

## Essay Assignment #2

As you know, there are two essays that you will write for this class. The second of those will look like this:

This paper will focus on epistemological or ethical issues connected to the philosophy of the Classical Greek tradition and Early Christian philosophy. The material up for consideration will be everything since essay #1 which is the Greek philosophy beginning with Socrates. So, for this one, I want you to address one of the following three questions: “How did one (or two) of the ancient Greek philosophers think about the concept of truth and how we gain knowledge about the world?” or “How should I behave, morally speaking, and how do I determine what counts as right behavior?” or “Does trying to render Christian faith logically consistent generate insurmountable problems or have theologians provided adequate solutions?” Draw from any of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Hellenistic Philosophers, or the Early Christians. There is a lot you can do here: explore the ideas of one philosopher or some point raised by one, or compare two and assess the nature of their disagreement.

Consider (again, as a way to generate some ideas):

Socrates developed the dialectic method as a way of pursuing a true understanding of some basic concepts of justice or ethics. How did he use the method? Does it, could it, work?

Plato advocates a theory of Forms as a way of establishing a foundation for making true claims about reality. What is that? Is it (or some variation) convincing?

The “Ring of Gyges” story is at the center of a debate over whether justice is the product of authority (or power) or whether there is some objective principle of justice. Examine this debate and take a side.

Plato explores what he takes to be the difference between knowledge and opinion. Examine his definitions and argument. Is it convincing?

Plato’s “allegory of the cave” is meant to illustrate how we are supposed to know reality. How does the allegory work? What does it show? Is Plato’s theory of knowledge convincing?

Aristotle attempted to bring knowledge into the world through focus on the “four causes.”

Aristotle’s ethics is based on developing one’s character in a specific way. How do we know what counts as virtue?

The Stoics and the Hedonists advocated conflicting views of proper behavior. How do they justify their views?

Christian philosophers wrestle with issues generated by the orthodox view of God in Christianity. These include free will, the existence of evil, and demonstrating God’s existence. Address one or more of these issues in Augustine, Boethius and/or Aquinas.

I list these not to necessarily suggest topics (although you could base your essay on anything suggested above) but to generate some ideas about what you might select. Again, reflect on whether there was some

moment during the last few weeks where you thought “that raises interesting points about a theory of knowledge or ethics.” Try to recall that and make it into the basis of some further investigation.

If there is something connected to the material we have covered but you are not sure if it is relevant or if you are not sure it might provide the focus of a good essay, ask me. We can talk about it.

I will certainly be open to paper topics not listed here if you think you have something good.

2 other things:

This essay is more likely than the first to engage you in some research through secondary sources. You don’t have to read the “Complete works of Plato” or anything like that, but see if you can’t find out a little more about the philosopher(s) you focus on than we discussed in class. Again, books are good. If you are good at judging the scholarly nature of web sources, this can work too. Again, provide a bibliography for any outside sources including web sources.

Second, (and again) refer directly to course material. Include some reference to or analysis of something that we read in the course (something that was assigned). This is a way to insure that you anchor your paper to course material. Use the version assigned and cite page numbers from our version.

In an effort to help you focus the essay, I would suggest organizing it in the following way:

Explain the issue you are exploring as it appears in the work of the philosopher you are focusing on. You want to begin with an introduction (with a thesis) but you might quickly move on to an opening exegetical section of the essay. Explain the work.

Second, explore the epistemological, ethical or theological issue(s) at stake. You might interpret the sections you just elaborated. You might come up with examples to further illustrate the issue(s) at stake.

Third, explain and analyze the issue(s).

Fourth, as before, try to put something of your own impressions into the essay. What do you think? Does this have any relevance to anything we worry about today?

If you are having trouble with the assignment, just treat those four things one at a time and you will have an easier time working through the ideas.

If you consider the structure as one that would stifle your creative expression, then ignore it and go with what you prefer. Just be careful to stay focused on the topic.

Feel free to consult with me (or chat) about your topic. I will look at outlines or rough drafts and offer feedback, either written or spoken, at any time.

The essay should be 4-5 pages, typed, double-spaced, with standard fonts and margins, submitted in RL (not VR). ("real life" [on paper], not "virtual reality" [an email attachment])

Have fun with it. Write well.

The essay is Technically due Monday, November 17. Shoot for that if you can.

Since I did not generate this handout until two weeks before that deadline, I will offer another week to anyone who needs it, without penalty. So, the alternative deadline is Monday, November 24.

If you make the first deadline, you will get your essay back quickly, graded, with comments.