First Paper Topics

Write an 8-10 page, double-spaced, paper on one of the following topics. The paper will count for 40% of your grade. Papers are due MONDAY OCTOBER 8 in class.

Be sure that your paper has a clear and comprehensible thesis; that it contains arguments for that thesis; and that it anticipates and responds to likely criticisms.

1. What is Cartesian substance dualism? According to substance dualism, what is the nature of the mind? Carefully reconstruct Descartes’ argument for the Real Distinction between mind and body. Develop and analyze one of the arguments (the one you think is strongest) against substance dualism. (For example, you could describe and analyze the argument from mind-body interaction, Ryle’s argument from other minds and the acquisition of psychological terms, or Smart’s argument from simplicity.) Is this argument compelling, in your opinion? Explain why or why not.

2. According to the identity theory, neuroscientists can discover what it is to be in pain. Discuss this claim. Be sure to explain what the identity theory is. (In doing so, distinguish type-physicalism from token-physicalism—see Kim, ch. 101-105—and explain which type the identity theory is committed to.) The problem of multiple realizability is supposed to show that we should reject type-physicalism. What is this problem? Why does it arise for the identity theory? Is the problem fatal for the identity theory? Explain why or why not.

3. What is functionalism? In answering this question, discuss the notion of a functional property (or state) and explain how functionalism aims to account for multiple realizability. Both Block and Searle argue that functionalism fails to offer sufficient conditions for mentality. Carefully reconstruct either Block or Searle’s argument (not both!) and explain why it is supposed to show that functionalism is false. Does the argument succeed? Explain why or why not.