

Third Paper Assignment

The third paper assignment is due Friday, April 5 at 5:00 in my e-mail inbox: bricker@philos.umass.edu. Same rules as the first two papers. It should be around 800 words (2-3 double spaced pages), but anything between 600 and 1000 words is fine. You should choose some specific issue or argument from one of the articles we have read and try to clearly say in your own words what that issue or argument is. Then try to say something of your own about the issue or argument. It could be something critical, or it could be just asking a question raised by the issue or argument. You can write on any of the six articles we have done since the last paper assignment. That includes two articles by Russell, and the articles by Black, Quine, Moore, and Gettier.

Here are some “prompts” for the six papers. Again, they are meant only to suggest topics you might write on. You do not need to gear the paper to specifically answering the questions asked.

1. Russell concludes his paper with this summary of his argument for universals: “The ground for regarding such a division [between particulars and universals] as unavoidable is the self-evident fact that certain spatial relations imply diversity of their terms, together with the self-evident fact that it is logically possible for entities having such spatial relations to be wholly indistinguishable as to predicates.” Try to unpack this, and explain in your own words what Russell’s argument for universals is.
2. It is often suggested that Black’s two globes world is not a counterexample to the Identity of Indiscernibles because the globes differ in their spatial location. After presenting the Identity of Indiscernible and Black’s proposed counterexample, consider this objection and give some response.
3. Present in your own words Quine’s criterion of ontological commitment. Are there cases where we assert existentially quantified claims in English (claims of the form “there are Fs such that ...” or “there exist Fs such that ...”) that don’t seem to commit us to accepting Fs into our ontology? How might a defender of Quine’s criterion respond to such cases?
4. Present Moore’s “proof of an external” world. Then discuss whether his proof gives us reason to reject a skeptical hypothesis such as that we are brains in a vat.
5. Present Russell’s distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description, and then discuss his “fundamental principle” on p. 194. Explain why Russell thinks the principle must be true and/or give some illustrations of the principle.
6. Gettier’s counterexamples to the analysis of knowledge as justified, true belief suggest that something more is needed for genuine knowledge. After presenting one of Gettier’s cases (or even better, a “Gettier case” of your own), consider what that missing ingredient might be.