

PHIL 160 Final Paper
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Due: midnight on W 12/4, on Canvas

Final Paper

Submission information: Submit your assignment on Canvas by **midnight, Wed. 12/4**. Make sure that your UMID, but not your name, is on the assignment. The assignment is worth 20% of your final grade.

Late work and extension policy: Late work loses three percent per day. After a week, it will not be accepted, barring extreme, unforeseen circumstances. Extensions will not be allowed, barring extreme, unforeseen circumstances. This ensures that students get equal time to complete assignments and that the assignments (and grading) do not pile up near the end of the semester.

Why we're doing this assignment: Philosophical writing involves four core skills, among others:

1. Identifying a central philosophical question and articulating a thesis statement answering it
2. Accurately and charitably reconstructing an argument for that thesis
3. Objecting to that argument and assessing the strength of the objection
4. Responding to that objection and assessing the strength of the response.

This paper will build on your previous papers, allowing you to practice all of (1)-(4).

Final Paper Instructions

1. Choose a significant ethical issue that matters to you. *The issue cannot have been discussed in lecture or section.*

2. Type an essay of **no more than 1200 words** that addresses the following questions:
 - a. 1 sentence: Articulate the philosophical question related to your chosen ethical issue.
 - The question should generally be of the form, ‘Is [insert some action by some agent] morally permissible/required/forbidden?’

 - b. 1 sentence: Articulate the answer to this question that you will defend in this paper. In other words, what is the thesis of your paper?
 - You may defend an answer to this question that you believe, or one that you do not believe.

 - c. 2-3 sentences: Explain why this question is significant to you. In other words, how would your actions or others’ actions vary based on different answers to this question; and why would those variances matter?
 - Make sure to clearly say the practical implications of different answers to the question.

 - d. 1-2 paragraphs, approximately 300-400 words: Advance what you see as the strongest argument for this thesis.
 - It can be an argument that you’ve read or heard about or an original argument.
 - Make sure to clearly say the premises and conclusion of this argument.
 - Provide citations, including page numbers, for any paraphrases and quotations.

 - e. 1-2 paragraphs, approximately 300-400 words: Advance what you see as the strongest objection to this argument.
 - It can be an objection that you’ve read or heard about or an original objection.
 - Make sure to clearly say the premises and conclusion of this objection.
 - Provide citations, including page numbers, for any paraphrases and quotations.

 - f. 1-2 paragraphs, approximately 300-400 words: Advance what you see as the strongest response to this objection.
 - It can be a response that you’ve read or heard about or an original response.
 - Make sure to clearly say the premises and conclusion of this response.
 - Provide citations, including page numbers, for any paraphrases and quotations.

3. Turn in your typed essay on Canvas, with UMID but not your name.

This assignment was adapted from materials by Mara Bollard.

Final Paper Rubric

Important Notes:

1. The below are the standards for papers *prior* to assigning penalties for submitting work late, exceeding the word count, or lacking proper citations.
2. Instructors also reserve the right to refuse to accept a seriously defective paper for a passing grade, until major problems are corrected.

B: the baseline grade of competent but not exceptional work.

The grade of "B" functions as a baseline grade, signifying competent but not exceptional work. Papers are graded up or down relative to these baseline "B" criteria:

- articulates a clear philosophical question and thesis
- explains the significance of that question
- advances a strong argument for the thesis
- advances a strong objection to a charitable interpretation of that argument
- advances a strong response to a charitable interpretation of that objection
- is generally well-written and well-organized, with few or no grammatical, punctuation and spelling errors
- does not contain significant misunderstandings

B+: the beginnings of distinction.

A "B+" paper meets all of the standards for a "B", but in addition:

- includes the beginnings of an original or powerful idea, argument, example, or application--something beyond what an undergraduate would come up with on a first pass at the topic. For instance, an unusually apt analogy that illuminates a previously obscure aspect of the problem; a clever counterexample to a seemingly persuasive claim; a sharp distinction that does significant philosophical work; a subtle point drawn from a close reading of a text; or a compelling example or application of a principle

A- or A: outstanding work.

An A- or A paper meets all of the standards for a B+, but in addition:

- works out the original or powerful idea, argument, example, or application fully and deeply, with outstanding execution that demonstrates a firm grasp of the underlying concepts, principles, facts, and argumentative strategy

Now, for the downside:

B-: most of the paper ok, but contains significant errors, omissions, or misunderstandings.

A B- paper falls just short of "B" standards, by, for example (this list is not exhaustive) the following criteria:

- fails to articulate a clear philosophical question and thesis
- fails to explain the significance of that question
- fails to consider a strong argument for the thesis
- fails to consider a strong objection to that argument, or uncharitably interprets the argument
- fails to consider a strong response to that objection, or uncharitably interprets the objection
- wastes space on issues irrelevant to the paper topic
- offers a mistaken, confused, or superficial interpretation of cited texts or philosophical points
- contains numerous grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors
- lacks clear organization, failing to logically order and signpost important points

C+, C, C-:

- exemplifies one or more of the problems of a B- paper, more often or more pervasively
- alternatively, misunderstands the assignment, confuses polemical assertion with argumentation, or lacks proper citation of central points (but not in a pervasive way).

D, F:

These grades are reserved for incoherent papers (lack of a minimally coherent argument, objection, or response), papers that completely miss the point of the assignment, and for moral failings: not bothering to make a serious effort, plagiarism, etc.

The rubric was adapted from materials by Elizabeth Anderson.