

PHIL 112 Guidelines & Topics for Paper #1

1250-1500 Word Paper Due via E-mail to garrettj@csus.edu by 11:59 p.m. on 10/4/09

General Advice from Professor Garrett

(1) Have others proofread your paper and help you identify obvious mistakes (grammar, spelling, sentence structure, etc.). Papers with sloppy writing and obvious mistakes will be penalized. The campus has a free writing center in Calaveras Hall #128. It is open Monday – Thursday from 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. and Friday from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. Take advantage of this free resource.

Additionally, coordinate with your classmates and read each other's papers to help each other improve writing quality. One way to do this is to find one or two classmates who will agree to read and comment upon papers that are e-mailed to them (though obviously this does not mean "write" or "rewrite" anyone else's paper).

(2) Once you have a draft of your paper, analyze it with the following checklist in mind:

- a) Have you represented the views you are discussing in their strongest and most plausible form?
- b) Is your essay organized in a way that is logical and easy to follow?
- c) Does each sentence and each paragraph have a clear purpose? Or do they repeat things that have already been said? Avoid unnecessary repetition.
- d) Are the sentences short, crisp, and clear? Avoid long, convoluted sentences that try to say too much.
- e) Are the sentences written in a direct and active voice?
- f) Are the words you have selected the best and most precise way to express your ideas? If you are using words with which you are NOT 100% comfortable, look them up in the dictionary and confirm that they mean what you think they do. If they do not, look for a better and more precise word.
- g) Are you focusing on the main ideas related to your topic? You do not have enough space to waste it on tangential matters; if you include something in your paper, I will assume that you think it is absolutely critical for properly understanding and evaluating your topic. Your paper will be evaluated not just on how clearly you present your ideas, but also on whether you have a good sense for which ideas are most important in a given debate.

General Advice on Writing a Philosophy Paper

Two good websites for getting sound advice on writing your paper:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

<http://www.csus.edu/phil/req/writing.htm>

How Papers will be Graded

In grading your papers, I will employ a five-part rubric. Each component of the rubric will be worth 15 points. The five components are:

- (1) Focus – does the paper carve out and define an appropriately sized topic and limit its attention to the **main** questions and concerns associated with that topic?
- (2) Content – does the paper demonstrate clear command and understanding of the philosophical material?

(3) Reasoning – does the paper demonstrate the ability to reason critically and consistently about the philosophical material?

(4) Organization – is the paper organized and written in a clear and logical manner so as to make her/his reasoning clear to others?

(5) Mechanics – does the paper make proper use of sentence structure, word usage, grammar, punctuation, etc.?

Specific Guidelines

(1) Any terms, phrases, or sentences taken from someone else's work (including my PowerPoint slides) **MUST** have quotation marks around it/them AND include a citation. It is fine to reference the work of other people (though be careful about doing too much of this), but it is absolutely unacceptable to try to pass that work off as your own. Per the course policy on Academic Honesty, any paper that includes any part of another's work without this being clearly indicated with quotation marks and a citation will result in a grade of 0. [NOTE: THERE IS NO CITATION STYLE (e.g., MLA, APA, etc.) YOU NEED TO FOLLOW; JUST PICK ONE AND BE CONSISTENT.]

(2) Papers should be in Microsoft Word format, so that I can use Word's "Comments" feature when assessing them. You will then both attach the paper to your email to me and copy and paste it into the body of the message. Please save your paper as a .doc file.

(3) Please use 12 point Times New Roman font and double-spacing throughout the paper.

(4) Please include a Word Count at the top of your paper. The word count should not include your name, title, or any other information supplied at the top of your paper; it should not include section titles, footnotes, or references; and it should not include any explicit arguments that are required to be included in your paper.

(5) Please put the Section Numbers (e.g., Part 1, Part 2, etc.) for your paper topic in the body of the paper to help me follow the precise structure of your analysis and argument.

Option I. Is there Anything Worth Dying For?

The object of this paper is to analyze, evaluate, and apply Socrates' argument in Plato's *Crito* that some things are worth dying for. You'll remember this argument was represented in class in the following numbered step form:

(1) It is "not life, but a good life, is to be chiefly valued." (p. 74)

(2) "A good life is equivalent to a just and honourable one."

(3) "Injustice is always an evil and dishonour to him who acts unjustly." (p. 75)

(4) Therefore, it is better to practice justice and die than to practice injustice and live.

NOTE: place this argument early in your paper, but do not include it in your word count.

Proposed Structure of Paper:

Introduction (50-75 words) – Get right to the point; what conclusion(s) are you going to argue for and why is it (or are they) important?

Part 1 – Analysis of the Argument (350-500 words) – Analyze each premise, identifying and clarifying each of the **main** assumptions and components of the claim. Make sure the reader is clear on what each premise is claiming and how the three premises work together to deliver the conclusion in (4).

