

Question Set 1

Due September 4th at 8pm. Submit your work in PDF or Word format, through Canvas.

Part A. Questions

Typical answers should be about a paragraph per question (3-6 sentences). Be direct and to-the-point, and use simple words and short sentences.

Regina Rini

Deepfake technology allows the production of ultra-realistic video recordings that show actual people (e.g. politicians) doing and saying things they never actually did or said (see for instance [these remarks](#) on the threat of deepfakes by President Obama).

1. Rini argues that, in addition to their ability to deceive us directly, deepfakes will also undermine our ability to obtain knowledge from regular, unfaked recordings. Explain why she thinks this.
2. Explain what Rini means by an “epistemic backstop.” (1-3 sentences)
3. Using this notion of an epistemic backstop, explain why Rini thinks that, besides recordings, other sources of information about current events will also be negatively impacted by the existence of deepfakes.
4. Do you agree with Rini’s predictions about the negative impact of deepfakes? If you disagree, say exactly which prediction you disagree with and why. If you agree, what measures do you think could be taken to mitigate the negative impact of deepfakes?

Descartes

5. Give an example of a time you began to doubt something you had believed all your life, or found it to be mistaken. Did you find that that discovery affected your confidence in other strongly held beliefs as well?

6. Descartes claims that he cannot know for sure whether or not he is dreaming, and concludes on this basis that it is also doubtful whether or not he really has hands. Explain how those two claims are connected.
7. Later on, Descartes also claims that he cannot know for sure whether he is being deceived by an evil demon. This makes him doubt even more things. Explain why the evil demon argument licenses a stronger skepticism than the dreaming argument. (In other words, explain why the possibility of being deceived by an evil demon licenses some doubts that were not suggested by the dreaming hypothesis.)
8. In the Second Meditation, Descartes goes on a search for beliefs that are so certain that they are completely beyond reasonable doubt. Do you think you have any beliefs like that? If so, give an example of such a belief, and explain why no skeptical argument could ever make you doubt that belief. If not, discuss the best example you can think of of a belief that seems completely certain, and explain why even that belief can be subjected to reasonable doubt.

Nick Bostrom

9. Nick Bostrom argues that it is possible that we might be living in a computer simulation. According to that hypothesis, we are not really flesh-and-blood creatures, but sophisticated versions of the inhabitants of *The Sims*, running on an extremely powerful computer made by some futuristic civilisation. Explain how this scenario could be used in an argument for Skepticism.
10. How do you think this Bostrom-inspired Skeptical argument compare to Descartes' Evil Demon argument? Do you find it more convincing or less convincing? Give reasons.

Part B. Definitions

Define each of the following terms as accurately as you can. Write in full sentences, use your own words, and give examples where helpful.

11. **Skepticism**

12. **Fallibilism**

13. **Dogmatism**
14. **Evil Demon**
15. **Argument**
16. **Premise**
17. **Epistemology**
18. **Knowledge**
19. **Belief**
20. **Justification**