

Paper #3 Instructions
PHIL 130.1001
Spring 2025
Dove and Woodbridge

Due on **Friday, May 16th by 11:59pm**. Late submissions are subject to a **severe grade penalty** as follows: Papers submitted after 11:59pm on 5/16 get a **full letter-grade off**, until 12:00am on 5/18 when they get **another full letter-grade off**. No papers will be accepted after 11:59pm on Sunday 5/18. **Get your paper in on time.**

[Relevant material: films and readings assigned from 4/7 through 5/7—check the External Course Website]

Topic: Assuming that films can *do* philosophy at least to the extent of illustrating a thesis, doing conceptual analysis, and posing a philosophical question, pick two films assigned in the relevant date range [4/7 through 5/7] that you think make the best case that film can do philosophy in a *more robust* manner and, for each, explain in detail precisely how it appears to do philosophy in this more substantive way. Alternatively, a more ambitious strategy is to pick one assigned film [from between 4/7 and 5/7] and one *external* film of your choosing to discuss this. No film discussed in either of your first two papers is an option here. For both approaches, you must, for each film, relate, compare, and contrast how it appears to do philosophy to how at least one reading does philosophy on the same topic (a different reading for each film). If you opt for the second strategy and use an unassigned film, you should confer with us about a relevant philosophy reading to compare it with (otherwise use only assigned readings). If you have a related philosophy reading in mind, you must confirm it with us before using it. For your conclusion, assess (with an argument summarizing your discussions) whether you think film *really can* do philosophy in the more robust/substantial sense.

Recall the following elements of doing philosophy (of employing philosophical method) in a *more robust/substantial sense*: presenting a counterexample in a counterargument against a thesis, doing thought experiments to test a thesis, answering a philosophical challenge to counter it, making an argument/case for a thesis.

Library Concerns: Don't cite, paraphrase, or use readings that aren't assigned that you have not antecedently confirmed with us.

Word Count: 1500-2000 words. Works Cited/Bibliographies do not count towards your word count, footnotes and endnotes do. Quotations **will not count** towards your word count.

Grammar, Spelling, Etc.: Grammar, spelling, style, and readability matter. Of course, there can be typos. We all make mistakes. Yet, as mistakes multiply, grades decrease. Why? Because one mistake is understandable, multiple errors show misunderstanding or lack of care or worse.

Naming Convention: Name your file as follows:

"yourstudentnumber.PHIL130S25.paper3.docx". Obviously, replace "yourstudentnumber" with your student number. Improperly named documents will be considered unsubmitted/late until a correct file is submitted.

File Types: Only .doc, .docx, or .docm files are acceptable. If you use another writing format, convert it to .docx before submitting your paper. Files in other formats will be considered unsubmitted/late until a correct file is submitted.

First Page Mechanics:

No title page. Indeed, you don't even need a title; though, you can title your essay if you prefer. Please make sure your student number is on at least the first page on the top, left side. Also make sure that your name does **not** appear anywhere on your paper (e.g., in a header).

Various Mechanical and Stylistic Elements:

- Lines should be double-spaced.
- All pages should be numbered.
- Use whatever font you prefer, but it should be 12-point.
- Margins should be **no greater than one inch on all sides**.
- Do not use right-justification.
- We don't care what citation style you use, just be consistent. The easiest citation style is name/year/page for in-text citations: (Taylor 1974, 60), for example. Where the details of cited work appear is on a Works Cited page at the end of the document.
- Keep footnotes/end notes to a minimum (if it's worth writing, it's probably worth putting in the body of the paper—if it seems wholly tangential, then why bother?)
- Cite your sources. Use whatever style you wish. We give full bibliographic information for the readings on the syllabus and give some examples here; you can cut & paste these.
- Your style should be suitably academic. You are trying to explain and defend relatively technical and abstract notions. Hence, you should aim to *simplify* the technical bits to make them understandable, while at the same time you should aim to *apply* the abstract bits to make them relevant. Explicit definitions simplify concepts. Examples illustrate concepts. Make sure you do both. As for examples, feel free to steal (and then cite) cases from our readings. You do not have to invent new ones; though you can if they are particularly illustrative.
- Aim for good arguments and clear explanations. Some folks seem to think that their essays must contain *novelty* to be good. That's not true. Aristotle (384-322 BCE) argued that people could be taught edifying lessons by watching and discussing dramas, especially tragedies. He also explored many of the problems associated with it. What makes this an enduring philosophical problem is that we find *better*, as opposed to *newer*, ways to explain what's right and what's wrong with the idea that fictional films can aid in philosophical theorizing. Some of our readings are giving arguments that are centuries old, but they are giving them in ways that better explain the problems and prospects. If you can clarify what's at stake, that's virtuous novelty.
- There is no one length for a good sentence. Some can be short. They make their points quickly. Others require many more words with which to make their points, clarify their concept, and justify their conclusions for whatever content they contain. Still, if all of your sentences are short, your paper will read as choppy. And if all of your sentences are long, your paper will read as long-winded, and, perhaps, boring. To determine whether you have hit the sweet spot for sentence length, you should read your paper aloud. We also use the computer to read to us.

