Belief (My Philosophy) Paper

Objective: to demonstrate in writing the ability to analyze and interpret some of the philosophic aspects of your own belief system.

Directions: Compose a 2-5 page paper (500-1250 words) in which you accomplish the following:

Identify at least three of the core beliefs from your own belief system that have philosophical meaning. A core belief is expressed as a general statement. Follow the clues given in the Philosophy as Quest and Philosophical Frameworks texts to discern the philosophic character of your beliefs and ideas. Please note that it will not suffice to submit three statements that are paraphrases of each other or very nearly the same idea. I suggest that you try to find a metaphysical belief (How does the reality work?), an epistemological belief (what can I know? Or how does the mind work?), and an ethical belief (What are my values? How does morality work?). Please do not merely substitute statements from another text. These statements are supposed to be genuine expressions of your own belief after you have considered them. Reason it out.

For each of the core beliefs that you identify. Do the following each in a separate paragraph.

1) Analyze it: Identify the major concepts in the belief statement and briefly explain what you mean by each of those concepts.

2) Describe its Origins: where did you get this belief? Has it changed over time for you?

3) Describe its Consequences: what impacts in the world follow from your belief? How does it affect what you will do and what you won’t do? How does it affect other people?

4) Explain how it relates to the other core beliefs that you have identified: Are there overlapping concepts? Are there any conflicts or differences? Do the beliefs fit together in the consequences they have?

5) Give at least one strong reason in support of that belief: this is evidence or reasoning that stands in support of your statement. You are not asked here to prove the statement or convince anyone of your belief. What you are asked to do is to give the strongest reason(s) that you have for it. They are strong in that (a) they compel you and (b) they are well reasoned.

Two good guides to this are the “Philosophy as Quest” text and “Philosophical Frameworks.” Both of these are found in the InterQuest web. Determining your philosophical beliefs may be difficult. Some folks deny that they have any at all, but that never turns out to be the case. They are merely hidden and neglected. Recall that a philosophical belief is a general claim that has consequences for thoughts and actions. A philosophical belief, when stated, provides a sort of
explanation as to why some part of the world is the way it is. The difficulty for many folks is finding the right level of generality. The claim “I like football” is not a philosophical belief or core belief. It is an expression of someone’s value. The claim “Human beings are basically competitive by nature” is a philosophic claim. Such a claim can explained and interpreted (what does it really mean?), it can be connected to consequences (what actions follow from it?), it can be linked to origins (where did I get that belief?), it can be framed as an issue (What are the views that stand in opposition?), it can be linked to other philosophic beliefs (What else do believe about human nature?).

Please note that this is not intended to be a brain-buster assignment. This should be rather straightforward in that you are the best authority on what you believe. You will have to do some serious self-reflection to find this out. It is possible that you will find the exploration of your own belief-system more challenging than learning what someone else thinks. If that is so, then spend some of the essay considering that fact.

Also, please note that you will have the opportunity to rewrite this piece with the benefit of feedback.

Make sure that you do two key things:

Formulate clear and general statements of your belief (think may be hard).

Perform each of the five steps for each of the three beliefs.

Criteria: Your paper will be graded based on the following criteria:

1) Each of the five steps is clearly accomplished for each of the three belief statements.
2) The belief statements and your discussions of them indicate a genuine attempt to find and interpret the philosophic content of your own beliefs.
3) Attention has been given to charity in writing, spelling, and grammar.

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Connections Paper

Objective: to demonstrate in writing a reasoned interpretation of the relations between a classic philosopher’s ideas and your own.

Directions: Compose a 2-3 page paper (500-750 words) in which you accomplish the following:

Identify a philosophical belief (or set of beliefs) that is (are) your own. From the philosophers that we have studied, select an idea or statement that is relevantly related to your own belief(s).
Write an clear and well-reasoned essay on:

1) Your belief (explain it)
2) The philosophers idea (explain it, with references to relevant texts)
3) The relevant relations between your belief and the Philosopher’s idea

One of the objectives of InterQuest is to demonstrate and develop some relations between your own belief system (which you had before this course and will continue to have afterwards) and the ideas of philosophers who have changed the world. The possible relations are many. A philosopher’s idea may be identical to yours, similar to yours, supportive of yours, in direct opposition to yours, cast doubt on yours, an alternative to yours, a powerful addition to yours, and so on. Thus, you do not have to look for agreement only (though that is a valuable discovery) as you may find ideas that you strongly disagree with. Either way (and many others besides) is a relation to explore. It is a beginning to understanding how your own belief system connects to the history of thought. In other words, your beliefs have a history and they do not begin with you alone. The origins are probably ancient.

