

List of Topics for Paper #3¹

- Write a paper on *one* of the following topics.
- Length: 5-7 pages (12-point font, double-spaced, and no fiddling with margins.)
- **Revised Deadline:** Due in my Eliot mailbox by 5pm on Monday, November 14.²
- **Note:** Please identify the topic you are addressing in your paper.

1. What is substance dualism? Carefully reconstruct one (or two) of Descartes' arguments for substance dualism and assess it (or them) for cogency.
2. What is crude logical behaviorism and what is refined logical behaviorism? Carefully reconstruct Armstrong's objections to these two forms of behaviorism and assess these objections for cogency.
3. Carefully develop Armstrong's topic-neutral analysis of mental states. In doing so, be sure to use a particular mental state as an example. Explain why Armstrong's analysis is neutral between materialism and dualism, yet has materialism as a consequence when supplemented with a plausible empirical premise. Present what you take to be the most compelling objection (or pair of objections) to Armstrong's account and assess it (or them) for cogency.
4. Carefully develop the account of pain developed by Lewis in "Mad Pain and Martian Pain." Be sure to explain how Lewis' account accommodates mad pain, Martian pain, and mad Martian pain. Also, be sure to explain why Lewis thinks that human pain is a neural state. Present what you take to be the most compelling objection (or pair of objections) to Lewis' account and assess it (or them) for cogency.
5. In Section 1 of "Epiphenomenal Qualia," Jackson develops an argument involving "black-and-white Mary" against a thesis he calls 'physicalism'. What does Jackson mean by 'physicalism'? Carefully reconstruct Jackson's knowledge argument and explain why he thinks it entails the falsity of physicalism. Is the knowledge argument a cogent argument against physicalism? Why or why not?³
6. In "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 establishes the falsity of strong AI. Present what you take to be the most compelling objection (or pair of objections) to Searle's argument and assess it (or them) for cogency.
7. What is the token-identity theory? In the final pages of "Identity and Necessity," Kripke develops an argument against the token-identity theory. Carefully reconstruct Kripke's argument in premise-conclusion form. Be sure that you explain Kripke's reasons for thinking each premise to be true. Also, be sure to characterize all technical vocabulary you use in your reconstruction. Is Kripke's objection to the token-identity theory cogent? Why or why not?
8. How would Lewis respond to the following argument:
(1) If 'Human pain = C-fiber firings' is true, then 'Necessarily: Human pain = C-fiber firings' is true.
(2) 'Necessarily: Human pain = C-fiber firings' is false.
(3) 'Human pain = C-fiber firings' is false.
Is Lewis' response successful? Why or why not?
9. In footnote 17 to "Identity and Necessity," Kripke develops an objection to functionalist accounts of phenomenal states of the sort developed by Armstrong and Lewis. Briefly outline Lewis's account of pain and then reconstruct the objection to it developed in footnote 17. Is Kripke's objection cogent? Why or why not?⁴

¹ Some of these topics overlap to a slight degree. I chose to include such overlapping topics, since each enables you to approach a central issue or view from a slightly different angle.

² For my lateness and extension policy, please see the syllabus for Philosophy 200.

³ In characterizing 'physicalism' you need not appeal to the notion of information. It's fine if you frame your characterization in terms of the notion of a fact.

⁴ This topic is extremely difficult. Here's one hint: The assumption that it is an essential, as opposed to a contingent, property of pains that they hurt (i.e., are painful) plays a central role in Kripke's objection.

10. Give a clear definition of ‘determinism’. Provide a compact reconstruction, in premise-conclusion form, of Ayer’s argument for the thesis that determinism is necessary for moral responsibility, and thus for free will. Has Ayer successfully shown that determinism is necessary for free will? If not, why not? Again, if not, is there a weaker claim that Ayer *does* succeed in establishing? Is this weaker claim sufficient to establish that our exercise of free will amounts to nothing, or that our concept of free will is in some way incoherent?

11. In “Freedom and Necessity,” Ayer develops a positive account of free will. Clearly outline Ayer’s positive account. Give a clear definition of ‘determinism’. Explain why, given Ayer’s positive account, our possession of free will is consistent with determinism. Present what you take to be the most compelling objection (or pair of objections) to Ayer’s positive account of free will and assess it (or them) for cogency.

12. What is the principle of alternate possibilities? Clearly outline Frankfurt’s objection to it and explain how, according to Frankfurt, it has to be revised? Provide a clear definition of ‘determinism’. Why does Frankfurt maintain that morally responsible conduct is possible in a deterministic world, and is he correct in this claim?⁵

13. In “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” Frankfurt writes:

[I]t is having second-order volitions, and not having second-order desires generally, that I regard as being essential to a person. (pg. 16)

Drawing on Frankfurt’s remarks in the first full paragraph of pg. 12, outline what he views as suitable criteria for personhood. With this task behind you, provide a precise characterization of the condition Frankfurt identifies as essential for personhood in the passage quoted above. In providing this characterization, be sure to define all specialized concepts used by Frankfurt in developing this condition—including, perhaps, Frankfurt’s concepts of a first-order desire, a second-order desire, a second-order volition, Frankfurt’s concept of an effective desire, and Frankfurt’s concept of the will. Drawing on Frankfurt’s discussion of wantons, do you think that Frankfurt has identified a condition that is both necessary for, and central to, personhood? Be sure to present the reasons underlying your assessment.

14. On pp. 20-21 of “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” Frankfurt outlines a positive account of freedom of the will, which he later (pg. 25) claims to be compatible with the truth of determinism. Provide a precise definition of ‘determinism’ and clearly outline Frankfurt’s positive account of freedom of the will. Has Frankfurt developed an account of freedom of the will that is *both* compelling *and* compatible with the truth of determinism? Be sure to present the reasons underlying your assessment.⁶

15. In Section 2 of “Determinism al Dente,” Pereboom develops an objection to compatibilist accounts of moral responsibility. Briefly outline the compatibilist account of moral responsibility that Pereboom considers and then reconstruct his objection. Be sure to identify precisely what Pereboom takes his objection to establish. Is Pereboom’s objection cogent? Why or why not?

16. Clearly outline what you take to be the most plausible version of an agent-causal account of free will. Present what you take to be the most compelling objection (or pair of objections) to such an agent-causal account and assess it (or them) for cogency.⁷

17. Provide a characterization of an agent-causal account of free will. If a proponent of an agent-causal account of free will wishes to avoid the problem of “cosmic coincidences” developed in Section 3 of Pereboom’s “Determinism al Dente,” must he embrace full-blown Cartesian dualism, including the claim that immaterial substances can have causal influence on the physical world?⁸

18. Provided that your topic is centered on the philosophy of mind or the problem of free will, you are permitted to formulate a topic of your own or revise one of the above. However, you need to formulate your prompt in writing and receive explicit permission from me to write on it.⁹

⁵ In considering the latter question, you may find it helpful to address the material developed in Section 2 of Pereboom’s “Determinism al Dente.”

⁶ In addressing this topic, you may wish to explore the following objection: Frankfurt equivocates between a *more compelling* account of freedom of the will that is *incompatible* with determinism and a significantly *less compelling* account that turns out to be *compatible* with determinism.

⁷ Here, you may wish to discuss the problem of “cosmic coincidences” developed in §3 of Pereboom’s “Determinism al Dente.”

⁸ This is very murky material. I recommend that you avoid this question unless you find it so compelling that you can’t resist it.

⁹ I am quite happy to work with you in revising potential topics. If you want to explore this option, I strongly recommend that you contact me soon.