

Reading Questions for November 24

These questions cover excerpts of an article by William K. Clifford called “The Ethics of Belief.” The answers do not have to be turned in. You will probably have to do the reading more than once to get the answers.

*Background:*

In this passage, Clifford seems to spend a lot of time talking about examples involving ships. But his article is often interpreted as a challenge to religious belief. In particular, what he does is to introduce a general view by talking about ships. He then leaves it to you, the reader, to apply his general view to the case of religious belief.

*Questions:*

1. Clifford considers two versions of the ship case. What is the difference between the two cases. What does he say about the cases? Is he right?
2. Clifford considers an objection that in these cases it is not the belief that is wrong, but merely the action that is wrong. What does he say about this objection? Is he right?
3. Clifford discusses cases in which whether one holds the belief is not super-important. What does he say about these cases? Is he right?
4. Clifford’s article is often taken to be a challenge to religious belief. How do you think the challenge is supposed to go? What could be said in response?