming and think you have one, but when in reality you don't.

Secondly, a con could argue that even if you're in a dream or in real life, you still will have a hand in some area.  Does it really matter what place you have a hand in? Even if it’s in a dream or in a matrix, a hand is a hand so shouldn't it count? Even if we can't know for sure that we have a hand right now, in our dream we may have a hand so don’t we think we have a hand anyways? If we were in a matrix, our world would be somewhat perfect since everything is run on a computer and therefore we would probably have all of our body parts.  I, as a Pro however, would argue that even if we are in a matrix or in a dream, we can't prove for sure what is real life so we won't have a hand in every aspect.  There is no way to show that we for sure have a hand since in the dream or real life we either have one or we don't.

**Con’s Game Plan**

Our opening argument is what does it mean to be certain you have hands? What does it mean to be certain of anything? How are you certain that the world is round, that SMU needs more fountains or construction, or that you have hands? You can define certainty as “known beyond a doubt.” Our second argument uses the following deductive argument:

* + - If you drop your cell phone, instinctively you would react with trying to catch it with your hand.
    - If you did not have hands, you would have no chance of catching the cell phone.
    - People often times catch their cell phones.
    - ∴ We know we have hands.

We want to reiterate the following points throughout our rebuttal and conclusion. If you did not have hands, you would be unable to justify how you’ve lived all of the years you have. If you didn’t have a hand, yet your brain magically provided you a mental image of a “hand” and the pain that goes along with cutting it, you would be unable to prove anything beyond “I think, therefore I am.”

People should believe the premises since everyday we drop objects or are asked to catch objects. If we did not have hands then we would be unable to even have a chance of catching the object. We also would be unable to open jars, use our touch screen cell phones, and so forth. If you did not have a hand, you would thus not have an opposable thumb. Without an opposable thumb, you would be unable to grasp objects, use your cell phone, catch anything thrown at you, etc. If we did not have hands, based on our definitions, you would be unable to live a day-to-day life.

**Con’s Anticipation of Pro’s Response**

Pro will most likely try to convince the audience that they cannot be sure if they are awake or dreaming and that physical characteristics cannot be proven, because nobody can tell the difference between a dream or reality. We will need to be sure to convince the audience early on that there is no possible way that they are asleep, and what they are experiencing with all 5 of their senses is in fact reality. We will try to get across our point that if you can’t be sure that you have hands, then you can’t be sure of anything. The audience will already be predisposed to the idea that hands are real, and that they as a physical being are real, so we will be sure to play on that fact that they want to believe in the physical world as it is.

Even if we convince the audience that they are not dreaming, the pro team will attempt to convince the audience of one of Rene Descartes’ arguments which states that an evil demon could exist, and that this demon could be "as clever and deceitful as he is powerful, who has directed his entire effort to misleading me." We would counter this argument by either asking the audience if any of them believe it could be true, or even by saying, and showing, that there is more proof pointing towards the existence of hands than there is for the existence of an evil demon. The human hand seems infinitely more real than a powerful evil demon, and that Descartes only used that as an example to show that technically anything is possible.

**Crux of the Issue**

Can we really be sure we’re not dreaming? No one has ever come up with definite proof we are not dreaming. Does that really matter whether we are dreaming or not? Our perception of time has at least allowed us to believe as if we’ve been living a reasonably long life and that’s all we know. As Descartes’ said, the only thing we are truly able to prove is that we exist (I think therefore I am) and that you can also be certain what is in your mind. How do we know we aren’t in a matrix? We could be somewhere else, “living” this alternate life but just as with dreaming, all we know is what we’ve believed to of perceived.