

Philosophy of Mind, third Essay topics

Papers should approximately 1,200 words, double spaced with normal margins. They are **due in class** (at the beginning of class) on the final day, April 09. An electronic copy should be emailed to me on the same day (please write "3180 paper 3" and your name in the subject line of your email).

Papers will be graded according to three criteria. First, how clearly does the author express the ideas and arguments under consideration. Be careful not to rely on jargon. It is okay to use technical terms as long as you to explain what they mean (in your own words). Short clear sentences are preferable to long convoluted ones. Examples are often helpful. Second, how well does the author respond to the argument(s) under consideration. Your responses should address the argument under consideration. Ideally they will be sensible and creative. Finally, does the author consider potential replies to his or her response? If you agree with the focal argument, how might someone disagree with you. If you are taking on the focal argument, how might the author of that argument respond to your objections.? How would you in turn reply to those responses? Such philosophical back-and-forth makes for an engaging paper.

1. In the section titled "Retreat to Natural Selection" (180), Varela, Thompson and Roche (VTR) consider an adaptationist defense of the representational theory of mind. Since our psychological mechanisms have been shaped by natural selection, it is argued, they can be regarded as accurately representing relevant features of an external world. An organism that failed to accurately represent a cliff, for example, would fall off the cliff. Same goes for our psychological machinery in general. The fact that it has been "optimized" by selection for solving adaptive problems is sufficient grounds for assuming that the mind (more or less) accurately represents objective features of an external world. On this view, examples like colour vision are more of an exception than the rule.

In the Evolutionary Path Making (Chapter 9), VTR develop a response to this objection. They present an account of evolution as natural drift which supposedly refutes the adaptationist argument and supports the enactive approach. In your paper, first briefly state the adaptationist defense of representationalism in your own words, then explain their alternative approach and analyze whether it refutes this argument.

2. Bennett and Hacker claim that the ascription of mental states to the brain and its subcomponents involves a "mereological fallacy". The fallacy involves ascribing properties of the whole system to components of the system. Allegedly this fallacy is replete throughout neuroscience. In your paper, first describe this objection in your own words. Then articulate either Dan Dennett or John Searle's critique of this argument. Do Bennett and Hacker's provide a compelling response?
3. I am open to suggestions if there is any topic that you are particularly interested in. However, this would require meeting with me by **March 26** to discuss your idea.