

Paper proposal: due by 5 pm on Tuesday, **Dec. 1**

Paper: 2,500 – 3,500 words (about 7 -10 pages) long, due by 5 pm on Thursday, **Dec. 10**

Both of these due dates have been moved back a bit from what was specified on the syllabus. This is mainly due to my classes this semester having fewer students than usual (allowing me to do my grading in less time). You need not wait until these deadlines to submit either piece of work: Proposals can now be submitted at any time, and I should be able to get them back to you within a couple of days (and hopefully more quickly than that). The papers themselves can be submitted any time after the proposals have been approved.

Course papers must directly, substantially, and critically engage with one or more of the assigned readings for our course, other than Descartes. (It is alright for you to write about Descartes in your second paper, but he should not be the main focus, as the first papers were aimed primarily at him. If you will pay considerable attention to Descartes (short of making him your main focus), explain in your paper proposal how the material about him in the second paper will relate to and differ from what you covered in your first paper.) Successful papers will clearly explain the issues involved and the key argumentative moves made in the readings, and will also advance the discussion/argument in significant ways with new considerations or lines of argument of your own. In most cases, a student's best paper topic will be where they have their best idea about the material we've covered in the course. Though other sources can be used (being careful to cite them correctly), this is not expected, and excellent papers can be written using only assigned readings for our class (which should also be cited). Papers are to be 2,500 – 3,500 words long (about 7 – 10 pages), and are due by 5 pm on Thursday, Dec. 10, and should be submitted by email attachment to keith.derose@yale.edu.

Those who plan to write on one of the topics specified below should notify me of their choice by email by 5 pm on Tuesday, Dec. 1. Those who substantially modify one of the topics I specify, or who choose to write on another topic altogether (but again, addressing our course readings and topics of discussion) should submit a brief paper proposal (about 1 page, maybe less), in an email message or by email attachment, describing the topic of your paper. I should be able to get approval of these topics back to you quite quickly. (And if you are just reporting your intention to write on one of the topics below, I will reply to verify that I received your report.) In either case, you can change topics by submitting a new proposal, or just notifying me that you have decided to do one of the topics I have

described. Proposals will not be given a letter grade. Their purpose, in addition to prodding some to start work on their course papers, is to give me a chance to check whether your proposed topic is sufficiently relevant to our course. In the proposal, you should state what your topic is, what conclusion(s) you will be arguing for, the basic strategy you plan to employ in arguing for your conclusion, and what readings you will be discussing. It is expected that many papers will concern only one or two of our assigned readings, and in such cases, one fairly short sentence will cover that last item.

Some topics:

1. Compare and critically assess the views of either two or all three of Berkeley, Hume, and Reid, on whether we are rational or justified in believing in mind-independent material objects. Briefly describe the basics of the views of each of the philosophers you treat, but focus in on the aspects of their views that are the basis of your evaluative and comparative conclusions.
2. Explain and critically discuss Michael Huemer's phenomenal conservatism. In class, we focused mainly on the opening of Huemer's paper, and specifically on his views on the nature of appearances, and your paper can be likewise focused on such issues (though you should also explain, if briefly, the role appearances play in justifying our beliefs, according to Huemer). But you can also focus your critical attention on parts of the paper we did not discuss in class.
3. Can a person be irrational and/or unjustified in believing something that they are incapable of not believing? Is there a good and epistemologically important sense in which it can be that they "ought not" to hold a belief that is in that way beyond their control? Critically assess the views of Wolterstorff and Greco on these matters, and explain and defend what you take to be the correct answer to these questions. (Since the relevant parts of Wolterstorff's and Greco's papers can be explained fairly succinctly, this topic should provide lots of room for your own critical, and also perhaps constructive, argumentation.)

Papers can address the readings that we have now yet to get to. If you would to address upcoming readings that take different sides on an issue (perhaps so that you can adjudicate the differences), note that my "Direct Warrant Realism" (in the "Files" for our course on the Canvass page), in its last section (starting at the bottom of p. 167) counters the central argument of Alston's paper. Those looking to

read ahead in search of a possible paper topic could start with that last section of my paper, and then look at Alston, to see if the controversy is something you could sink your argumentative teeth into.