

24.00: Problems of Philosophy
Prof. Sally Haslanger
November 3, 2005

SECOND PAPER TOPICS

Write a short (5-7 page, 1500-2100 word) paper on ONE of the following topics. Be sure to follow the "Guidelines for Papers" that is available on the MIT Site. Page numbers in parentheses refer to *Reason and Responsibility*, 12th edition. Remember to submit an electronic copy of your paper to your TA.

Papers are due Friday 11/18 at 3pm or in your recitation section.

1. According to Paul Churchland, *the identity theory* is the view that "mental states *are* physical states of the brain. That is, each type of mental state or process is *numerically identical with* (is one and the very same thing as) some type of physical state or process within the brain or central nervous system." (286) Critically evaluate the identity theory, explaining its strengths and weaknesses. Do you find this a compelling approach to the mind? Why or why not?

2. In the selection from "Minds, Brains, and Programs," Searle argues against a position that he calls 'strong AI'. What does Searle mean by 'strong AI'? Carefully reconstruct Searle's Chinese room argument and explain why he thinks it refutes strong AI. Summarize and evaluate what you take to be the strongest objection to Searle's argument. Do you agree with Searle? Why or why not?

4. Paul Holbach vividly raises the problem of freewill as follows:

There is, in point of fact, no difference between the man that is cast out of the window by another, and the man who throws himself out of it, except that the impulse in the first instance comes immediately from without whilst that which determines the fall in the second case, springs from within his own peculiar machine, having its more remote cause also exterior. (395)

Carefully explain Holbach's view and the reasons he offers to support it. What exactly does he require for free agency? How does he understand determinism? How compelling is his position? Present what you take to be the strongest objection to his view and consider what he might say in reply. Do you agree with Holbach? Why or why not?

3. In "Freedom and Necessity," Ayer develops a compatibilist account of free will. Explain and evaluate Ayer's account. In doing so, give a clear definition of 'determinism' and show how, given Ayer's account of freedom, our possession of free will is consistent with determinism. What is the most compelling objection to Ayer's account? Does he have an adequate reply? Do you endorse Ayer's compatibilism (or perhaps something similar)? Why or why not?

You may write on a topic of your own design if you submit a proposal in writing to your TA by 11/13 and it is approved.