

Philosophy 4300 — Paper Assignment #1

You should email your paper to me – joel.velasco@ttu.edu - by 11:00am on Monday, March 25th.

The paper should be an argumentative essay of roughly 3-5 pages (1500-2500 words). It should be relevant to our class so far, but the exact nature of the paper might vary quite broadly. The word count can also vary quite a bit if you do something that involves calculation or more mathematical argument. But it should be a substantial piece of work and not feel like solving a homework problem. Here are some possible topics. Each of these questions could be a paper in itself or a paper could involve a few of these together. Each of these *could* be a topic. But if you look at a question and think, “I have an answer to that one and it takes just a few sentences” then you should not write about that topic.

What is the best rule for decisions under ignorance?

Are all of Resnik’s axioms for preferences required for rationality?

What should we say about context effects or other psychological features of normal humans that seem to show that we violate these axioms all the time? Are we just basically never rational?

What should we say about the dominance rule in cases like studying for a test? Resnik says that the rule just doesn’t apply when states and acts are independent. Can we do better?

Are there good rules for the proper or best way to set up a decision table or tree? When should you divide up states and when should you combine them?

Can the principle of insufficient reason be used in some cases of decision under ignorance? Which cases? How do you know if it is appropriate?

Who is right in the Rawls vs. Harsanyi debate and why?

What reasons could we have for always subjective maximizing expected utility?

Which interpretations of probability make sense in which cases?

Is there a notion of objective probability that makes sense?

What is the best way to spell out the frequentist idea that probabilities just reflect what will happen “in the long run”?

Do Dutch Book arguments really show that our degrees of belief should always satisfy the probability axioms?

Is there a version of the Dutch Book argument that is purely logical or epistemic? Or does it have to be a practical argument?

Can Dutch Book arguments show that when we learn we should always update our subjective probabilities by the principle of conditionalization?

It should be obvious from your paper that it is a relevant topic, but if you have questions about whether a certain paper topic would be appropriate, please come and see me.