The key to quality in this effort is to sufficiently explain and interpret the claims that are made; both your own and the philosopher’s. An explanatory interpretation will involve saying what the terms in the idea mean, providing other ways to say the idea, and giving clear and explanatory examples with a description of how the example fits the claim (i.e. do not expect your readership to do all the work. Tell them what is up and show them how they are to understand you).

You have a wide latitude for creativity in this assignment. The intention is that you will make this project your own; that is, an expression of your genuine belief system. Since we are focusing on a single point of relations (one of your beliefs and one of the philosopher’s ideas), it is obvious that the result will not be a complete explanation of either your complex belief system of the sophisticated idea system of a philosopher. So be it. What we want is clarity, specificity, strong reasoning, and effective explanation.

If you need to deal with several beliefs of ideas, or even more than one philosopher, then you have license to do so. Just try not to create a larger project than is needed. Your goal is to seek depth and clarity, not completeness and grandiosity.

You will have an opportunity to post drafts of your work to the discussion board and comment on the work of others. Again, my friend, this is not a contest between us with a grade as the prize. It is an honest attempt by a teacher to elicit an honest effort of self-exploration and expression by you. Read the works carefully and critically. Think through the implications of your own ideas. Then trust yourself to explain your thinking. And trust me to recognize genuine effort.

**Criteria:** Your paper will be graded based on the following criteria:

1) Your work indicates a careful and well-reasoned effort to present and explain the philosophical aspects of one of your own beliefs.
2) Your analysis of the philosopher’s ideas are well-researched with references to particular
3) Your effort to make comparisons, find similarities, and/or differences - and to make those connections clear - is evident.
4) Attention has been given to charity in writing, spelling, and grammar.

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Synthesis Paper

**Objective:** to demonstrate in writing the ability to express a well-reasoned interpretation of the relations between the ideas of two classic philosophers.

**Directions:** Compose a 2-3 page paper (500-750 words) in which you accomplish the following:

* Identify a point of relation between the ideas of two classic philosophers.
* Give a reasoned explanation as to why that point is significant.
* Give a reasoned analysis and explanation of one of the philosopher’s ideas on that point with references to relevant texts, quotes, etc.
* Give a reasoned analysis and explanation of the relations between the ideas of the two philosophers relevant to the point that you have identified.
* Conclude with your reasoned assessment of what conclusions may be drawn from these relations.

In this paper you are forming an interpretation by drawing a conceptual connection between some aspects of two major thinkers. Making such connections is a common mode of scholarly writing in philosophy and many other fields. In order to make the connection point(s) clear, you must give a strong account of each thinker’s ideas (at least those that are relevant to the point of connection that you are establishing). A point of connection or a relation between two thinkers does not have to be an agreement or total overlap at all. It may be an opposition of ideas. It may be a shared assumption leading to different conclusions. It may be a shared conclusion reached by different premises. It may be different descriptions of the same phenomena. The key insight to be gained is that when any two people come together intellectually, there will be points of connection which will be expressed as agreements, disagreements, questioning, debate, and even confusion. This is where philosophy leaves the strictly personal sphere and becomes social. Throughout the term I have emphasized that applying philosophical methods to your own thinking will increase your own abilities. This assignment is designed to demonstrate that philosophical methods may also increase our abilities to relate to other people and their ideas.

**Criteria:** Your paper will be graded based on the following criteria:
1) Your work indicates a careful and well-reasoned effort to present and explain selected ideas that two philosophers have in relation.
2) Your analysis of each philosophers’ ideas are well-researched with appropriate references to particular sources and appropriate use of quotes as support for your claims.
3) Your effort to make comparisons, find similarities, and/or differences - and to make those connections clear - is evident.
4) Attention has been given to charity in writing, spelling, and grammar.

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