- Likewise, there is no set length for a good paragraph. Some are very short—just a couple of sentences cover all that needs to be said. Others are long, perhaps covering a whole page. Still, one sentence (typically) does not a paragraph make. Alternatively, paragraphs covering multiple pages are surely in need of revision and re-parsing. An unbroken paragraph covering multiple pages unnecessarily taxes the reader.

Grades: Whole letter grades (i.e., no pluses or minuses). We use the following rough rubric:

An **A** paper is excellent. It contains few, if any grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, or stylistic infelicities. It has a clear and well-defined thesis. It supports its claims with argumentation, which includes considering replies and counter-positions. It explains technical terminology. It stays on topic. It is clear, concise, and complete.

A **B** paper is very good. It may contain a few grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, or stylistic infelicities. It has a clear and well-defined thesis. It supports its claims with argumentation, which includes considering replies and counter-positions. It explains technical terminology. It mostly stays on topic. It is mostly clear, concise, and complete.

A **C** paper is average. It probably contains some grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, and/or stylistic infelicities. Its thesis isn't as clear and well-defined as it should be. It supports its claims with argumentation, though the argumentation isn't quite as strong as it should be. It may not explain its technical terminology. It mostly stays on topic. It would be improved if it were more clear, concise, and complete.

A **D** paper has failed in some aspect of the assignment. Perhaps it contains too many errors to be readable (grammatical, spelling, or stylistic). Or its thesis is too unclear or undefined to be defensible. Or it fails to support its claims with adequate argumentation. Or it fails to define its technical terminology adequately. Or it fails to stay on topic enough to generate a sustained essay. In general, it is not clear enough or concise enough or complete enough.

An **F** paper has failed in multiple aspects of the assignment. It may be unreadable. Or it may lack a defensible thesis. Or it may lack argumentation. Or it may lack adequate explanations. Or it may not stay on topic. It needs multiple revisions and edits to make it acceptably clear, concise, and complete.

Plagiarism (or academic dishonesty of any kind—including using generative AI to write or rewrite any sections of your paper) will result in an F for the paper and for the course as a whole.

Here's a list of things we dislike in papers. These aren't listed in order of aversion.

- (a) Unnecessarily grandiose introductory sentences and paragraphs.
- (b) Poorly formed (or absent) thesis statements.
- (c) Unnecessary adverbs.
- (d) Using "actually" when not talking about modal logic and the actual world.
- (e) Using "seems" and/or "appears" when not talking about appearance vs. reality.
- (f) Run-on sentences; comma splices. [Look them up!]
- (g) Treating an essay like a mystery novel: introduce your conclusion early!
- (h) Changing the topic.
- (i) Wordiness.
- (j) Conceptual confusion.
- (k) Slapdash writing.

- (l) Unnecessary qualification.
- (m) Laziness.
- (n) Unnecessary slang. [If it makes sense and adds to the paper, use it; otherwise, no!]
- (o) Unnecessarily passive constructions. [There is a place for passive constructions!]

Here's a list of things we like in papers. These aren't listed in order of preference.

- (a) Clear and concise introductions.
- (b) Explicit conclusions that are introduced early in the paper.
- (c) Perspicuous argumentation—Identify your premises, conclusions, and inference rules.
- (d) Illustrative examples.
- (e) Simplifying explanations.
- (f) Helpful summaries. This can happen at the end of sections, paragraphs, or even particularly difficult passages, and not just at the end of the entire essay.
- (g) Reader-oriented writing. E.g., making the transitions between concepts explicit.
- (h) Dialectical argumentation. This means that you must consider, and reply to, counterpositions, counterarguments, and alternative interpretations. Failure to do this is dogmatism.
- (i) Cleverness.
- (j) Honest self-appraisal. Some conclusions should be qualified; some shouldn't.

Conclusive arguments—so-called *knockdown* or *destroying* arguments—are rare, and when they do occur, it isn't usually regarding any important concept. Instead, we make incremental progress. You will not be *solving*, e.g., the problem of skepticism or *demonstrating* the utter foolishness of famous philosophers or *inventing* wholly new applications of philosophy to film. You will be explaining and responding to *difficulties* for the idea the films can *do* philosophy. You can use any citation/bibliographic style you prefer. Full bibliographic details for assigned readings are given in the course syllabus (newly updated), so they can be cut and pasted from there. Here are several assigned viewings (not applicable in this paper) from an earlier portion of the class in APA style, to give you a template of how to cite films in your Works Cited.

Works Cited

- Allen, W. (Director). (1989). Crimes and Misdemeanors [Film]. Orion Pictures.
- Chaplin, C. (Director). (1936). Modern Times [Film]. The Criterion Collection.
- Gehr, E. (Director). (1970). Serene Velocity [Film]. Anthology Film Archives.
- Gondrey, M. (Director). (2004). Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind [Film]. Focus Features.
- Raimi, S. (Director). (1998). A Simple Plan [Film]. Paramount Pictures.
- Reiner, C. (Director). (1984). All of Me [Film]. Universal Pictures.