

Philosophy 2180

Thought probes for September 15

Occasionally in this class, I will provide a list of questions to help us through the readings for that day. Many of these questions will end up on the exams. By preparing answers before class you are able to gauge your comprehension of course material. This exercise will also help you get the most out of lecture and class discussion.

The reading for this class is Dan Sperber's *The Guru Effect*, and the first 12 pages of *Theory and reality*. The Sperber reading is available on the course website (go to www.biophilosophy.ca and look under "teaching" for the course website).

1. Have you ever fallen victim to the guru effect? Dan Sperber suggests that a symptom of much academic writing is that obscurity masquerades as profundity. Have you encountered cases in which his thesis rings true?
2. Break down the individual steps that Sperber associates with the guru effect. Do you see any assumptions in his argument that are more questionable or problematic than others?
3. How susceptible do you think we are to the guru effect? Is there any way to detect when we have fallen victim to it? Can we shake it or avoid it altogether by following a certain practice?
4. In the Introduction to *Theory and reality* (the textbook for this course), Godfrey-Smith briefly outlines the thesis of empiricism as the doctrine that the only source of knowledge about the world is experience. Do you think that by being an empiricist, one could avoid falling victim to the guru effect?