

A Short Guide to Writing  
a Philosophy Paper

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Note to the reader:

This guide is available to all for free at [http://www.andrewfrancisroche.com/writing\\_guide](http://www.andrewfrancisroche.com/writing_guide). I hope that you find it useful.

Contained herein are sample essays in philosophy. I wrote them for this guide (although they do not necessarily reflect my views). They are intended for students who are new to philosophy—to help them see that philosophical writing is not some mysterious form of prose.

I realize that there is a risk that a small number of desperate students may be tempted to plagiarize these example papers. If you happen to be one of them, please resist the temptation. Setting to one side that plagiarism is wrong, it also often ends badly for the person plagiarizing. Bear in mind how easy it would be for your instructor to find these essays through a web search.

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## 1. Preliminaries

### 1.1. Whom is This Guide For?

First and foremost, this guide is for my own students: to give them a sense for what I expect from their papers. The sort of paper that I have in mind is a position paper that is 2-15 pages long. This guide says nothing about how to write, say, a dialogue; and it is not intended to help students write very short pieces (e.g., *précis* of assigned reading), whose conventions are less demanding.

Although this guide is meant for my students, I am not that idiosyncratic. Much of the advice that follows will apply to papers assigned by other philosophy instructors (although you should always *ask* your professor what his/her expectations are). How far it will apply beyond philosophy courses, I will not speculate.

### 1.2. Writing and Preparing to Write

One size probably does not fit all when it comes to the process of producing a paper. Early in your undergraduate career you should try to find the process that works best for you.

Here is some advice that I have found useful:

- Write multiple drafts.
- In between drafts, reread the material on which you are writing (you will find that things jump out at you that you previously missed).
- Start your paper early, and take a vacation from it after one of your first drafts. It helps to approach your work with a fresh pair of eyes.

### 1.3. Aims (Defending a Thesis)

Typically, your task in a philosophy paper is to defend a position or claim. This means that you need a thesis. *Every word of your paper should help you defend this thesis.* When you edit your paper, you should cut everything that fails to do so.

Your thesis should be a *good* thesis. Here are some bad thesis statements, and some explanations of why they are bad:

I will compare and contrast act- and rule-utilitarianism.

This is not the point of a paper (unless the professor explicitly asks only for comparison and contrast). Of course, you may well need to articulate the differences between two views. But that is as a means to defending a position; it should not be an end in itself.

I will explore the consequences of accepting a theory of definite descriptions.

Again, your task is to defend a position—not to go exploring. It is true that you will read philosophers who will claim that their aim is to “investigate” or “probe” something or other. But this is rarely the main task of a piece of philosophical prose.

I will show that Spinoza's argument that God is the only substance is not clear and thus cannot be accepted as it stands.

I will argue that Singer is correct that eating animals is impermissible.

I will argue that people should typically tell the truth.

I will rebut all major objections to a libertarian account of freedom.

A thesis should be reasonably ambitious, clear, and interesting. Beyond that, there really are no fixed rules about what makes for a good thesis. It depends on the subject, and your professor is one of the best persons to help you gauge whether your proposed thesis is worth defending.

#### **1.4. Citation Practices**

Professors typically do not care what citation style you use: MLA, APA, Chicago, etc. are each fine. It *does* matter, however, that your style be consistent and that your professor is able to track down your sources.

I usually do not demand that students produce bibliographies or works-cited pages. Yet I certainly do expect that through your references I can easily locate the passages to which you appeal. If you refer to work not on the course syllabus, make sure that you provide a complete bibliographic reference, either in a bibliography or in footnotes/endnotes.

It is OK to argue that another argument goes wrong—especially if the task that your professor has set for you is to evaluate the argument. But a thesis like this is unacceptable. When a student's main criticism is that an argument "is not clear," he/she is adopting the pose of an instructor who is commenting on a pupil's work. This is not your role. Your role is the more substantial and more exciting role of *scholar* engaging in debate. If you think that an argument is not clear, then you ought to consider what the author most plausibly had in mind and evaluate *that* argument. Sometimes students offer a thesis like this because it does not require them to have a substantive opinion about the argument under consideration. But this is clearly no justification. *Get opinionated*. That is part of your task in writing a paper.