Part 2 – Evaluation of the Argument (400-600 words) – Is Socrates’ argument convincing? Are there any serious weaknesses in either the form of the argument or support for the premises? Does Socrates (as some suspected in class) equivocate illegitimately, using the same word in different ways and thus making the argument seem more powerful than it is? Defend your position with careful argumentation.

Part 3 – Application of the Argument (400-600 words) – In the final part, and regardless of how you evaluated the argument in Part 2, assume that the argument is sound and apply it to Socrates’ own situation. What would “practicing justice” require of Socrates with respect to whether or not he should escape? Does justice demand that he stay and accept his punishment or could he be justified in escaping?

Conclusion – (50-100 words) – As with the intro, hit the high points. What were the main claims that you defended? Why are they important? Are there any surprising implications yielded by your paper?

Option II. Do Divine Commands Provide the Foundation of Morality?

The object of this paper is to analyze and critically evaluate the two possible answers to the updated version of the Euthyphro question:

Are “right actions” right because God commands them? Or, are “right actions” right because of some other property (which God knows and commands in light of)?

Proposed Structure of Paper:

Introduction (50-75 words) – Get to the point pretty quickly; what conclusion(s) are you going to argue for and why is it (or are they) important?

Part 1 – Analyze the Two Options (350-500 words) – First, analyze the two options regarding the foundation of right action in relation to the commands of God. In particular, identify and clarify each of the **main** assumptions, components, and implications of the claim. Make sure the reader is clear on what each option is claiming.

Part 2 – Overview of Problems with Each Option (400-600 words) – Second, identify 1-2 problems that might be emphasized by critics of each option and articulate each problem in its strongest

form. Be sure to focus on those problems that, in your judgment, are most worrisome and threatening to the view under consideration.

Part 3 – Defend Your Position (400-600 words) – Finally, take a stand in the debate by *defending* one of the options as superior to the other (remember that, as the questions is stated, there are no other options). In making your defense, be sure to defend your preferred option against the problems raised in Part 2, either by explaining why the problems are not legitimate or are not as serious as the problems for the other option.

Conclusion – (50-100 words) – As with the intro, hit the high points. What were the main claims that you defended? Why are they important? Are there any surprising implications yielded by your paper?

Option III. Why Be Just?

The object of this paper is to reconstruct Glaucon's challenge to morality and analyze and evaluate Plato's response (through Socrates) in the *Republic*.

Proposed Structure of Paper:

Introduction (50-100 words) – Get to the point pretty quickly; what conclusion(s) are you going to argue for and why is it (or are they) important?

Part 1 – Reconstruction of Glaucon's Challenge to Morality (350-500 words) – First, reconstruct Glaucon's fundamental question and *explain* it in detail using the example of the Ring of Gyges and the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value. Make sure you present Glaucon's challenge in its strongest form.

Part 2 – Reconstruction and Analysis of Plato's Response (400-600 words) – Second, reconstruct and analyze Plato's reply (through Socrates) to this challenge in terms of justice in individual souls.

Part 3 – Evaluation of Plato's Response (400-600 words) – Finally, evaluate Plato's response. Do you think that it successfully answers Glaucon's challenge? Why or why not? Defend your conclusion with careful argumentation.

Conclusion – (50-100 words) – As with the intro, hit the high points. What were the main claims that you defended? Why are they important? Are there any surprising implications yielded by your paper?

Option IV. Moral Virtue and the Good Life

The object of this paper is to reconstruct, analyze, and critically evaluate Aristotle's account of moral virtue.

Proposed Structure of Paper:

Introduction (50-75 words) – Get to the point pretty quickly; what conclusion(s) are you going to argue for and why is it (or are they) important?

Part 1 – Reconstruction and Analysis of Aristotle’s Account of Moral Virtue (550-700 words) – First, reconstruct and analyze the main components of Aristotle’s account of moral virtue. Here you will want to be sure to address all three of the following (though with primary focus on the third part):

1. His account of the ultimate end or good of human life.
2. His account of the unique human psyche (and how moral virtue fits into that account).
3. His account of moral virtues themselves.

Obviously, you don’t have much space to do this. Thus, you will have to be very selective in what you decide to include in Part 1. Part of how I’ll be grading this paper will be based on how well you are able to isolate and concisely reconstruct the **most important** components necessary for understanding Aristotle’s account.

Part 2 – Evaluation of Aristotle’s Account of Moral Virtue (550-700 words) – Finally, evaluate Aristotle’s account. Do you think that it offers an accurate and complete picture of the good life and the role of moral virtues in such a life? Why or why not? Defend your conclusion(s) with careful argumentation. NOTE: you do not have to fully accept or fully reject his account; you can (and probably should) accept some parts and reject (or preferably, show how to improve) others.

Conclusion – (50-100 words) – As with the intro, hit the high points. What were the main claims that you defended? Why are they important? Are there any surprising implications yielded by your paper?

Option V. Propose Your Own Paper Topic

You are free to propose an additional topic and paper structure, but you must get it cleared with me (via e-mail is fine) by the time class is over on Thursday, October 1.