First paper

One of the central aims of this class is to challenge your beliefs about certain very fundamental questions. That doesn't mean that your views have to change; but the arguments we discuss should cause you to rethink your beliefs and your reasons for having those beliefs.

In your first paper, I'd like you to answer the following questions:

(1) Which argument we discussed in the first part of the class was most challenging for beliefs you had coming into the class?

(2) What was that belief, and why did you hold it coming into the class? (The explanation can be autobiographical rather than philosophical.)

(3) In the end, did the argument cause you to either change your belief or become less sure that it was true?

(4) Answer one of the following:

   (a) If yes to (3): explain why you think that the argument in question may be sound, by explaining why you think that each of the independent premises is likely to be true. State what you take to be the strongest objection to one of those premises, and defend the premise against the objection.

   (b) If no to (3): explain why in the end you did not find the argument convincing, by saying which independent premise you think is false, and why. Also say why in the end you think that the belief that you state in (2) is more likely than not to be true.

Your proper should consist of four sections, clearly labeled and separated.

There is no length requirement; a typical paper would be 3-6 pages, double spaced.

You can submit a rough draft to your TA for comments, but that rough draft must be handed in 7 days before the paper is due.

The paper should be handed in as an email attachment to your TA.

Grading rubric

Papers will be judged according to the following seven criteria:

(i) in (1), names an argument;

(ii) in (2), states a view and explains clearly why the view was held;

(iii) in (3), answers the question;

(iv) if (4a): gives a clear and persuasive explanation of why each of the premises in the argument is more likely likely to be true than false;

    if (4b): gives a clear and persuasive explanation of why the relevant independent premise of the argument is false;

(v) if (4a): gives the strongest objection to one of the premises in the argument, and gives a persuasive reply to that objection;

    if (4b): gives a clear and persuasive explanation of why the belief stated in (2) is more likely to be true than false;

(vi) in accomplishing one or more of the above, makes substantial original points which go beyond material discussed in lecture and discussion days; and

(vii) is free of grammatical and spelling errors.

An A paper accomplishes all 7. A typical A- paper would accomplish (i)-(v) and (vii), but not (vi); but in general an A- paper is one which fails to meet one of the above criteria. A B+ paper is typically one which fails to meet two of the above criteria, or egregiously fails to meet one. A B paper is one which fails to meet three of the above criteria, or fails to meet two, one of which it egregiously fails to meet. And so on. Obviously, meeting or failing to meet these criteria is a matter of degree, and we will take that into account; but this should give you an idea of how you will be evaluated.