

First Paper Assignment

General Guidelines

1. Your paper is **due on Monday, February 26**. Late papers will be penalized.
2. All papers must be typed or computer-printed, double spaced, **four to six pages** in a reasonable font (12 point Times, for example). This means approximately 1000 to 1800 words.
3. Do not right-justify your paper.
4. Observe basic rules of grammar and spelling. Proofread your paper. Asking a good writer to read and comment on your paper can be helpful.
5. You may use quotes from the reading(s) in Morton by merely noting the author and page number: "Thought must be related to what is thinkable, as sense is to what is sensible (Aristotle, 42)." You may quote from Churchland similarly, though he is generally silent on topics relevant to the first paper. You may quote class notes thus: "Blah blah blah (Marcus, class notes, 1/22/07)." I do not expect you to use other sources. In fact, I discourage using other sources. If you do use another source, you must include a proper bibliographical reference, including author, title, and publishing information, or current URL. I must be able to trace the source.
6. Violations of academic integrity, like plagiarism, can and will lead to failing grades. I am interested in what you have to say, but I do not expect you to generate 1500 words of original scholarship. Your main task here is to be clear about what others have said, and to present it in your own way. Sometimes, for brief passages, some one else will just say it better than you can. Quote it. Cite any ideas that are not your own. (E.g. "Descartes argues that...")

How to Write Your Paper

1. Pick a topic from the list below.
2. Introduce your paper by briefly stating your thesis, the conclusion you will defend. Be specific. Your paper should be an extended argument in support of this thesis. Often, it is easiest to write the introduction after you have finished writing the body of the paper.
3. Argue for your thesis. Each paragraph should relate directly to your specific thesis.
4. Consider possible objections. Argue your own thesis, but through the writings of the philosophers.
5. Conclude your essay by summarizing exactly what you intended to say in the paper.

Some Pedantic Comments on Spelling and Grammar

1. Do not rely on spell-checking or grammar-checking programs, alone.
2. *Its* is a possessive pronoun, as in "The cat cleaned *its* paws." *It's* is a contraction meaning 'it is'. Normally, we use apostrophes to indicate possession, but not in this case.
3. *There* indicates location; *their* indicates possession; *they're* means 'they are'. (E.g. They're crying because Bobby spilled their milks on the table over there.)
4. Use one space after a comma, and two spaces after a period. Use one after a semicolon; better yet, avoid semi-colons. Using semicolons is like tinkering with the insides of the TV. Don't do it unless you know what you're doing.
5. When quoting a source for more than five lines, indent the quotation, single-space it, and do not use quotation marks. Be sure to cite any quote, of course.
6. Spell out numbers less than and including one hundred.
7. *Then* indicates a conclusion or a change in time. *Than* indicates a comparison. If you prefer reading Aristotle to reading Plato, then you and I feel differently.
8. Avoid biography. Descartes' birthplace is unlikely to be relevant to your thesis.
9. Omit needless words. (See: Strunk and White. *Elements of Style*. §13. <http://www.bartleby.com/141/>)
10. *E.g.* means 'for example'. *I.e.* means 'that is'. If you use either of these, make sure you understand the difference.

Paper Topics

1. Plato and Aristotle. Describe Plato's argument from recollection for the existence of the soul. Describe Aristotle's understanding of the soul. What considerations favor Plato's formulation? What considerations favor Aristotle? Which formulation is more likely to be consistent with a contemporary conception of the mind, and why?
2. Plato and Descartes. Describe Plato's argument from recollection for the existence of the soul. Describe Descartes' argument for the independence of the mind from the body. How does Descartes' dualism differ from Plato's dualism? Is either formulation more defensible?
3. Descartes and Arnauld. Describe Descartes' argument for the independence of the mind from the body. What exactly does Arnauld reject in Descartes' argument? Describe Arnauld's counter-example. How does Descartes reply to Arnauld? Who wins? (I.e. whose arguments are stronger?)
4. Descartes, Hobbes, and Berkeley. How does Descartes' dualism lead to a mind/body problem? How does Hobbes propose to solve the mind/body problem? How does Berkeley propose to solve the mind/body problem? Which solution is preferable, and why? Is either solution preferable to Descartes' dualism? Why or why not?
5. Aristotle and Hobbes. Both Aristotle and Hobbes might be called materialists. What are the differences between their views? What problems arise for Aristotle's view of the soul? How does Hobbes defend his materialism? Is it an advance on Aristotle's view? Is either view currently plausible? Why, or why not?
6. Descartes and Aristotle. How is the mechanism of the scientific revolution incompatible with Aristotle's view of the soul? How does Descartes' view of the mind arise from, or how is it compatible with, the new science? How do Descartes' and Aristotle's views of the soul reflect different views of the nature of the sensible world? Which view is more plausible, and why?

Notes:

For each topic, above, you need not be restricted to the philosophers listed at the beginning of the topic. Locke's arguments, for example, might be relevant in topic 6; Hobbes' work might be relevant in topic 3; etc.

Any topics other than the ones listed here must be cleared with me *in advance*.