

Term Paper Assignment

Paper Proposal Due: April 24th, 8pm

Draft date: May 6th

Due date: May 15th, 8pm

Word count: 1500-2000 words (typed; no other formatting requirements)

Assignment. Write a term paper about one of the topics we covered in class. You can pick any topic except the Ravens Paradox, which we already covered for the short essay. Your aim in this paper should be to communicate your ideas to an intelligent but philosophically ignorant reader. More concretely, you will be arguing for a particular view about the topic, and consider at least one counterargument or objection. Your argument need not be original.

On April 24th, you should hand in an *outline* for your paper through Blackboard, which will be about half a page long. I will give you feedback on your outline, and recommend additional reading if you want me to. There will be *no extensions* for the outline!

You should arrange a time to meet with the classmate you are partnered with on May 7th or May 8th, so that you can give each other *feedback on your drafts*. You should send them a draft of your paper by May 6th at the latest.

The deadline for the paper is May 15th, and you should hand in your work through Blackboard. Given that I will have seen your outlines, there is no point in keeping it anonymous — so you can put your name on it, and credit your partner by name for any ideas they contributed.

Outline. Your outline should take up about half a page, or a page double-spaced. It should specify:

- ▶ The *thesis* you will be arguing for.
- ▶ An outline of the *structure* of your paper, listing the sections.
- ▶ A rough *description of your main argument*, in a few sentences.
- ▶ A list of all the *literature* you will be engaging with. You can ask me for recommendations.

You could also include other information besides, such as the title of the paper, the objection(s) you will be addressing, etc.

Thesis. This is the view you are arguing for in your paper. Here are a couple of examples:

In some cases, testimony is sufficient evidence to believe in a miracle

Statistical evidence should always be admissible in court

Sleeping Beauty should have credence 1/2 that the coin will land Heads

Ramsey's account of partial belief gets things backwards: actions should be explained in terms of beliefs, rather than the other way around.

Evidential Decision Theory makes the right prediction in Newcomb's Problem

If determinism is true, every event either has chance 0 or chance 1

It can sometimes be useful to formulate a *research question* before you come up with a thesis. In that case, your thesis will be some specific answer to that question. Most people pick a thesis they actually agree with, but that is not necessary. It is also fine to argue for a thesis simply because there is interesting argument for it that you wish to explore.

Literature. Besides what we have read in class, I recommend reading one additional paper on your topic — but this is optional. You can look for further reading yourself, or you can leave it to me. I will give everyone who asks for it a literature recommendation as part of the feedback on your outline.

Originality. Your essay must be written by you and should have clear citations for any ideas you have taken from other people. But your argument itself does not have to be original. A good explanation, in your own words, of arguments and objections taken from the literature can get you an A.

Writing Advice. You can find some useful resources about how to write a good philosophy essay on my website www.danielhoek.com/teaching.

Sample Outline:

Thesis. Non-black non-ravens confirm the hypothesis *All ravens are black*, but only slightly.

Structure and Argument Sketch.

1. An introduction explaining why the Ravens Paradox forms a threat to Nicod's criterion.
2. A section arguing, using a Bayesian analysis, that, because the number of non-black things is far greater than the number of ravens, the hypothesis "all ravens are black" is only very slightly confirmed by a non-black non-raven, and much more strongly confirmed by a black raven. I conclude that the paradox can be resolved without giving up Nicod's criterion.
3. A section which considers the objection that the observations from "indoor ornithology" in fact fails to confirm the hypothesis *All ravens are black* at all.

Literature:

1. Peter Godfrey Smith, "Induction and Confirmation," in his *Theory and Reality*.
2. Michael Strevens, "Notes on Bayesian Confirmation Theory."
3. One additional paper.