

HPS/PI 122

Second Homework Assignment

Instructions: Write an argumentative paper of 1,500 to 2,000 words (3-5 single spaced typed pages). The general guidelines are as follows. First, your paper must critically engage one or more of the topics we have discussed in the first six weeks of class. Second, your paper should not *merely* summarize the position(s) of some of the authors you discuss or describe some factual or technical details; it should in some way locate ideas relative to each other, synthesize those ideas, criticize them, defend them against important objections, or develop them in your own way. Third, the topic of your paper should be of an appropriate scope given the length constraints.

Due Date: You must submit your paper to me by email before 2:30 pm on Thursday, November 15th. Note that there is no class that day.

Grading: This paper is worth 30% of your final grade, and will receive a numerical grade out of 30.

Collaboration: Collaboration on this assignment is encouraged. Students are free to discuss the topics with one another, read each other's papers, and offer suggestions. Any suggestions or ideas contributed by another student must be acknowledged just as you would acknowledge an idea taken from any other source. The only restriction is that each student must write their own paper containing their own ideas and words.

References: All sources used in the writing of your paper must be properly referenced. This applies to material in the course readings, other published material, lecture notes from this class and other classes, material 'published' on the internet, and ideas contributed verbally by other students. Information about proper procedures and formats for references is included in my handout "How not to get BOC'ed," which is posted on the course website. Further information is also available at <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~words/plagiarism/index.html>. Failure to follow these guidelines may result in a lowered grade or even an automatic F in the course; it may also lead to charges being brought before the Board of Control. If you have any questions about these issues, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Advice on Writing a Philosophy Paper: The course website contains several handouts on writing a philosophy paper, as well as links to websites on the topic.

Reading Drafts: I am happy to read drafts of papers, on a time-permitting, first-come, first-served basis. If you get a draft to me early on Monday the 12th, it is likely that I can get it back to you by Tuesday evening. Please indicate whether you would like to receive detailed comments, or only a general sense of whether you are on the right track. Please request the former only if you actually plan to make substantial revisions to your paper based on the feedback.

Topics: The topics offered below are given as suggestions: you may address one of them

as is, you may modify one of these topics, or you may create your own topic. Whatever topic you may choose, your essay should have a title that clearly and accurately reflects what the essay is about. It is strongly recommended that your opening paragraph make clear what the conclusion of your paper is and give as much of the key argument for this conclusion as possible. For example, do not write a paper with the title “On Reflection” and then proceed to simply talk about the principle of Reflection. Better would be a title of “Why Reflection is necessarily satisfied by all rational agents” with an opening paragraph that explains why this is true. If you would like further readings that may be helpful in addressing some of these topics; I recommend starting with the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. I have also put up a number of additional readings that are directly relevant to the papers we have read in class, though it is not always clear exactly how they are relevant without some research. Asking me for advice for what to look at is also a very good idea.

Suggested topics:

Does the Dutch Book Argument show that rational agents have credences that obey the axioms of probability? If not, what does it show?

Is there a general principle that tells us when it is rational to update your credences by conditionalization and when it is not? When you do not conditionalize, what should do you instead?

Christensen argues that while synchronic Dutch Books can tell us that we are irrational if our credences do not conform to the axioms, diachronic Dutch Books can't show us that we ought to conditionalize. Is this difference justified?

What is the relationship between rational agents at one time and at another time? Is there a pragmatic reason to be “coherent”? Or an epistemic one?

How does an agent's degree of belief in some proposition relate to their actions? How does it relate to ideally rational actions?

Do Kyburg and Ericksson and Hájek agree on the problems with defining degrees of belief? If so, why do their conclusions come apart? Who is right?

Do scoring rule arguments show that we ought to be probabilists?

Can there be a “purely epistemic” argument for probabilism or must all such arguments rely on pragmatic considerations?

Joyce argues that in some sense the best degrees of belief would align with the truth values. But other possibilities are that they align with our evidence in some way or perhaps with the objective chances. What should our degrees of belief be aiming at?