This thesis is actually not so bad as far it goes—*provided that the author says more*. The trouble is that for a lot of students, a thesis like this represents the following game plan: recite another author's argument and then claim, "I agree!" This is no contribution to the discussion. Consider instead, for example, defending Singer's argument from a criticism or providing better support for a claim that Singer takes for granted.

Does such a claim really require defense? The uncontentious does not require your support.

While you do not want to dedicate a paper to defending what is obvious, you also do not want to bite off more than you can chew.

Do not quote a lot of text: you are authoring, not co-authoring, your paper. Yet **you should make abundantly clear where—i.e., on what pages—an author says what you claim she says**, especially if it is a point of importance to your paper. This rule applies both to quoting and paraphrasing an author. If you are not sure whether some point needs a page reference, err on the side of referencing too much.

## 2. The Content of Your Paper

### 2.1. The Introduction

Your introduction may be the most important part of your paper. First, it sets the tone. A good introduction gives your reader reason to think that good thoughts will follow. A bad introduction gives your reader reason to be skeptical that you have anything worthwhile to say. In papers, as in life, you want to make a good first impression.

Second, and more importantly, the introduction provides the reader a sense of what is to come. In literary works, unexpected twists and turns can be exciting. Such devices just don't work in philosophical prose. Moreover, your goal in a philosophy paper is not to entertain but to convince. To accomplish this goal, make it as easy as possible for your reader to follow along. If she knows what is coming, she will be in a better position to appreciate the force of your case.

Your introduction should first give the reader a basic sense of the issue in which you are interested. It must contain a thesis statement (see §1.3), and more often than not it is helpful to articulate, in broad outline, how you will support it. In longer papers authors divide their work into sections, and in their introductions they may write something like the following:

In section 1, I argue that ... In section 2, I consider and rebut the objection that ... Finally, in section 3, I show why the alternative that ... is in no better position to explain ...

Shorter papers may not have numbered sections, but the basic idea is the same.

*Do not* begin your paper with platitudes (e.g., “the problem of identity over time is a very difficult philosophical problem”) or clichés (e.g., “since the dawn of time, philosophers have wrestled with the age-old question of how we know that there is an external world”). Additionally, your reader does not need to know the biographical details (e.g., date of birth) of the authors with whom you are engaging. The inclusion of such material will give your reader the impression that you are only trying to use up space. Just get down to business (see the introductions to the essays in §3.3 and §3.6; compare them to those in §3.2 and §3.5, respectively).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I once offered this advice to students during a period when we were reading John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*. After that class, one student noted to me that in the opening paragraph to that work, Mill writes:

*From the dawn of philosophy, the question concerning the summum bonum, or, what is the same thing, concerning the foundation of morality, has been accounted the main problem in speculative thought, has occu-*

## 2.2. The Body

Some general tips:

- Do not assume that your professor is your audience. Rather, assume that your audience is a fellow philosopher who is not as familiar with the material about which you are writing as you. So: you can take for granted that your audience knows what a valid argument is. But you should not assume that your audience understands the details of the subject of your paper, including the jargon, who thinks what, etc.
- Remember also that you *do have* an audience. Do not assume that your reader can divine the finer points of what is running through your head if you fail to express those points clearly on paper. Students—as well as professional philosophers—often assume that what is obvious to them will be obvious to everyone else. Not so. Assume that you are working a tough crowd.
- Feel free to write in the first-person. But remember that you are trying to defend a position; you are not writing a journal entry. So avoid writing such things as: “When I read this passage, it made me feel that de Beauvoir was confused to hold.... But then I considered that ..., and I became convinced that de Beauvoir was right....”
- Avoid jargon. Where you must use it, *explain* it. Use examples if possible.
- Avoid attempts at wit, sarcasm, literary flourish, etc. These typically fall flat. Write simply and in plain English.
- If you disagree with someone, be charitable. Put the best face possible on his/her position. *Then* explain why it is wrong.
- You may very well be asked to consider someone’s *argument*. If so, make sure that you present that argument—at least a basic outline of it. Consider also putting that argument into numbered steps (this is where studying a little logic can prove useful). For instance, you might be asked to evaluate an argument against the death penalty. Perhaps that argument looks like the following when put into numbered steps (the horizontal line symbolizes a “therefore” or a “consequently”):

- (1) Death row inmates are persons.
- (2) It is never permissible to kill a person.
- (3) It is never permissible to kill a death row inmate.

