

Philosophy 101: Assignment Sheet

Short Assignments

There are five short assignments, each due in two drafts. Both drafts will receive grades, but only the final grade will count.

A penalty of a third of a letter grade will be imposed (from the final grade for the paper) for every day that the assignment is late.

The assignments cannot exceed 2 pages, double-spaces, 12 point font with regular margins. The point of the length restriction is not to torment you—it is to help you learn to write succinctly.

Avoid quotation: paraphrase.

When you write philosophical prose, you don't need to worry too much about elegance. What is most important is setting out the argument in a clear and precise way. Avoid flowery language, personal attacks on anyone, and slang.

Do not write as though your audience is your T.A. or your instructor. Instead, imagine you are writing for an audience which is prepared to read about difficult subjects, but which has not done our readings or attended class with us. One way to test whether you're really succeeding in writing for such an audience is to give your paper to a friend to read. Do they know what you're talking about? Or did you lose them in the first paragraph?

Please proof-read your papers before you hand them in. Typos and awkward prose will result in a lower grade.

Assignment #1 (Focus on 466a-469a)

First draft due: June 26th

Second draft due: July 7th

Socrates and Polus disagree about whether the orators in the city have great power. Why does Socrates think that the orators have the least power in the city?

Set out Socrates' argument for this odd conclusion as clearly as you can.

Assignment #2

First draft due: July 3rd

Second draft due: July 14th

“For if the really good things are up to us, neither envy nor jealousy has a place, and you yourself will want neither to be a general or a magistrate or a consul, but to be free. And there is one road to this: despising what is not up to us.” (*Handbook of Epictetus*, paragraph 19, page 16)

What does Epictetus mean in this passage? (You might comment on the following issues: What things are not up to us? How will despising them make us free? Why is this the *only* road to freedom? What does freedom consist in, according to Epictetus?)

Assignment #3 (focus on Butler. *Preface*, p. 13, paragraph 12 to p. 18, paragraph 29, *Sermon II*, *Sermon III*.)

First draft due: July 10th
Second draft due: July 21st

"Appetites, passions, affections, and the principle of reflection, considered merely as the several parts of our inward nature, do not at all give us an idea of the system or constitution of this nature, because the constitution is formed by somewhat not yet taken into consideration, namely, by the relations which these several parts have to each other; the chief of which is the authority of reflection or conscience" (Butler, p. 14). Explain what Butler means. Be sure to consider how Butler develops and defends this point in the readings.

Assignment #4

First draft due: July 16th
Second draft due: July 28th

Suppose determinism is true. That is, suppose that everything that happens in the future happens necessarily, given the laws of physics and the past states of the world. In this case, would we still have free will?

This assignment gives you a chance to philosophize on your own. Obviously the paper is very brief—only long enough to state your position and offer a brief argument or two. Be sure to explain what you mean by free will. There’s no official answer: just choose something that sounds plausible to you and try to state it clearly.

If you get stuck, don’t panic. Both Van Inwagen and Ayer write on this topic. If you find yourself at a complete loss, you’re free to consult both or either of these papers and focus your remarks on their own solutions to this puzzle. And remember, the paper is due in two drafts, so you’ll have a chance to revise your assignment in the light of our class discussions.

Assignment #5 (focus on Frankfurt’s ‘Freedom of the will and the concept of a person’)

First draft due: July 23rd

Second draft due July 31st

According to Frankfurt, what makes a person a person? How does his view of this matter help Frankfurt address the problem of the freedom of the will?