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Reading Questions for February 1

These questions covers a reading by U. T. Place called “Is Consciousness a Brain Process?” and then also some abstracts from your group members. The answers do not have to be turned in. You will probably have to read more than once to get the answers.

Background:

Today we’re starting to look at identity theory, which is (roughly) the theory that mental processes are brain processes. We’ll read an article by U. T. Place defending this view. Then, we’ll have small group discussions of your abstracts (we’ll be continuing these on Wednesday).

Questions:

1. In the first paragraph of his second section (pages 44-5), Place says that he is not claiming that cognition statements are analyzable into statements about brain processes. Why doesn’t he want to claim this? Is he right?
2. In the final two paragraphs of his second section (pages 45-6), Place introduces the sense of “is” he is talking about when he says that consciousness is a process in the brain. What is this sense, and how does it differ from other senses of “is.”
3. (*) In section four (pages 47-8), Place discusses some cases (one involving clouds and masses of tiny particles in suspension, one involving lightning and electrical charges, and one involving the stages of the moon and the movement of the tides). Which case does he think is closest to that of consciousness and brain processes? How do the cases help him defend his conclusion that consciousness is a process in the brain? Is his defense plausible? Why?

4. (*) In section five (pages 48-50), Place describes an argument against his view that he thinks rests on something he calls “the phenomenal fallacy.” What does he mean by “the phenomenal fallacy” and how is it connected to the argument in question? Is Place right that it is a fallacy? Why?
5. Here are some questions to think about when reading your peers’ abstracts:
 - (a) Is it clear what the person will be trying to accomplish in their paper?
 - (b) Does the person give arguments? If so, are their arguments sound? Are there objections they should be aware of?
 - (c) Does the person offer objections to other people’s arguments? If so, are there responses to their objections you can think of?
 - (d) Does the person introduce concepts? If so are each of the concepts they introduce clear?
 - (e) Does the person seem to be trying to discuss a huge number of issues very quickly? If so, what would be a good way to help focus the paper so that the person can go in depth?