

24.00: Problems of Philosophy
Prof. Sally Haslanger
September 22, 2005

FIRST PAPER TOPICS

Write a short (5-7 page) paper on ONE of the following topics. Be sure to follow the "Guidelines for Papers" that appears as page 2 of this assignment and is available on the MIT Server. Page numbers in parentheses refer to *Reason and Responsibility*, 12th edition. Remember to submit an electronic copy of your paper to your TA.

Papers are due Thursday 10/6 or Friday 10/7 in your recitation section.

1. Consider the argument (borrowing from Anselm, *RR* 7):
 - i) That which can be conceived not to exist is not God.
 - ii) Therefore, God exists.

Elaborate this argument (the one just stated in (i) and (ii)) in a way that shows what is plausible about it. Does it succeed in proving God's existence? Why or why not?

2. Through his dialogue between the brothers Ivan and Alyosha, Dostoevsky asks:
But there are the children, and what am I to do about them? That's a question I can't answer. For the hundredth time I repeat, there are numbers of questions, but I've only taken the children, because in their case what I mean is so unanswerably clear. Listen! If all must suffer to pay for the eternal harmony, what have children to do with it, tell me, please! It's beyond all comprehension why they should suffer, and why they should pay for the harmony. Why should they, too, furnish material to enrich the soil for the harmony of the future? (Dostoevsky, *RR* 84)

What is Ivan's point? Do you think there is an argument in this passage for atheism? Why or why not?

2. Pascal believes that atheism is irrational. What is his argument for this claim? Do you agree? Why or why not?

3. Evidentialism is the view that:
...it is wrong, always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence. (Clifford, *RR* 101)

Critically evaluate this claim. Do you agree? Why or why not?

4. It is sometimes suggested that all stereotypes contain a "kernel of truth," otherwise they would be long ago rejected. Do you agree? Why or why not? Is one ever justified in believing a stereotype?

You may write on a topic of your own design if you submit a proposal in writing to your TA at least 72 hours in advance of the deadline, and it is approved.

GUIDELINES FOR PAPERS

1. All papers should be neatly typed, double-spaced, in an easily readable font. Be sure to include *your* name and *your TA's name* on your paper. For safety, keep copies of your papers. *Please number your pages.* Papers should be turned in at the time and date indicated on the syllabus and on the paper topics.
2. All papers should be within the length guidelines specified. If you have more to say than you can fit within the page limits, pare down your discussion: make sure you have stayed on topic, focus your discussion on the most important points for your argument. However, note that because this is a HASS-D course, you must submit a total of **20 pages** during the term.
3. Essay topics must be taken from the list distributed in class, and your paper should be on *one* topic only. Stick closely to the topic; *be sure you address the question asked.* All papers should be clearly organized around a *thesis*, and should provide *arguments* for it. On some occasions your TA *may* approve an alternative paper topic. If you are interested in writing on a topic of your own design, speak to your TA well in advance of the paper deadline.
4. If you wish to attribute a position to a philosopher we have discussed, be sure to check that the text supports your attribution. On controversial points you should cite textual evidence, e.g., by quotation, or by giving the line numbers of relevant texts in parentheses. It is *imperative* that you indicate when you are quoting or paraphrasing an author, and when you do you *must* cite references to the original text. Failure to do so counts as plagiarism and will be handled accordingly. However, points made in lecture or in class handouts are “common property” for students in this class and may be relied upon in your papers without citation. (More on plagiarism, see syllabus.)
5. Although quotes are helpful, please keep quotation to a minimum. The paper should be, by in large, *in your own words.*
6. You do not need to consult additional secondary sources. If you do, this *must* be acknowledged in the paper. If you quote or paraphrase a secondary source, this must be attributed to the author; if you relied on texts in your preparation which were not assigned in class, include reference to them in a bibliography at the end of the paper (even if you don't quote from them). (More on plagiarism, see syllabus.)
7. Papers are due at the date and time specified. After that time papers will be considered late and will be penalized one third of a grade per day, i.e., from a B+ to a B. If you foresee special difficulties with the deadline, speak to your TA well in advance.