

PHIL 361 Reconstruction and Objection Assignment

Instructor: Sumeet Patwardhan

Due: 11:59 PM EST on Thurs. 5/20, on Canvas

Reconstruction and Objection Assignment

Submission information: Submit your assignment on Canvas by **11:59 PM EST on Thursday, May 20th**. Make sure that your UMID, but not your name, is on the assignment. Include the paper you've chosen in the title of the assignment.

Why we're doing this assignment: Compelling philosophical thinking and writing involves four core skills, among many others:

1. Accurately and charitably summarizing an argument
2. Objecting to an argument and assessing the strength of your objection
3. Responding to your own objection and assessing the strength of that response
4. Doing (1)-(3) concisely

This paper will allow you to focus on (1), (2), and (4). The next paper will focus on (2)-(4).

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Choose one of the following arguments from lecture or section readings. Note that these arguments may not be ones that the authors agree with, even if they discuss them.
 - a. Moody-Adams's summary of the argument for meta-ethical cultural relativism which relies on premises about enculturation (primarily pgs. 20-21).
 - b. Gensler's summary of the 'racism test case' argument for the conclusion that meta-ethical cultural relativism is false (primarily the last full paragraph on pg. 45).
 - c. Parfit's summary of the argument against the Success Theory and Preference Hedonism which employs the grass-counting and sadist examples (primarily the end of pg. 296 to pg. 297)
 - d. Graeber's summary of the argument that being in a bullshit job attacks one's sense that one is a self (primarily but not only pgs. 17-18).
 - e. Emma's summary of the argument that it's unfair for women to bear the mental load.
 - f. *Another argument not listed here, in which case you have to get written permission from me, to make sure you're not taking on an argument that's too small or big in scope for a paper like this!*

2. Type an essay of **no more than 600 words** that addresses the following questions:
 - a. 1-2 paragraphs, no more than 300 words: Summarize, in a logically organized manner, the argument you picked.
 - I encourage you to first list out the premises and conclusion, and then explain in a paragraph the justifications (or lack thereof) offered for each premise. However, you may also write the argument in paragraph form (rather than step by step form) and intersperse the justifications after each premise.
 - This isn't a comprehensive outline of the argument – you only have 300 words! – so don't worry if you need to skip over some details.
 - Provide citations, including page numbers, for paraphrases and direct quotations.
 - b. 1-2 paragraphs, no more than 300 words: Advance a strong and original objection to the argument you choose.
 - If you are objecting to the truth of a premise of the argument, please identify the precise premise to which you are objecting. (I encourage you only to object to one premise – you don't have much space to object to any more than that in a strong and original way.) If you are objecting to how strongly the premises support the conclusion, please explicitly say that you are doing that.
 - Make sure to detail the premises and conclusion of your own objection (again in logical form or paragraph form).
 - Remember that you are aiming to identify a strong objection, not simply any objection – so you'll have to think about how someone might respond to your objection in order to succeed in this portion of the paper.
 - Remember that you are aiming to identify an original objection – so you'll have to make sure not to repeat objections already contained in the relevant readings or lecture/section content.
 - Again, do provide citations for any paraphrases and quotations.
 - c. No need to write an introduction or a conclusion – just launch straight into the argument, then straight into the objection, and then end there.

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

RUBRIC

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:

- the paper addresses all parts of the paper topic
- charitably summarizes the argument
- considers a significant, original objection to the argument
- makes relevant use of course readings and lectures, displaying a grasp of, without merely replicating, their content
- 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:

- offers the germs of a particularly original, striking, or powerful idea, argument, or illustration/application--something beyond the ordinary, beyond what one would expect an undergraduate to come up with on a first pass at the topic. 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 real philosophical work; a subtle point drawn from a close reading of a text; a compelling illustration or application of a principle--all of these can count as an idea that rises the paper above the ordinary
- alternatively, the paper might just develop relevant arguments that demonstrate real mastery of the course readings

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

- works out the particularly original, striking, or powerful idea, argument, or illustration/application fully and deeply, with outstanding execution that demonstrates a firm grasp of the underlying concepts, principles, facts, and argumentative strategy
- alternatively, the paper might offer an unusually sophisticated, close and systematic reading of the text, paying attention to tensions and contradictions in the work, alternative interpretations of passages (offering persuasive arguments for preferring one interpretation to another), and interpretations that bring out philosophically significant points, especially if they offer fresh, unconventional readings

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):

- failing to answer one of the parts of the paper topic
- misunderstanding a substantial philosophical point, or confusing different positions
- uncharitably summarizing the argument
- failing to consider a strong, original objection to the argument
- wasting space on issues that are not pertinent to the paper topic

- offering a confused, sloppy, superficial, or erroneous interpretation of course readings or other cited texts
- containing numerous grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors
- lacking a 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. "C" grades may also be assigned to papers that misunderstand the assignment, confuse polemical assertion with argumentation, or lack proper citation of central points (but not in a pervasive way).

D, E: these grades are reserved for incoherent papers (lack of a minimally coherent summary of the chosen argument or an objection to it), papers that completely miss the point of the assignment, and for moral failings: not bothering to make a serious effort, plagiarism.

Note: these are the standards for papers *prior* to assigning late penalties. *Also, instructors reserve the right to refuse to accept a seriously defective paper for a passing grade, until major problems are corrected.*

This assignment was adapted from materials by Mara Bollard. The rubric was adapted from materials by Elizabeth Anderson.