Revised Reading Assignments and Syllabus:

F  11/18  Introduction (440-447) & Descartes (448-457)
M  11/21  Paulsen (458-461)
      11/23  No Class – Thanksgiving
      11/25  No Class – Thanksgiving
M  11/28  No Class
      11/30  Grayling (462-470)
      12/2   Copi (471-479)
M  12/5   Trefil (491-501) & Shermer (502-504)
      12/7   Hospers (505-508)
      12/9   Hardin (337-345) & Singer (346-355)

FRIDAY, 11/18

There are only two general types of response to the problem of knowledge. This problem has two aspects. First, how do we get our knowledge about ourselves and the world around us? Second, how confident can we be that our knowledge is true, that is, accurately represents the world around us? The rationalists claim that our minds have the ability to know ourselves and external reality without having to use the data from our unreliable senses, and they also claim that this way of knowing ourselves and the external world guarantees that our knowledge is true. The empiricists deny that the mind has this ability and that our knowledge is based on the information from our senses. The skeptics, however, point out that since the data from our senses is unreliable, we really cannot say that we know anything with assurance.

Descartes is our example of rationalism. In the sections of the Meditations we are reading he claims to prove that his own mind is a real existing thing in a wider reality.

1) The first step is to identify what part of his sense experience is doubtful so that his argument will not be grounded on shaky evidence. It turns out that he finds all of his information and knowledge that is derived from sense data is less than certain. He argues for this conclusion by identifying three general reasons for doubting his sense-based knowledge. What are these three general reasons? How do they cast doubt on our knowledge?

2) Descartes' argument that his mind is a real existing thing is: "I think, therefore I am."
Does this argument convince you of anything? If so, of what does it convince you, and why? If not, why not?

**MONDAY, 11/21**

Paulsen is our example of an empiricist, and in the section we are reading he identifies that portion of our total knowledge that is based on sense data. Interestingly enough, he admits that some knowledge is produced in the way the rationalists say, **but** Paulsen claims this knowledge is **not** about external reality.

1) What are the two types of knowledge that Paulsen identifies? Which sciences (or ways of knowing) produce each type of knowledge?

2) Do you agree that the knowledge Paulsen says is fact-based is really fact-based? Do you agree that the other type of knowledge has no relation to the external world?

   The specific problem case is mathematics. Science clearly uses math to describe the orderly processes if the external world (scientific laws are mathematical), yet an empiricist says mathematics is an invention of the mind that bears no relationship to the external world? How do you make sense of these apparently conflicting claims?

**WEDNESDAY, 11/23 – NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING**

**FRIDAY, 11/25 – NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING**

**MONDAY, 11/28 – NO CLASS**

**WEDNESDAY, 11/30**

In the 18th Century, David Hume showed that a certain kind of skepticism followed from the empiricist view of knowledge. If all knowledge about reality is based solely and strictly on sense data, Hume argued, then there appears to be **no** way of assuring that much of the knowledge that we would say we have about the world actually matches the world.

Take, for example, cause and effect. We would say that we have knowledge about causes and their effects. For example, a pool player would say that the cue stick causes the cue ball to move when it hits it, and the cue ball causes the 8 ball to move when it hits it, and so on. Hume would say we do not **see** causality. We see the cue ball hit the 8 ball, and we see the 8 ball move. We may see this many times. But the most we know on the basis of these observations is that the collision of the balls is constantly conjoined with the motion of the 8 ball. Or, as another example, we might say we know that gravitational attraction causes objects to fall when they are dropped. But Hume would say that we see the release of the object, and we see it fall. We do **not** see gravitational attraction.
Even worse, our knowledge is in our minds (or brains), and the world is external to us. How can we know that our knowledge and the world match? We cannot have sense data about the comparison between our knowledge and the world, and even if we could, that would be internal to our minds (or brains) and itself have to be verified as matching reality, *ad infinitum*.

Much philosophical discussion after Hume has been an attempt to prove that he was wrong – that is, that skepticism is an incorrect philosophical theory and that, on the contrary, we definitely can know certain things. Grayling takes a different approach and suggests that skepticism is best understood as a challenge, not as a demand for us to admit we have no reasons for claiming to know anything. And, he suggests, the way to respond to this challenge is to clearly say how we come to know what we say we know. Some contemporary philosophers believe that Hume said the same kind of thing – that is, that people have been wrong in seeing Hume as a skeptic of the kind that Grayling rejects. In class I will develop an answer to the skeptical challenge that these contemporary philosophers say is the one given by Hume.

**Friday, 12/2**

This reading contains Copi’s classic explanation of how the scientific method works. To make his explanation understandable to a non-scientific audience, he compares scientists to detectives – the title for the reading is even “The Detective as Scientist.” Do you think Copi means for you to take this literally? Is he saying that any body of knowledge that is produced by applying the scientific method is therefore science? Would this make sense if he was saying this, or does it take more that use of scientific method to make a body of knowledge count as science? And what about the degree of confidence that we should have in the results from the scientific method? Can the scientific method be applied correctly – even brilliantly – and the resulting knowledge still be false?

**Monday, 12/5**

These articles try to distinguish between science and psuedo-science. Pseudo-science is a body of knowledge that appears to have been produced by applying the scientific method, but which people would say is nevertheless not true. Are there any examples of knowledge claims that you think are based on psuedo-science?

**Wednesday, 12/7**

Hospers discusses some of the conceptual issues surrounding the notion of time travel. Does it make any sense at all to claim that such a thing is possible?
Final Conundrum

Friday, 12/9

The articles by Hardin and Singer provide a good test case for the moral theories that we discussed this semester, as well as some of the other philosophical concepts.

Hardin criticizes the “spaceship earth” metaphor, which is often used by environmentalists to support their ideals of conservation, recycling, and reuse. It also implies that each person (and each society, and each country) has the right to an equal share of resources, food, etc. In its place, Hardin suggests we should use the metaphor “lifeboat earth.” This has a different set of implications, for example, the right by some of the people in the lifeboat to throw others out in order to save themselves, and this in turn implies that each person does not have the right to an equal share (or even any share at all) of resources, food, etc. Which metaphor do you think is correct, and why? Or, if you think they are both incorrect ways of thinking, what is a better metaphor?

Moreover, when looking at the moral theories we examined, what would an Egoist say? Are rich countries like the United States obliged on humanitarian grounds to admit refugees and immigrants? Would a Utilitarian say anything different? What about the perspective of the Golden Rule?

Written Homework #10 – Due in class Friday, December 9.

On the one hand, it is indisputable that the earth has only a finite carrying capacity; that is, considered as a whole system, some combination of population, resource utilization, and waste generation will drive the system to collapse. It might be good, as Hardin tries to do, to capture this situation with a phrase that both reminds us about the truth and suggests helpful responses to it. On the other hand, many proposed solutions appear unjust or immoral. Try to formulate a brief phrase that will do the job but not suggest that we take actions that promote injustice or undermine morality.

Monday, 12/12 – All Course Work Due