You are now in a position to examine this argument fruitfully. If you disagree with the argument, this might be because you believe that it is *invalid*: i.e., that its conclusion does not follow from the premises (this argument, by the way, *is* valid, at least assuming that the meanings of the words remain the same throughout). Or perhaps you think that the argument is

---

pired the most gifted intellects and divided them into sects and schools carrying on a vigorous warfare against one another (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001; p. 1; my emphasis on the first five words).

Fair enough. But there are a number of things that one might say in response to this sort of observation. I will rest content borrowing a point from Jim Pryor (see §4.1): we often read philosophers in spite of, not because of, the way that they write.



### 2.3. The Conclusion

valid but that one or more of its premises is false. Or perhaps you think that this argument is indeed sound and you want to defend, say, (2) from some criticism. Or perhaps you think that the argument is bad as it stands but could be made to work with slightly amended premises....

The point is: it is a lot easier to write about this argument when you can simply refer to “(1),” “(2),” or “(3)” in your prose. It is much easier for those reading your paper, too.

- Avoid writing a book report. Students frequently make summaries of the texts the biggest parts of their papers. Of course, it is important to make your reader familiar with what is at stake. But that should be *set-up* for your own contribution.
- Your contribution will be the defense of some thesis. I have already covered the importance of having a thesis. But *the defense* is also very important. Adopting a position is not enough. What reasons support your position? Note also that it won't do to say such things as “*p* is true because it is more logical” or “I believe that *p* because I find it more agreeable.” These are not serious reasons. Why is *p* “more logical”? Why is *p* “more agreeable”?
- If you do not have the option to select your own paper topic, make sure that you address the question or prompt that your instructor assigns, not something merely similar. For instance, if you are asked to consider *A*'s argument against stem cell research, you should do just that. It is not responsive to the prompt to ignore *A*'s argument and produce your own argument in support of or against stem cell research, regardless of how compelling your case is.

### 2.3. The Conclusion

Don't feel compelled to write a conclusion, especially if the paper is relatively short (in longer papers there may be more pressure to include one). Sometimes (*i*) conclusions are summaries; sometimes, (*ii*) they serve to indicate the relevance of the ideas presented in the paper for other fields; sometimes (*iii*) authors use conclusions to draw a moral that they did not draw earlier in the paper. But (*i*) summaries are unnecessary in short papers; (*ii*) you (as an undergraduate) are at this point unlikely to be in a position to explain how your claims are relevant in other areas in philosophy; and (*iii*) you (as an undergraduate) are at this point unlikely to be in a position to draw any additional moral that was not already a feature of your main argument.

### 3. Examples

#### 3.1. The First Assignment

Write a 3-5 page paper answering the following question:

Mary Anne Warren's paper, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," contains criticism of Judith Thomson's defense of abortion. Is Warren's criticism just?

#### 3.2. A Paper that Needs Work

What follows is a paper that needs a fair amount of work. The topic should be accessible to students at any level. Its length is equivalent to about 3.5 pages of proper-sized font, although given the font and margins that I am using, it appears somewhat longer than that.

I have lettered some of the comments below. This is because I refer to them in comments in §3.3. In that section, the same paper has been substantially improved.

Jane Doe  
Philosophy 101  
February 14, 2007

A Defense of Thomson on Abortion

~~The issue of a woman's right to do with her body~~ *This introductory sentence is just a platitude. Don't start your paper this way.*

~~what she wants vs. the potential rights of a fetus not~~

~~to be killed is a perennial problem in politics and in~~

~~morality.~~ Judith Thomson produces a **powerful** defense

*"A Defense of Abortion"!* of abortion in her paper, "In Defense of Abortion."

But Mary Anne Warren ~~came back at Thomson~~ with equally

**powerful** objections in her ~~tract,~~ *"essay" or "article" or "paper"* "On the Moral and

Legal Status of Abortion." In this paper I present my

views on this debate.

1

*This is not a thesis statement. Jane should state more specifically what she will accomplish.*

Thomson's argument gets going by considering what she thinks is the best argument against abortion out there. It starts with the controversial premise that a fetus has the right to life, something that Thomson is prepared to take for granted. The argument next says that if a fetus has a right to life, then that is more important than a woman's right to do what she wants with her own body. Then the argument claims that a fetus's right to life is more important than a woman's right to do what she wants with her own body. But then in that case, an abortion is wrong.

