

Introduction to Philosophy
Professor Collier
Fall 2008

First Essay Topics

Directions: Choose one of the following topics and write a *3-4 page paper* on it. (Note: this means that you should get onto the fourth page but not off the fifth). The paper should be double-spaced, and it should be formatted in 12 point font with one inch margins all around. You should avoid quotations from the text. If you need to cite the text, just include the page or line number at the end of the sentence like this (32 or III.463-5). You must rely *solely* upon primary sources for this paper.

Due date: October 30 (in class)

1. Epictetus argues that we should not care about things outside our control. What is the strongest argument that he gives for this claim? Is this argument ultimately convincing? Why or why not?
2. In Book Three, 417-829, Lucretius presents a series of “proofs” that the mind and spirit are subject to birth and death. Choose one of the following proofs: (a) 463-525 or (b) 679-712. Explain the structure of the proof. Does it work? Why or why not?
3. On p.538, Sextus presents an argument against the dogmatist (beginning with “That every matter of inquiry admits.... Ending with: circular reasoning is brought in”). What exactly is the structure of this argument? Is it successful? Why or why not?
4. In Book One, Lines 430-449, Lucretius offers a proof that atoms and void provide a *complete* metaphysical account of the nature of things. What is his argument for the claim that *nothing else* exists besides atoms and void? Is this argument successful? Why or why not?

Suggestions: There are two main parts of a philosophy paper: the first involves an *interpretation* of the structure of the argument; the second involves an *evaluation* of the argument. In the first (interpretative) part of the paper should present your reconstruction of the argument in question; the goal is to put the argument as elegantly and simply as possible, while not oversimplifying it. The second (evaluative) part should include two separate parts: (a) you should pose the strongest possible *objection* to the argument and then (b) consider whether the philosopher has the resources with which to adequately *reply* to it.

Note: You should assume that your reader is another student in the class. This means that you should assume that the reader has a basic grasp of the text in question. You don’t need to introduce all the basic ideas in the text; instead, you can just launch into a discussion of the particular topic at hand.