Homework 6: Philosophy of science and consciousness

Philip Salqvist - phisal@kth.se

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1 Philosophy of Science

1.a

Realism states that we in science can make just as valid theories about unobservable as observable phenomena and that scientific descriptions can be considered real whether they can be observed or not. According to this theory, our scientific theories describes reality as it is. As an opposition to this, anti-realism claims that only what can be observed is to be considered real, and that we cannot say anything about what is unobservable. In this sense, scientific theories are considered merely a tool to make meaningful predictions, but doesn't necessarely say anything true about an unobservable reality. An example of an unobservable could be the force of gravity, which lets us make very accurate predictions about the world, but can't be directly observed by us as humans.

1.b

I would argue that even if you accept Popper's proposition it would still be meaningful to do science because for one, by observing what is false about the universe we get closer to the truth by eliminating what is not true. Furthermore, even if we can't state that a scientific theory absolutely describes reality, it is still meaningful to gather scientific theories that can help us predict and manipulate the world correctly.

2

First of all I would like to state that we know too little about consciousness to know how one could arise. However, if I have to pick sides I will have to mostly agree with Searle. In his article, he argues against the claims made on the potential of strong AI, that is that by creating the right set of programs with the right set of inputs and outputs minds like ours can arise. Another claim made by the advocates of strong AI according to the article is that this could be measured by the Turing test. And it is against this claim I think Searle's Chinese Room argument is the strongest. By merely being unable to tell whether a system is a human being or a computer wouldn't mean that the system is conscious in itself. It only means that the system can perform and mimic the cognitive tasks of being a human very well, which is illustrated greatly in with the Chinese Room argument. This being said, I don't agree with Searle that a conscious mind couldn't arise from a computer program, I only agree with the statement that a turing test wouldn't tell us anything meaningful about the systems degree of consciousness.