

Philosophy 24.211 Second Paper Topics

Write a 6-8 page paper on one of the following topics.
Your paper is due on Wednesday November 26 at 12 PM.
I will read and return your paper the following week,
and you will then rewrite your paper in light of my comments.
As before, please feel free to consult me at any time in your writing process.

1. In "Can empirical knowledge have a foundation?", Bonjour argues that there are no basic beliefs--- that is there are no beliefs which are justified, but not justified on the basis of other beliefs. Explain Bonjour's argument very carefully. (Take about 3 or 4 pages.) Then spend the rest of the paper answering the following question: What does Bonjour's argument show? (If you think that Bonjour's argument shows that there are no basic beliefs, then consider some objections to Bonjour's argument, and explain how Bonjour can respond to those objections. If you think Bonjour's argument does not show that there are no basic beliefs, then explain why. And then explain what the argument does show.)

2. In "What is justified belief?" Goldman claims that a belief is justified just in case it results from a reliable belief forming process. Explain Goldman's proposal in detail (in a page or two). Then evaluate the following counterexample to Goldman's proposal:

Jake is a brain in a vat and so is Earl.
Jake is a very careful in forming beliefs about the external world. He weighs his evidence carefully, and reasons slowly and carefully to be sure not to make any mistakes.
Earl, on the other hand, is careless. He jumps to conclusions. He forms beliefs on weak evidence. He is careless in reasoning.

It seems that, according to Goldman's proposal, neither Jake nor Earl is justified in his beliefs about the external world. For their belief forming processes produce mostly false beliefs about the external world; their belief forming processes are equally unreliable. However, intuitively, Jake's beliefs are more justified than Earl's.

3. In "Externalist theories of empirical knowledge", Bonjour presents the example of Norman the clairvoyant. Norman's faculty of clairvoyance is reliable; however, Norman has no evidence that his faculty of clairvoyance is reliable. Nor

does Norman have any evidence that his faculty of clairvoyance is unreliable. According to Bonjour, the beliefs that Norman forms by clairvoyance are unjustified. Explain Bonjour's argument that the beliefs that Norman forms by clairvoyance are unjustified. According to the reliabilist, Norman's clairvoyance beliefs are justified. Explain why. Does Bonjour's example show that reliabilism is wrong? Or can the reliabilist respond to Bonjour's argument?

4. You may develop your own paper topic. Your paper may only concern things we have discussed in class after the midterm. You must submit a proposal to me by Wednesday November 19, at 12PM. Your proposal will explain, in one page or less, what question or questions you will try to answer. If I accept your proposal, then (and only then) you will be permitted to write on your own topic.