

Philosophy 103
Paper #3
Professor Guerrero

Due by 9am on Monday, December 19, 2016

**Please email your paper to me as a .doc or .docx file with the subject “Phil 103: Paper #3”
1000 to 1500 words**

I. Background

For this paper, your assignment is to pick any reading or part of the class and to offer your own original argument for a conclusion relating to some part of that reading or that part of the class. (The only things you are not allowed to write about are the topics from the other two papers.)

Your argument can have the conclusion that someone else’s view or argument is wrong or does not work (this would be an argument for a *negative* conclusion); or your argument can have a *positive* conclusion about some topic (e.g. that it would in fact be good to be immortal, under some specified conditions). In either case, you need to offer an argument, not just a statement or assertion of your opinion about the matter.

This gives you quite a bit more room to maneuver, and you can, in some sense, write about whatever you want *that was covered in the class*. But you still need to do it as a philosopher would. Here is a suggestion for how to get started:

First, think of some part of the class, some claim, some argument, some conclusion, that you found yourself disagreeing with, perhaps strongly. Were there any readings or discussions that left you frustrated or, even better, angry? Work with that. You might be on to something important. If nothing comes to mind, pick some of the readings that you found most interesting, or go over your notes from the class, or both. Does anything jump out as being not right, or not quite right? Start just by going through the syllabus and your notes if nothing comes to mind.

Second, make some notes about what made you angry or frustrated; what you disagree with; what you think the philosopher or paper is getting wrong; examples that seem to go against what was being claimed; examples that show that something important is being ignored; places where the argument seems to skip over something important; places where the argument seems to blur together two different things.

Third, try to think about the logical structure of your complaint or concern or idea. Is it that there is a theory or view that has some bad implications? You might be looking at a modus tollens argument. Perhaps you need to reconstruct the argument you disagree with and show how there is an equivocation between two important terms: maybe there is no single understanding of “P” in your opponent’s argument that makes both the first premise and the second premise of their argument true. Maybe there’s something that has been left out of the discussion, so that you want to advocate for a new view, Q, and to get there by way of a modus ponens argument (where your “P” would be the thing you think is being left out).

II. Structure

For this paper, you have more leeway in terms of the ideas, but the basic structure should look like this:

A. **Introductory Section:** in which you set out the broad topic of the paper, the specific thing you are going to argue, and the basic structure of your paper. Here you might give a general discussion of the issues or arguments offered by others, but all with an eye toward setting up your own discussion. Aim to be brief but clear.

B. **Presentation of Argument Section:** in which you present your argument, in explicit numbered premise conclusion form. This should be a valid argument.

C. **Defense of Premises Sections:** in which you argue or offer support for the different premises of your argument. You don't need to offer an argument or paragraph of support for every premise, but certainly for those premises which might be controversial, confusing, or that you are not taking as uncontroversial background assumptions.

D. **Response to Objections Section:** in which you consider natural objections people might make to your argument and respond to them.

E. **Conclusion:** in which you summarize what you have done in the paper and what you have demonstrated.

III. Help

If you run into trouble, feel free to email me or come to office hours.

Also, this is a very useful guideline for writing philosophy papers, although not every part of it might be relevant for this paper (this guideline is written by Jim Pryor, posted by Steve Yablo):

<http://www.mit.edu/~yablo/writing.html>