

## FIRST PAPER TOPICS

Write a short (5-7 page) paper on ONE of the following topics. Be sure to follow the "Guidelines for Papers" handed out in class. Page numbers in parentheses refer to *Reason and Responsibility*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition.

**Papers are due Thursday 10/4 or Friday 10/5 in your recitation section.**

1. St. Anselm writes:

Even the fool is forced to agree that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists in the mind, since he understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood is in the mind. And surely that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot exist in the mind alone. For if it exists solely in the mind, it can be thought to exist in reality also, which is greater. If that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists in the mind alone, this same that-than-which-a-greater-*cannot*-be-thought is that-than-which-a-greater-*can*-be-thought. But this is obviously impossible. Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that something than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists in both the mind and in reality. (7)

What is the argument presented in this passage? One important objection to the argument is that an argument of the same form could be provided to show that a perfect Island (or a perfect golden retriever, or a perfect anything (!?) exists. Explain and evaluate both the argument and the "perfect island" objection. Does the argument establish that there exists a God? Why or why not?

2. In his article "Evil and Omnipotence", J.L. Mackie maintains that the fact of evil rules out the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly benevolent God. The most famous response to an argument such as Mackie's is that evil is due to human free will. Explain and evaluate Mackie's argument and the free will response. Does the fact of human free will show that the existence of evil is compatible with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good God? Why or why not?

3. The reasoning behind Pascal's "Wager" suggests that even without evidence favoring God's existence we should believe in God and adopt a correspondingly reverent lifestyle. State the argument based on the "Wager" as clearly and convincingly as you can. In his reply, Simon Blackburn replies that the argument is fallacious because it is a "case of false options" (141). What is Blackburn's point? Does it undermine the Wager (why or why not?) Can we at least conclude from Pascal's argument that it is rationally *permissible* to believe in God?

4. According to W.K. Clifford, "it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (124). (Call this view, "evidentialism".) Explain evidentialism and the reasons Clifford offers to support it. (Be sure to make clear what Clifford's claim is, e.g., what sort of "wrong" is Clifford talking about: is he claiming that it is *morally* wrong to believe something on insufficient evidence? Or is it *wrong* in some other sense?) Are Clifford's reasons compelling? Why or why not? Can you think of further reasons to support evidentialism (or a revised and improved version of evidentialism?)

5. William James argues against Clifford (and what we call "evidentialism" and what James sometimes calls "intellectualism") based on the principle that "a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging

certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule." (132) Explain and evaluate James' reasoning against evidentialism based on this principle. Does James offer an argument for the principle? If so what is it? How, on James' view, should we proceed in our quest for truth if evidence is not available? Do you agree? Why or why not?