

24.223 Paper 2 Prompts

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Instructions: Please write a roughly 2000-word paper (7–8 pages double-spaced) that responds to one of the following prompts.

ChatGPT and AI: You can use whatever methods you like to brainstorm and outline, but once you start writing your draft, all your writing must be your own. **You must write your draft, from start to finish, in Google Docs.** When you submit your paper, you will **share editing privileges with me for your paper**, so that—if needed—I can use Draftback to verify that you wrote it yourself, rather than using an AI to write it.

The aim is to make one small contribution to the conversation started by the paper and in class. You should begin with a thesis paragraph, explaining what you will argue and how you will proceed. You should then reconstruct the argument you will be engaging with in a way that is understandable to someone who has not read the paper or come to class. (You may presuppose the basics of Bayesian epistemology and decision theory, though it is good to remind your readers what any terms and equations mean.) After doing so, you should make your contribution, which should come in the form of raising or responding to an objection to the argument you have reconstructed. I will grade your paper by evaluating it for (1) sentence-level and structural *clarity*, (2) accuracy and adequacy of its *exposition* of the target argument, and (3) the novelty and substance of its *engagement* with that argument.

Papers should be submitted over email to kevindorst0@gmail.com by sharing editing privileges with your Google Doc. The due date is **11:59pm on December 11**. Late papers will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for each late day. Due to the grade deadline, **any paper turned in after December 16 will automatically fail**.

Prompts:

1. Moore et al. argue that *overprecision* is clear evidence for irrationality. What is the empirical finding, and how do they use it to argue for this conclusion? What is the best way to respond to this claim? Is it convincing?
2. Kinney and Bright claim that the *value of evidence* result from standard decision theory can be used to argue that motivated ignorance must be irrational. Is this argument convincing? What's the strongest reply, and how should they counter it?
(*Note:* You do not need to engage with risk-averse decision theory in order to address this prompt—though, if it's relevant to your argument, you should feel free to.)
3. Nielsen and Stewart argue that, given finite evidence, polarization can be fully rational, and—using a particular measure—that *global* polarization can increase. Suppose they conclude that real-world polarization provides no clear evidence for irrationality. How would you respond? How should they counter? Who's right?
4. Kelly (2008) argues that selective scrutiny is rational, and that as a result those who aren't aware of this fact are rational to polarize when presented with mixed evidence. Explain his argument, and either object to it or defend it against an objection.
5. Salow and Past-Kevin both argue that confirmation bias (or “intentionally biased inquiry”) should be understood in terms of Reflection failures. Explain why they think this. A natural objection is that someone could be biased without realizing that they are. What's the best way to formulate this objection? Is there a plausible way for them to respond?