

Hum 9: Winter 2013

Final Paper Assignment

Instructions: Write an argumentative paper of between 1,500 and 2,000 words (around 3-4 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 at some time during the class (any week). 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. A good guide to writing is to aim the paper as if the audience is your fellow classmates. Yes, they have read the material but it is okay to remind them of it. The paper should aim to try to convince them of some particular thesis or point of view.

Due Date: You must submit a complete draft of your final paper to me by email before 2:30 pm on Thursday, March 7th. I will return your paper with comments on it by email and then the final version of your paper will be due Tuesday, March 19th.

Grading: In total, the portfolio for this paper includes the draft and the final paper that you produce from it (in response to my comments). I will grade it as if I were giving you a numerical grade in the class. As such, the grade would be 40% of your final grade, and will receive a numerical grade out of 40.

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: You already have to get a draft of this paper to me to be looked at so I will not be looking at 'drafts of drafts'. Of course you can (and should) still talk to me

about the paper. You can meet with me in person or by email and I will be happy to help you write the draft or write the final version of the paper in response to my earlier comments.

Topics: The thesis statements offered below are given as suggestions: you may use one of them as is, you may modify one, or you may create your own. 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 “Is there a God?” and then proceed to simply talk about the different views about God. Better would be a title of “Why Paley’s Argument from Design is Still Relevant Today” 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.

You may write on any topic relevant to the class except for one that I deem ‘too close’ to the topic of your first paper. Examples of too close would be one paper about what ‘knowledge’ means and a second paper about what ‘justification’ means. If your first paper was about the meaning of knowledge, it is acceptable to write about whether we can know that there is a god. If you are unsure whether your topic might be too close to your first PLEASE ask me.

Here are some sample theses statements that you might defend:

- 1) Salmon’s suggestion of ‘rational probabilities’ is a solution to the problem of induction.
- 2) There is no solution to the problem of induction. There is no way to justify inductive methods. That is okay, science is just fine without them.
- 3) Science necessarily allows for the possibility of testing via experimentation. Claims that cannot be tested in this way are not scientific.
- 4) If anything can pass the Turing Test, it would automatically be a thinking thing because behaving as though you are thinking *just is* what thinking consists in.
- 5) While a computer might be able to pass the Turing Test, this does not mean that it would necessarily be conscious. In fact, it is impossible for a machine to be conscious.
- 6) It is clear we have free will. But free will is incompatible with determinism. That means our decisions must not be determined.

7) We do not have free will.

8) Every action that any person does, even if it seems altruistic, is really 'selfish' in the sense that it is done because the person believed it to be in their own self interest.