Thomson argues that the second point is wrong. She does this by using her example of a violinist. "But now let me ask you to imagine this. You wake up in the morning and find yourself back to back in bed with an unconscious violinist. A famous unconscious violinist. He has been found to have a fatal kidney ailment, and the Society of Music Lovers has canvassed all the available medical records and found that you alone have the right blood type to help. They have therefore kidnapped you, and last night the violinist's circulatory system was plugged into yours, so that your kidneys can be used to extract poisons from his blood as well as your own. The director of the hospital now tells you, 'Look, we're sorry the

(A) Here Jane is presenting an argument and then referring to one of its premises. It is a little difficult to follow the argument thus presented—it is especially difficult to discern what the "second point" is. This is a good example of why it can be helpful to present arguments in numbered steps.

(B) First, this is much, much too much quotation.

Second, if and when you quote a lot of text, use block quotation.

Society of Music Lovers did this to you--we would never have permitted it if we had known. But still, they did it, and the violinist now is plugged into you. To unplug you would be to kill him. But never mind, it's only for nine months. By then he will have recovered from his ailment, and can safely be unplugged from you.' Is it morally incumbent on you

The reference must be more specific than this. Whose paper is Jane quoting?

to accede to this situation?" (49) Thomson thinks that it would be "outrageous" to suggest that it is.

But then, by analogy, it would be outrageous for someone to suggest the proposal that a woman has to *"to suggest that a woman must stay connected to a fetus once she discovers that she is pregnant."* stay connected to a fetus once she visits the doctor or takes a pregnancy test and finds out that she is pregnant.

Warren's main objection to Thomson is that her analogy isn't fair because the person in the violinist case *"did nothing"* didn't do anything that would lead to being

Ambiguous. Most pregnancies result from consensual sex or consensual sex typically results in pregnancy?

attached to the violinist, whereas typically pregnancy is the result of consensual sex (49-50). But Thomson anticipates this response. "If the room is stuffy, and I therefore open a window to air it, and a burglar climbs in, it would be absurd to say, 'Ah, now he can stay, she's given him a right to the use of her house--for she is partially responsible for his presence there, having voluntarily done what enabled him to get

(C) Lots of quotation. Again.

It is important to understand why this is bad.

It is not difficult to quote relevant pas-

(D) Yet more quotation!

in, in full knowledge that there are such things as burglars, and that burglars burgle'" (58-9). Thomson uses a more far-fetched, yet even more apt, example in the following: "suppose it were like this: people-seeds drift about in the air like pollen, and if you open your windows, one may drift in and take root in your carpets or upholstery. You don't want children, so you fix up your windows with fine mesh screens, the very best you can buy. As can happen, however, and on very, very rare occasions does happen, one of the screens is defective; and a seed drifts in and takes root. Does the person-plant who now develops have a right to the use of your house?" (59). "Surely not," thinks Thomson. Thomson's point in all of this is that just because you did something that leads to someone using you're stuff, that doesn't mean you have to let them.

grammar!

(E) The point that Jane is trying to make is that this is an objection that Warren makes generally about many defenses of abortion without making it specifically of Thomson. Jane could be clearer about this.

sages, especially if the professor went over them in class. Quoting a lot of text does not demonstrate comprehension of the material. But demonstrating that you understand the material is one of the things that you are trying to accomplish in your paper!

It is good that Jane articulates, in her own words, the moral that Thomson is trying to draw.

There is a paragraph break here that Jane is not representing, and it would be better if she did. The break would be easy to represent if Jane used block quotation.

Be sparing in explicitly telling your reader that you believe something. If you state something, it typically goes without saying that you believe it.

is where Warren disagrees: "It is <sup>...</sup>~~equally~~ unclear that I have any moral right to expel an innocent person from my property when I know that doing so will result in his death. Furthermore, it is probably inappropriate to describe a woman's body as her property, since it seems natural to hold that a person is something distinct from her property, but not from her body. Even those who would object to the identification of a person with his body, or with the conjunction of his body and his mind, must admit that it would be very odd to describe, say, breaking a leg, as damaging one's property, and much more appropriate to describe it as injuring oneself. Thus it is probably a mistake to argue that the right to obtain an abortion is in any way derived from the right to own and regulate property" (44).

