

***PHIL 420 seminar paper guidelines***

Fall, 2009

***General instructions:***

The general expectations are these: Your paper will be an essay structured around a defense of a specific thesis pertaining to a particular topic addressed in our course. The paper should be 10-12 pages in length. The essay should include some expository material concerning the arguments and views being analyzed, as well as considerable critical discussion on your part, with the ultimate aim of defending your overall thesis. Objections to your own views and arguments should be considered where appropriate.

The formal seminar paper for our course is due electronically by 12:45 p.m. on Thursday, December 3. Submit your paper just as you would for our short essays. I'll return comments and the grade electronically.

***Formatting, citations, and sources:*** Follow the guidelines as given for the short papers (double-space the text, one-inch margins, etc.). Properly formatted in-text citations are required, as is a works cited page. Using sources other than the materials for the course is discouraged.

***Grading:*** Papers will be graded on the same criteria as the short papers, and see also the attached rubric (a grading sheet) that I'll use in evaluating your essay. Study it by way of seeing very clearly what the expectations are.

***Late assignment policy:*** This mirrors the policy for all of our assignments: For late papers, ten points will be deducted for each calendar day the assignment is late, measured from the time the paper is due until the time the paper is submitted.

***Topics:*** Questions you could address in your paper are these:

Are there universals?

Sample answer: Universals exist, and are platonistic entities: Universals are abstract, non-spatiotemporal entities that are ontologically prior to their instances.

What is a concrete particular?

Sample answer: Concrete particulars are constituted by (i) a set of properties, together with (ii) a bare particular in which those properties inhere.

What is a number?

Sample answer: Type conceptualism about numbers is correct. Numbers are types of ideas.

What account of modality is correct?

Sample answer: A property-theoretic actualist view is the correct view of modality, where possibility and necessity are analyzed in terms of entailment relations between properties.

What account of time is correct?

Sample answer: An eternalist view of time is correct. Reality includes past, present, and future.

What is it for something to persist through time?

Sample answer: Endurantism is correct. Persistence through time is a matter of one and the same thing persisting through time.

**Other topics:** I'll allow other topics for papers, especially papers structured around showing that a particular view is *false*, or that a particular argument we've considered is *unsound*. The topics on p. 1 suggest for you to write a paper arguing that some view or other is *true*. I'll consider other possible topics as well, but: (i) Any topic other than those suggested on p. 1 need to be approved by me, and (ii) a formal written proposal is necessary, and the proposal must include an outline.

***General suggestions by way of organization:***

The introduction should be brief, and it should contain these items:

- There must be a clear and precisely-stated thesis to be defended in the paper.
- The introduction should give the structure of the paper to come, with clear indications of what arguments, objections, etc. will be considered.
- There should be some brief discussion of the general philosophical importance of the topic being addressed.

The entire essay should have a logically coherent organization. Consider these points by way of structuring a paper on one of the topics from p. 1:

- Presentation of the thesis to be defended should occur right after the introduction.
  - Clarification of the view being defended should be given as necessary.
  - Appropriate illustrative examples might be used.
- Discussion of arguments in favor of the thesis should come next, perhaps with objections to those arguments considered along the way.
- Independent objections to the thesis being defended might be considered near the end (and replied to! Considering objections without replying to them just lets your opponents win).
- There must be a clear concluding section that sums things up.
- There should be clear transitional expressions that link the sections together.

Individual sections need to be logically coherent as well:

- They should be focused on whatever the task at hand is for that section of the essay.
- Individual paragraphs should be focused on only one task (presenting an argument vs. considering an objection to that argument, for instance—don't do both things in one paragraph).

Notes on terminology:

- Mastery of logical concepts should be demonstrated (for 'valid', 'sound', 'argument', 'true', etc.).
- Terminology relevant to the thesis and arguments under consideration should be used properly too. Where there are possible ambiguities in usage, those should be identified where appropriate.

***The intimidation factor of a 10-12 page essay:***

I have confidence in you. The short papers you've done so far address the different elements that make up a longer essay. Our papers that asked you to apply a given view to a particular case were good training in presenting views and arguments clearly. The papers asking you to criticize something were good training for laying out objections to something. A 10-page paper is really four or five short papers logically arranged in order: After an introduction, give some exposition of an argument for one's thesis, with critical discussion, perhaps then a consideration of another argument, then maybe one more, and then some discussion of objections to one's thesis, etc., and then a conclusion.