

Hum 9 First Paper Assignment

Instructions: Write an argumentative paper of approximately 1,500 words (5 double-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 five weeks of class. Second, your paper should not *merely* summarize the position(s) of some of the authors you discuss; it should in some way locate them 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 the start of class on Thursday, May 3rd.

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 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 by Sunday, April 30th, it is likely that I can get it back to you by Tuesday evening.

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. 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. Asking me for advice for what to look at is also a very good idea.

- 1) Is there a sound version of the cosmological argument?
- 2) Is the idea of a universe with an infinitely long past a coherent notion? If so, how does that affect the soundness of the cosmological argument?

3) Does the problem of evil show that there is no God? Does it show that if there is a God, then this God or Gods must have particular properties?

4) Swinburne tries to give some particular reasons that any God would allow evil in the world. Do the reasons that he gives count as good reasons? Are there other reasons that you can think of?

5) Does Pascal's argument show that it is rational to believe in God even if you have no evidence for the existence of God?

6) What is the many Gods problem for Pascal's Wager? Is this a genuine problem for the soundness of Pascal's Wager? How could Pascal or some other defender of the wager respond to this problem?

7) Clifford argues that it is always wrong to believe things without sufficient evidence. Is there a plausible version of this principle that is correct? If so, what counts as sufficient evidence?

8) Does Turri's response to Gettier cases succeed? Will his analysis of knowledge work in general?

9) Is there any possible way to refute "deep" skepticism based on claims that we might be brains in vats, there might be evil demons constantly deceiving us, or that the world might have been created five minutes ago?

10) Does a contextual account of knowledge such as David Lewis's solve the skeptical worries? Does it make sense that we can lose (or gain) knowledge without changing our evidence at all but merely by changing the context that we are in?

Note that you may write about the problem of induction, but we will not be talking about this topic in class until two days before the paper is due. If you read about the topic ahead of time (and I would strongly recommend reading the Salmon piece for 5/3 early as well) and you want to write about this topic, you may. In that case, I would recommend that you talk to me in about your idea in advance so that you can get started soon enough to complete the assignment on time.