

24.01 Classics of Western Philosophy
Spring 2006

SECOND ESSAY TOPICS

Due Date: Two days after Lec #23

Please write an 8-page essay on *one* of the topics below. Make sure you refer to the relevant texts in support of the points you are developing in your essay.

1. After considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, I am, I exist, is necessarily true when ever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind. (Descartes, *Meditation II*.)

Explain and evaluate the argument in this part of the *Meditations*. What is special about the proposition 'I exist', according to Descartes? What problem is Descartes aiming to solve? What role does the argument play in the broader scheme of the *Meditations*?

2. Explain and evaluate Hume's account of our idea of causation or necessary connection, in the *Enquiry*. In what way does he criticize our ordinary idea of it? Do you find his arguments successful? What alternative, if any, does Hume offer to our ordinary idea of causation?

3. What, if anything, is wrong with lying, according to Kant, in the *Foundation for the Metaphysic of Morals*? How plausible do you find Kant's account of the wrongness of lying?

- 4.

We must...if possible, find, in our own purely private experiences, characteristics which show, or tend to show, that there are in the world things other than ourselves and our private experiences. (Russell, *Problems of Philosophy* Chapter II.)

Why must we? What, in Russell's opinion, is the foundation for our belief in things other than ourselves and our private experiences? How strong is that foundation? Do you think his assessment of the situation is right?