

PHIL2611 Paper assignment #2

This assignment should take roughly 4–5 pages. Again, I strongly recommend use of plain and simple language—the issues can become subtle and complicated, and highfalutin language can make things even more unclear. Format it as follows: double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, normal 1" page margins, stapled.

3 and 4 are
the most
important
sections—
focus on
them

Organization is very important. Your paper should have five sections.

1. Introduce your paper. Briefly explain what you are going to do in the paper.
2. Give a brief and clear explanation of the particular issue you are concerned with, and some of the alternative positions one might take on the issue.
3. **Lay out a point people have made (an argument for a specific position, an objection to a specific argument, etc.).**
4. **Either criticize this point, or defend it against objections.**
5. Briefly summarize what you've done with your paper.

Suggested topics (although feel free to write on anything relevant to our historical readings):

- Is Mill right that knowledge requires familiarity with rival points of view and a social atmosphere of open discussion where these points of view are freely advocated and criticized? Should this extend to all points of view, or are some of them beyond the pale?
- Is Hume right that religious miracle reports should be dismissed without further examination? Is it epistemically irresponsible to write off an entire category of evidence?
- Can Pascal's Wager be defended against any of the many objections directed at it? In particular, you might ask, does it really matter that God might possibly send nonbelievers to heaven and believers to hell? Is the wager intellectually dishonest?
- Can Clifford's strict evidentialism be maintained? Can he fend off James's objections regarding fear of dupe and moral questions? Does he have "sufficient evidence" to accept inherited methods of inquiry? What about foundational beliefs?
- Is James's pragmatism correct in holding that important epistemic questions can ultimately only be determined by one's "passional nature"? Does he make a good case for thinking it's okay to follow your heart and hold religious beliefs?

As before, notice that the paper should focus on a *specific* point. Don't write your paper on *evidentialism*—that topic is too big. Don't even write your paper on *Clifford's evidentialism*—that topic is still too big. Write on a *specific* objection to an argument or a *specific* version of an argument—something small and manageable.

If it helps, have a look at the secondary articles I emailed to you. Or go to Google Scholar and see if any articles look interesting.

With such a small topic, you might wonder: what can I say about it? Start by thinking of problems with the argument, or reasons why the objection won't work, or criticisms commonly raised—this should be fairly easy, because there are always going to be problems. If you think you've come up with a really serious problem, then there's your paper: offer a criticism. Or, if you think all the problems are solvable, then there's your paper: defend against objections.

Due Tuesday, 30 Apr.