I think that Thomson does describe someone's body as that person's property and uses this explanation to elaborate on her argument. I also think that Warren is correct that this principle is wrong and that Thomson is wrong to appeal to it. But I believe that in fact the principle is not essential to Thomson's case. All she needs is the theory that one is entitled to leave a situation in which they have been made to serve somebody else without permission. This

In its original context, Warren's use of "equally" is perfectly appropriate. In this quotation, out of context, it reads funny. Since it does not affect the author's intentions, Jane could have used an ellipsis here.

Another very, very long quotation.

Where? How so?

explains why one can disconnect himself from the violinist. The person has been turned into a dialysis machine of the violinist without permission. ~~Why a woman can disconnect herself from her fetus is also explained by this.~~ She has been turned into an incubator for the fetus without anyone asking her permission.

There are lots of cases in which people in some sense serve <sup>“others”</sup> ~~other people~~. But I believe that in these cases, when the people do not have the moral right to end their service, the people have consented to that arrangement. For instance, if I enter a contract with you to fix your house, I am agreeing to provide you a service. But if you pay me up front, and I blow the money on a trip to Vegas where I spend it on gambling and drinking and then decide I don't want to fix your house and can't return the money, it isn't acceptable for me to no longer fix your house, to no longer perform this service for you. This is because I contracted to provide it.

In conclusion, Thomson's defense of abortion should be taken seriously. Warren provides two objections to Thomson's argument. The first overlooks Thomson's insightful example of people-seeds. The second objection is appropriate but can be accommodated. In

A couple of observations.

(F) First, it is only in the previous paragraph that Jane goes beyond simply recounting the work of Thomson and Warren. There is not much originality in this essay.

(G) Second, Jane does offer an interesting proposal on Thomson's behalf. But she is doing little to defend it, and counterexamples to her principle suggest themselves. For example, it would seem that children have obligations to do chores even if they never consented to provide such services to their parents. It would be good if Jane could anticipate and address worries like this.

Long sentence. And some of this detail seems superfluous.

A summary of such a short paper does not contribute much. Jane should cut it—or rewrite it significantly.

this way, I have defended Thomson's defense of  
abortion.

#### Bibliography

Thomson, Judith Jarvis. "A Defense of Abortion." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, No 1 (1971): 47-66.

Warren, Mary Anne. "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion." *The Monist* 57, No. 1 (Jan. 1973): 43-61.



### 3.3. The Same Paper, Improved

The following is a thoroughly updated and improved version of the paper from §3.2. But before turning to that, I want to say a few words about the previous draft.

For all of the problems with that paper, Jane kept her eye on the ball throughout. She was asked to write a paper analyzing Warren's criticism of Thomson. She wrote a paper *about that*. Jane kept her focus on whether Warren found compelling flaws in Thomson's defense of abortion.

I stress this because a common mistake in undergraduate papers, especially when it comes to topics about which students are antecedently opinionated, is to address related but different issues than those assigned. For instance, in answer to the prompt from §3.1, students will often enough write an essay on why abortion is wrong or about why abortion must be kept legal. Such papers obviously do not assess the merits of Warren's claims and are, besides, much too ambitious for a 3-5 page paper. Professors typically assign the questions they do in part because those questions are manageable in the space students have to work with.

The following paper is somewhat longer than the original, but still within the five-page limit when normal-sized font and margins are used.

Jane Doe  
Philosophy 101  
February 14, 2007

#### A Defense of Thomson on Abortion

In "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," Mary Anne Warren contests Judith Thomson's defense of abortion. Warren faults the analogy that Thomson uses to motivate her argument. Additionally, she criticizes the belief, which seems also to be Thomson's, that we should regard our bodies as our property. In what follows, I show that Warren misses Thomson's anticipation of the first objection, which Thomson adequately rebuts. I then argue that while

An appropriately detailed and to-the-point introduction.

Warren is right to criticize the view that one's body is one's property, we can abandon this component of Thomson's case without abandoning her fundamentally sound defense of abortion.

