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Phil Mind

Reading Questions for February 22

These questions cover a reading by Sarah Sawyer called “Internalism and Externalism in Mind.” The answers do not have to be turned in. You will probably have to read more than once to get the answers.

Background:

This week we’re discussing the question “To what degree is the content of our thoughts determined by our external environment?” We’ll start today by reading a book chapter by Sarah Sawyer that discusses a number of positions and arguments in this debate. It should be noted that Sawyer isn’t entirely neutral; she’s on the side of externalists.

Questions:

1. On page 133 Sawyer introduces the terms “internalism” and “externalism.” What do these terms mean?
2. (*) On pages 134-7 Sawyer introduces two different types of “predicative externalism,” namely “natural kind externalism” and “social externalism.” What are these views? What arguments does she consider in favor of them (You can skip the one that occurs in the two paragraphs starting “The final consideration ... ” on page 136)? Are these arguments plausible? Why?
3. (*) On pages 143-5 Sawyer discusses some metaphysical considerations against externalism and some responses on behalf of the externalist? Is what she has to say plausible? Why?
4. (*) On pages 145-6 Sawyer begins her discussion of an epistemic consideration against externalism that she calls “The achievement problem.” (You only need to read up to the end of second full paragraph on 146, i.e. “... irrelevant to questions about self-knowledge.”) What is the problem and what are two responses on behalf of the externalist? Are they plausible? Why?