

Midterm 1 – October 7, 2015

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Student #: \_\_\_\_\_

- There are a total of 30 points
- All answers must be in paragraphs with complete sentences
- Bullet points will be penalized
- If you run out of space, continue your answer on the back of the test paper INDICATING CLEARLY which answers are being continued

**Short Answer (1-3 paragraphs) *each short answer question is worth 3 points:***

1. In 'Epiphenomenal Qualia,' Jackson presents a thought experiment about Mary. Provide a brief summary of her story.

Mary is a scientist who specializes in colour vision. She grows up in a black and white room, never seeing colours, but learning everything there is to know about colour vision. She eventually learns all of the physical facts there are to know about colour vision. One day she leaves her black and white room for the first time, and finally sees colours first-hand. According to Jackson, once she sees colours, Mary finally learns what it is like to see them. Since Mary already knew all of the physical facts about colour vision, the fact that she learns something new when she leaves her room entails that there are non-physical facts about consciousness, experience or 'what it's like.'

2. Briefly explain Churchland's critique of thought experiments in 'The Hornswoggle problem.'

Churchland's critique of thought experiments concerns the elements of intuition or imagination that contribute to them. She thinks that thought experiments are 'feeble' because they just express what their makers think is the case, rather than what is actually the case. She prefers actual evidence from the neurosciences to the imaginary evidence supplied in arguments against a physical account of consciousness by thinkers such as Nagel, Jackson, or Chalmers. She compares the thought experiment of imagining beings that are physically identical to persons but not conscious to imagining a possible world in which gases do not heat-up even when their molecules move at greater and greater velocity. She points out that the conceivability of such a world does not invalidate the reduction of heat to kinetic energy.

3. In 'What is it like to be a bat?' Nagel says that even though it might be impossible for humans to know what it is like to be a bat, there are facts about what it is like to be a bat. How does he defend the idea that there can be unknowable facts against people who might doubt that such facts can exist?

To defend the idea that there can be unknowable facts, Nagel asks the reader to consider the position of intelligent Martians (or bats) who are trying to figure out what it is like to be a human. Such creatures may be unable to grasp what human experience is like, but we know they would be wrong to conclude from this that humans lack subjective experience. We know they would be wrong because from our own points of view, it is clear that there is something it is like to be a person. Therefore, we should expect that there are genuine facts about various organisms' conscious experience even if we are unable to know such facts.

4. In 'Explaining the "magic" of consciousness,' Dennett describes Fodor as "exposing and endorsing the very idea that is causing all the trouble." What is it about Fodor's view that Dennett takes to be problematic?

Fodor insists that a person must be constituted by more than just all the physical states of the brain. Specifically, Fodor thinks that a person must somehow exist beyond her physical states so that she can be described as 'in charge' of those physical states. Dennett describes this view as 'homuncular' or 'the Cartesian theatre,' and he thinks it is problematic because it prevents thinkers from realizing that all the work apparently performed by persons' minds is distributed across 'various lesser agencies' throughout the brain. According to Dennett, once it is realized that all the features of mental life are accomplished by non-conscious systems in the brain, there is no reason to think that consciousness is a non-physical phenomenon.

5. In 'Self is Magic' Wegner provides three reasons that *the illusion of conscious will* may have evolved. List and briefly explain each.

Wegner suggests that the illusion of conscious will could have evolved because it provides humans with systems of (1) social signaling, (2) social task allocation, or (3) social control. *Social signaling* refers to the way the illusion of conscious will provides humans with previews of actions they might perform, which allows persons to communicate about their likely behaviours. This is useful for humans because it allows us to avoid potentially destructive confrontations that would result if we weren't able to communicate our intentions. *Social task allocation* refers to the way that the illusion of conscious will provides humans with experiences of performing particular tasks well or poorly, which allows for people to discover niches in which their particular skills are beneficial. *Social control* refers to the way that the illusion of conscious will makes people ready to accept responsibility for their actions, which in turn enables societies to develop systems of punishment and reward.

**Long Answer (1-2 pages) this question is worth 15 points:**

1. In 'The Phenomenal Stance' Robbins and Jack present an explanation for why many people find it difficult to believe that persons are entirely physical entities. What is this explanation?

Make sure to discuss all the different stances brought up by Robbins and Jack, and the evidence they use to establish that each stance corresponds to distinct cognitive capacities.

For a full 15 points on this question, the students need to explain:

- (1) Robbins and Jack delineate 3 different stances that persons can take toward things in the world: the physical stance, the intentional stance, and the phenomenal stance
- (2) The physical stance involves looking at things in the world as entirely physical entities, and predicting their behaviour on the basis of laws of nature (or folk-physics)
- (3) The intentional stance involves looking at things in the world as agents with beliefs, desires, goals, and plans, and predicting their behaviour on the basis of these (or mind-reading or folk-psychology)
- (4) The phenomenal stance involves looking at things in the world as capable of having subjective experience, or feelings.
- (5) Robbins and Jack support their claims about the distinctness (or autonomy) of these stances by appealing to three different psychological disorders that involve deficits particular to each stance: sufferers of Williams syndrome have an impaired capacity to take the physical stance; sufferers of autism have an impaired capacity to take the intentional stance; sufferers of psychopathy have an impaired ability to take the phenomenal stance.
- (6) Robbins and Jack claim that each of the 3 stances recruit different neural systems in the brain.
- (7) They describe the human brain as 'balkanized,' meaning that the brain is not always able to integrate information from across different neural networks.
- (8) Specifically, they claim that the human brain is not able to effectively integrate information resulting from taking the physical stance and the phenomenal stance, which is why for many people, when they think of the brain, they are not able to see it as the site of consciousness. Thinking about the brain activates the physical stance, and thinking about persons' conscious experiences involves the phenomenal stance; since humans cannot take both stances at the same time, it can be difficult to imagine that the purely physical brain could be the cause of conscious experiences. According to Robbins and Jack, this phenomenon (the balkanized brain) explains the occurrence of scepticism about physicalist theories of consciousness.

\*\*It's not necessary that the students convey Robbins and Jack's own view, which is that consciousness CAN be explained physically. However, if they describe Robbins and Jack as arguing against physical accounts of consciousness, instead of (the correct view: ) trying to diagnose what they take to be an unfortunate but surmountable stumbling block in the way of such accounts, points should be deducted.\*\*