

**Philosophy 2330: Science and Society  
Fall 2022, First Long Paper Assignment**

**Purpose:**

The standard unit of philosophical analysis is the argumentative essay. Writing is an extension of thinking. It allows you (and forces you!) to think more deeply about a topic than you are able to do by keeping things 'in your head.' Exposition of someone else's views (including careful description of those ideas, issues, terms and scope) allows you to understand them better, and it is then much easier to critically evaluate these views. Laying out your own argument or that of someone else often forces you to be explicit about connections which can reveal weaknesses in your own thinking which must be acknowledged so they can then either be fixed or can lead to better views overall. Thus the purpose of assigning an essay is both as an effective way to evaluate your learning and progress in the class and to help improve your philosophical skills.

**Instructions:**

You are to write an argumentative paper on some topic relevant to evidence and inference in medicine. Your paper should engage with at least one topic discussed in chapters 7-11 in Jacob Stegenga's book *Care and Cure* and the ensuing class discussion. You are strongly encouraged to expand the outline that you used for your tutorial session though this is not a requirement. The paper should be between roughly 1300 and 1800 words. If you double space and have natural fonts and margins, your essay would be about 4-6 pages.

**Due Date:** Your essay should be uploaded into Blackboard before 11:59pm on Monday, November 14th. (Though late penalties will not apply until after class on Tuesday, November 15th).

**Grading:** This paper will be worth 20 points (20% of your final grade).

**Guidelines:** An argumentative essay is a reasoned defense of some particular claim. A general guideline for a paper like this is that you should spend about half of your time in exposition and half your time in evaluation.

Here are some useful guides to writing philosophy papers:

[https://philosophy.fas.harvard.edu/files/phildept/files/brief\\_guide\\_to\\_writing\\_philosophy\\_paper.pdf](https://philosophy.fas.harvard.edu/files/phildept/files/brief_guide_to_writing_philosophy_paper.pdf) (from Harvard College's Writing Center)

<https://www1.cmc.edu/pages/faculty/akind/Intro01s/Writing.htm> (from Amy Kind)

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html> (from Jim Pryor)

[http://joelvelasco.net/teaching/120/How\\_to\\_Write.pdf](http://joelvelasco.net/teaching/120/How_to_Write.pdf) (from Chris Hitchcock)

Topics:

You may choose to write about any topic relevant to evidence and inference in medicine that was discussed in class. For example, here are some good topics you might choose from. Many others are possible. You don't want your paper to appear trivial (and be too short) so if you think that the answer is easy and obvious then it is probably not a good topic for you to write about.

- 1) Under what conditions is extrapolation justified?
- 2) Why are randomized controlled trials seen as so important for causal inference? Can you get good evidence without them? If you have a good RCT, does that mean that the results will be externally valid and 'exportable' to other contexts?
- 3) What is the best way to measure the effectiveness of a medical intervention? [I am thinking of relative and absolute risk reductions].
- 4) What is the value-free ideal of science and is it correct? What is the argument from inductive risk?
- 5) What is medical nihilism and is it justified?
- 6) Should doctors proscribe placebos to their patients? How does this relate to ethical principles such as the requirement of informed consent?
- 7) Should you (or a person of some specified background) get a mammogram? Or screened for prostate cancer? Or HIV? Or ... What general policies are appropriate for screening? When is screening a good idea in general? (and when is it not?)