

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT****PHILOSOPHY 1****SPRING, 2007**

This assignment is due at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, May 29, in Arneson's mail slot, at the faculty mail boxes facing the 7<sup>th</sup> floor elevator exit in the HSS Bldg. Late papers will be subject to grade penalty.

Write an essay of about five to seven pages on one of the topics below. Please indicate clearly which topic your essay addresses.

1. In chapter 6 of *Language, Truth, and Knowledge* A. J. Ayer considers the proposal that besides knowledge relating to questions of empirical fact there is also knowledge relating to questions of value. This latter knowledge is claimed to include knowledge of what is morally right and wrong, for example, the claim that torturing human babies just for fun is morally wrong. Elaborate Ayer's response to this proposal and his own account of moral and ethical claims—the emotive theory of values. Defend or attack Ayer's emotive theory of values.

2. On p. 8 of *What Does It All Mean?*, Thomas Nagel writes, "If you think about it, the inside of your own mind is the only thing you can be sure of." So consider your belief that something exists external to your own mind—for example, your two arms and two legs. Nagel is wondering, how can one's mental experience give one justification for believing that anything extramental exists. Explain how A.J. Ayer's verificationism and the tracking account of knowledge developed by Robert Nozick would respond to the skeptical worry that Nagel describes. Does either Ayer's response or Nozick's response succeed in refuting the skeptic? If so, how so? If not, why not?

3. In his essay "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" Edmund Gettier raises a difficulty for the justified true belief analysis of the notion of knowing a proposition. What is the objection that Gettier presses against the justified true belief analysis? In different ways the week 7 course readings by Robert Nozick and by David Lewis provide materials for responding to the Gettier problem. Does either Nozick or Lewis offer a successful response to the problem? If so, how so; if not, why not?

4. At the beginning of *Language, Truth, and Logic*, A. J. Ayer writes, "The traditional disputes of philosophers are, for the most part, as unwarranted as they are unhelpful." To end these types of dispute Ayer advances a principle, the verifiability test for meaningfulness. Ayer: "If a putative proposition fails to satisfy this principle, and is not a tautology, then I hold that it is metaphysical, and that, being metaphysical, it is neither true nor false but literally senseless." Expound Ayer's proposed verifiability test for the meaningfulness of factual assertions. Take realism versus idealism as an example of the types of philosophical controversy that Ayer's verifiability test is supposed to dissolve or settle. Does Ayer succeed or fail in showing that this philosophical dispute is a unwarranted and unhelpful? Why or why not?

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Your essays will be graded according to the clarity of your prose, the cogency of the arguments you advance, and the soundness of the understanding of course materials you exhibit. Avoid long quotations from course texts. University rules and common morality forbid plagiarism.