Phil 151
Philosophy of Neuroscience
Winter 2017

Paper Assignment

Below are some *topics* for your short paper. A paper is different from an answer to an exam question. In a paper you set the problem and specific *thesis* and address it. The topics are intended to focus you on a given thesis, but you must construct the thesis and organize your paper around it. The thesis should be broadly in the spirit of one of the prompts, but you should not follow them slavishly. If you have a question as to whether your thesis drifts too far from the questions posed below, ask me. Your paper should include whatever is needed to defend your thesis—no more and no less. Don't assume your reader will figure out what you are doing and how the things you say fit together—make it clear. And remember that a title is your first opportunity to direct your reader's attention to what you are doing in the paper.

The overall evaluation of your paper will reflect both how ambitious your thesis and how well defend it. But be aware of the page limit—this is to be a short paper, 3-5 pages double-spaced (900 to 1500 words). Do not get so ambitious that you need 10-20 pages to do what you set out to do. Typically, you will be better off narrowing your thesis and developing your argument in detail rather than pursuing a very broad issue superficially.

Write your paper for an intelligent audience, but do not assume that they have been in this class or read what you have read. That is, you need to explain the relevant material to your audience, not just make an allusion and assume they will understand. You may ask others to read your paper and give feedback, but the writing is to be your own.

If possible, please submit your paper electronically to the following email address (papers@mechanism.ucsd.edu) in MS Word or .rtf format. Please be sure that you do not have any computer viruses before submitting (I hope you don't have any other kind either). Otherwise, you may submit hardcopy to my mailbox. It is due by Noon on Friday 10 March (note, this is not a class day).

1. Grush argues for a sharp distinction between presentations and representations. What does he think is required for a proper representation? Why, on this view, would responses of neurons in visual areas to various stimuli not count as representing those stimuli? What would be required, for example, for the mind/brain to have a representation of a face? What makes something a representation of a face? Is he right to sharply distinguish a representation from a presentation?

2. Akins challenges a tradition that attempts to ground intentional states (e.g., the belief that the temperature is in the mid-70s today) in sensory experience by arguing that the senses are narcissistic. What is meant by calling the senses narcissistic and if they are, how does that affect the attempt to ground beliefs in what the senses report? What would be the strongest response of someone pursuing the traditional project? Is that response successful in addressing Akins' challenge?

3. The Churchlands and McCauley disagree about whether attempts to reduce (folk) psychology to neuroscience demonstrate the need to eliminate (folk) psychology. How do the Churchlands argue for the elimination of (folk) psychology? How does McCauley critique their argument? Does McCauley's critique undercut the Churchlands' case for elimination?

4. What does Bickle mean by *ruthless reduction*? How does he distinguish the explanations offered by ruthless reduction from mechanistic explanations? Identify what you take to be the most serious objection that might be raised to ruthless reduction. Does Bickle have a compelling answer to such an objection?