

## **Hum 9: Winter 2013**

### **First Paper Assignment**

**Instructions:** Write an argumentative paper of approximately 1,500 words (around 3 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 four 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, February 14th. Note that there is no class that day.

**Grading:** In total, the portfolio for this paper includes the outline you bring to me to discuss and the final paper that you produce from it (in response to our discussion). I will grade it as if I were giving you a numerical grade in the class. As such, the grade would be 35% of your final grade, and will receive a numerical grade out of 35.

**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 11th, 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 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.

Here are some sample theses statements that you might defend:

- 1) There is a sound version of the cosmological argument and so therefore there is a God. [And in the paper, you give it and defend it]
- 2) Paley is correct that it is possible to detect intelligent design in some objects.
- 3) A version of Pascal’s Wager shows us that there is a good reason to believe in some type of God or other, but not which God we should believe in.
- 4) Clifford is correct. Our beliefs should always be based on evidence. Just because it might make you happier to believe something you have evidence against does not give you a good reason to believe it.
- 5) While we should typically base our beliefs upon the evidence, theological and moral beliefs are special cases since these beliefs will lead to a better society over all.
- 6) Swinburne’s Free Will based Theodicy fails since God could perfectly well create creatures with free will that are just as valuable as us but whose free choices never lead to bad consequences.
- 7) The concept of omnipotence is incoherent.
- 8) Swinburne is incorrect when he claims that we need a theodicy to understand why God would allow the evil in the world. Because we know so little about the future and the consequences of alternative choices, it is not reasonable to claim that the problem of evil is a serious problem without a theodicy defense.
- 9) Knowledge is justified true belief. In the first Gettier case, Jones is not actually justified in believing that the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.

10) We can know that we are not dreaming/a brain in a vat/in an experience machine/in the matrix.