**4/4/19: Putnam-Inspired Anti-Skepticism 2: Problems** Readings 12,13Phil. 270

**“Begging the Question”/Circularity**

-Worry: the premises of any valid argument together imply the argument’s conclusion, so don’t they in some sense together “beg the question”? What could we mean by “beg the question” that wouldn’t apply to any valid argument?

-track record arguments show (I think) that whether an argument begs the question depends on how one has access to the truth of the premises, and so cannot be a purely formal matter (having to do with the form of the arguments).

[-application to Kramer?]

**Initial Problem, at least for the Dilemma Arg. (see last sheet, “How Strong a Form of Semantic Externalism Do These Arguments Need?”):**

-Dilemma argument seems to require “high-grade” SE, on which BIVs are thinking something true when they think the words “I’m not a BIV.” That’s not clearly true. And in fact, Putnam himself seems to have doubts about it (12: p. 37.6,.7). The Compatibilist Argument has a big advantage here in that it requires only a very modest form of S.E.: it can be fueled just by the causal constraint. Well, so long as we use Putnam’s BIV scenario. But….

**Problem: Other BIV Scenarios:** both arguments have a big problem with other BIV scenarios, like recent envatment versions of the BIV hypothesis (13: pp. 76.8-77.6; P’s very skeptic-friendly scenario is at 12: p. 31.4). On these versions of the BIV hypothesis, it seems, and is consistent even with the causal constraint, that BIVs mean *tree* by “tree,” *hand* by “hand,” and *vat* by “vat,” and so a key premise of each argument fails. (Exercise: identify the premise that fails for each argument from the last hand-out.)

**Refuting the Skeptic**. Putnam’s response (or, well, the Putnam-inspired response) falls into a long tradition in which anti-skeptics attempt to refute the skeptic, to prove that the skeptic wrong (see 13: pp. 66.9-67.6). This is done by means of arguments for anti-skeptical results [often, for the likes of O; but also often, and in Putnam’s case, for ~H], that, in order to be “proofs”, start from premises that do not “beg the question” against the skeptic. Since it’s the “external world skeptic” who is typically in question, the premises available for such a “proof” are limited to two classes: a) simple obvious facts about one’s own states of consciousness (what’s transpiring in one’s own mind); and b) clearly intuitable claims about facts that are metaphysically necessary.

-example of Descartes

**Refuting the Skeptic and the Compatibilist Argument:** Does SE expand certainty, or doubt? Given SE, does the presumed certainty we have about our own mental states seep out into the external world (since we couldn’t have those thoughts without the external world being certain ways), or does the presumed uncertainty of our grasp of the external world seep into our grasp of the contents of our own thoughts?!

-This seems a general problem. At least there’s room to suspect that however our anti-skeptical argument went, the skeptic would then balk. Look, when you’re challenged to “prove” there’s an external world, or that some skeptical hypothesis is false, and all you’re allowed to use are facts about what you’re thinking, together with metaphysically necessary principles you can see to be true in some apriori way, it seems your “proof” is going to have to be of something like this form: I’m having this thought; I couldn’t be having this thought unless [anti-skeptical conclusion]; hence, [anti-skeptical conclusion]. But I suspect that however we were able to make the case for “I couldn’t be thinking this unless…,” the skeptic’s response would be, “Well, then, maybe you should worry about whether you’re really thinking that.” (To which I’m inclined to respond: “Wait, I should be worried that I’m really thinking ***what***? If I’m thinking it within the worry, am I not just plain thinking it, too?”)

**Problem of Heroism:** 13: pp. 78.7-84.1

A “heroic” response to AI is one that tries to *make* the argument’s first premise not apply. But then does it leave non-philosophers (and, really, philosophers, too) behind?

**Moore’s “ ‘Proof’ of an an External World”**

**What’s the Alternative?**

At 13: pp. 66.7-69.6, starting with Moore, and including Nozick, I give a little sampling of recent-ish philosophers who battle skepticism without trying to refute it. But what method of battling can we be talking about here? One that *does* engage in question-begging?

Answer to come…