In her paper, "A Defense of Abortion," Thomson defends abortion against the following line of argument (see Thomson, 48):

- (1) A fetus has a right to life.
- (2) If a fetus has a right to life, then its right to life outweighs a woman's right to do with her own body what she wants.
- (3) A fetus's right to life outweighs a woman's right to do with her own body what she wants. [from (1) & (2)]
- (4) If a fetus's right to life outweighs a woman's right to do with her own body what she wants, then aborting a fetus is impermissible.
- (5) Aborting a fetus is impermissible. [from (3) & (4)]

Cf. (A).

Some basic logic: if an argument is valid, its conclusion follows from its premises. But that leaves open that some or all of its premises are false. If any of its premises is false, one hasn't been provided sound support for the conclusion. A sound argument is a valid argument whose premises are all true.

This argument is valid. So if (5) is false, one of the premises must be, too. Many abortion rights advocates dispute (1). But what is novel in Thomson's defense is her willingness to grant it for the sake of argument. Instead, she contests (2). Even supposing that a fetus has a right to life, it does not follow that its right to life supersedes a woman's right to determine what happens to her own body.

Jane is here admitting that this argument is valid. Thomson, however, thinks that it is not sound.

Thomson argues by analogy (Thomson, 48-9). Suppose that you are kidnapped and drugged and wake up to discover that your circulatory system has been plugged

into that of a very ill violinist. Being connected to your kidneys is the only thing keeping the violinist alive: no one else's kidneys will suffice. But sharing your kidneys for nine months will cure the violinist of his sickness, at which time he can be disconnected from you. Thomson asks whether you have the right to disconnect yourself. She thinks that it is obvious that you do. The violinist, of course, has as much of a right to life as anyone. But that right does not outweigh your right to do with your body what you want. This case, Thomson thinks, is relevantly similar to a case of a woman who is pregnant and would prefer not to be. So the example seems to show that (2) is false.

*Cf. (B). By paraphrasing Thomson's argument, Jane demonstrates her understanding of the material and makes more efficient use of the space with which she has to work.*

Warren's main objection is that Thomson's example is not truly analogous to most situations in which a woman finds herself pregnant (Warren, 49-50). You find yourself connected to the violinist through no fault of your own and without your consent. This is at best analogous to cases of rape. And in fact many people otherwise opposed to abortion think that abortions of pregnancies that result from rape are permissible.

*Cf. (C) and (D). Note the editing that took place here. Jane is presenting Thomson's case just as well as before, but she is giving herself more space to develop her own ideas (cf. (F)).*

But Warren fails to see that Thomson anticipates this response (Thomson, 58-9). Consider the following colorful scenario:

[S]uppose it were like this: people-seeds drift about in the air like pollen, and if you open your windows, one may drift in and take root in your carpets or upholstery. You don't want children, so you fix up your windows with fine mesh screens, the very best you can buy. As can happen, however, and on very, very rare occasions does happen, one of the screens is defective; and a seed drifts in and takes root. Does the person-plant who now develops have a right to the use of your house? (Thomson, 59)

Thomson thinks not. Her moral is this: simply doing something that enables someone else to use your property does not give that person a right to use your property. So, too: a woman's having consensual sex, even if she knows that pregnancy could result, does not give the resulting fetus a right to her body.

*Perhaps one opposed to Thomson's moral could question whether the new analogy is fair. Is consensual sexual intercourse merely an event that can lead to the fetus's occupation of the woman's womb? Is it something more than that, something morally relevant?*

*Cf. (E).*

But Warren issues a more troublesome objection (which she does not direct explicitly at Thomson). Thomson seems to regard the person-seed and the violinist in the above examples as violating someone's property rights.<sup>1</sup> She appears to think likewise of a fetus: it is violating a woman's property rights. The property in question is the woman's body. But it

<sup>1</sup> See also Thomson, 53: "[W]hat we have to keep in mind is that the mother and the unborn child are not like two tenants in a small house which has, by an unfortunate mistake, been rented to both: the mother *owns* the house."

is awkward to think of one's body as one's property (Warren, 44). Our bodies are much more intimately connected to us than that. For instance, when one breaks one's leg, one is not injuring one's property; one has injured *oneself* (Warren, 44).

But this is only part of Warren's complaint. Thomson's defense above turns on the following principle:

(P) One has the right to remove another from her property if that other is there without permission.

