

Essay 2 Prompts

PHIL 101

Instructions: Choose exactly **one** of the following five questions, and answer it in **1200-1400 words**. Try to make your answer as **straightforward** as possible; the aim is to sound clear, not smart. Be sure that you read the questions carefully and that you answer every part of the prompt. You are free to draw on your own ideas—however, make sure that in your response you do not merely state your opinion, but clearly explain your view and provide reasons for thinking your position is correct.

1. On p. 52, Hume says that it is natural to think that “instances, of which we have had no experience, must resemble those, of which we have had experience, and that the course of nature continues always uniformly the same.” Explain why Hume thinks that we are *not* justified in assuming the uniformity of nature. How does this lack of justification affect how reasonable it is to use inductive reasoning? Do you find Hume’s argument persuasive? Why or why not? If you *do* find it persuasive, do you think we ought to stop reasoning inductively, given that our use of induction is unjustified? Why or why not?
2. On pp. 254-256 of *Laws and their Role in Scientific Explanations*, Hempel discusses why he thinks that teleological explanations are not scientific explanations in the sense described by him in the first part of the chapter (or, if they are, they are not really teleological). First, explain what “teleological explanations” are. Then, explain why Hempel does not think that there are any fundamentally teleological explanations in the case of human action. Do you agree with Hempel’s assessment? Why or why not?
3. Explain why Pascal thinks that it is reasonable to believe in God, even if there is no concrete evidence of his existence. Explain Pascal’s advice for those who wish to believe in God, but claim that they are unable to do so. Do you agree with Pascal that it is possible to believe in something that one does not have any direct evidence for? Why or why not? Do you agree with him that we should believe in God on pragmatic grounds? Why or why not?
4. First, summarize the argument from evil as Adams explains it on pp. 122-123. Try to make your summary as straightforward and clear as possible. Next, briefly explain **either** Nelson Pike’s response **or** Alvin Plantinga’s response to the argument from evil. (See sections 3 and 4.) Then, explain some of the reasons why Adams finds this response lacking. Do you think Pike’s/Plantinga’s response is successful? If so, where does Adams go wrong in her criticism? If not, what are some of the implications of their failure to address the problem of evil?
5. According to Feldman, what is problematic about a group of respectful theists and atheists who disagree about the existence of God and nevertheless think that the people with the differing opinion are reasonable? Explain how a reasonable disagreement differs from the position Feldman calls “naive relativism”. What components are required for a genuine “reasonable disagreement” between epistemic peers? Why does Feldman think that there cannot be such reasonable disagreements? Do you agree with Feldman or not? If you agree, outline some of the consequences of this view. If you disagree, explain where Feldman goes wrong.