Accordingly, you have the right to remove the violinist from your circulatory system, since he is there without permission; likewise, a woman has the right to remove a fetus from her body. But, says Warren, (P) is at best contentious. "It is ... unclear that I have any moral right to expel an innocent person from my property when I know that doing so will result in his death" (Warren, 44). For instance--and this is my own example--it is dubious that if a homeless family, without permission, takes up residence in a shack at the far corner of my land in the dead of winter that it is permissible for me to remove them if this would certainly lead to their deaths.

I think that Thomson implicitly appeals to (P) and that Warren is correct that (P) is probably false. On the other hand, (P) is not essential to explain the permissibility of your disconnecting yourself from the violinist. And it is not essential to explain the permissibility of a woman having an abortion, either. To explain why these are permissible, one can avail oneself instead of the following intuitive principle:

(P') One has the right to extricate oneself from a situation in which one is serving another without one's consent.

(P') explains why you may disconnect yourself from the violinist, and it explains why a woman may disconnect herself from her fetus. You have been turned into the violinist's dialysis machine without your consent; a pregnant woman has been turned into the fetus's incubator without her consent.

So (P') is intuitive. But does it, unlike (P), withstand scrutiny?

Children may seem to be a counterexample. For instance, it does not seem right that a child has no obligation to perform chores around the house just because he has not consented to such service.

But all this shows is that children are special cases. Most people will grant that. I suggest that (P') applies only to persons fit to offer consent, in

*Cf. (G). Here and in what follows Jane is making her own contribution to the debate.*

the sense that they can enter into binding moral contracts. Presumably that covers you; it plausibly covers nearly any woman old enough to be pregnant.

Military conscription may also seem like a counterexample to (P'). For many think that in a draft one has an obligation to serve one's country even if one never consented to do so.

But this is far from a clear-cut counterexample. It may often be true that one incurs a *legal* obligation, under a draft, to serve in the military of one's country. But the plausibility of this position should not affect how we feel about whether one also incurs a *moral* obligation to serve. It is in fact not obvious that one does. But even *if* one does, that obligation seems contingent on one's continuing to be a citizen of that country. So conscription is not a situation in which one would lose the moral right to extricate oneself from service to another party. One retains that right--it is just that the extrication involves not only leaving the military but also one's country.

A final and more difficult case for (P') is this. Suppose that Xander contracts to provide a service for Avery. As it happens, however, and without Xander's knowledge, Avery is Bailey's agent, and so by dint of

serving Avery, Xander also serves Bailey. Since Xander dislikes Bailey, when he later learns of the relationship, he wishes to annul the arrangement, because: *Xander never consented to provide services to Bailey.* Yet it does not seem to follow automatically that Xander is entitled to end his service, as (P') suggests.<sup>2</sup>

I do not think this example is ultimately a problem. The following principle seems very plausible:

- (\*) If one consents to provide services to A, then one also consents to provide services to whomever one should foresee A might be providing services.

Thus, if Avery and Bailey conspired to dupe Xander, (P') poses no problem: Xander does have the right (all other things being equal) to extricate himself from his service, since he could not reasonably have foreseen the possibility that service to Avery was also service to Bailey. On the other hand, if it is well-known that Avery is Bailey's agent, then it is reasonable to expect someone in Xander's situation to anticipate that to provide services to Avery might also be to provide services to Bailey. In this case, by (\*), if Xander consents to serve Avery, he also

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<sup>2</sup> I owe this example to John Doe (no relation).



consents, in effect, to serve Bailey. It is plausible in this case that Xander is obligated to complete his service, and (P') does not suggest otherwise.

Granted, (\*) is not very illuminating, since it is up for grabs what "reasonable foresight" consists in. But there is no reason to think that *this* will be a principled source of disagreement between Thomson and her opponents.

Thus (P') seems to be a robust principle, one which is perfectly suitable for Thomson's purposes. Yet it may seem to jeopardize Thomson's response to Warren's first objection, according to which Thomson's violinist example is not relevantly analogous to most cases of unwanted pregnancy. Thomson's response presupposed that one's body is like one's home--i.e., one's property. But Thomson could easily reconsider what is relevant in her example:

*It is worth asking what other cases might be problematic for Jane's principle (P').*

[S]uppose it were like this: people-seeds drift about in the air like pollen, and if you open your windows, one may drift in and take root in your carpets or upholstery. You don't want children, so you fix up your windows with fine mesh screens, the very best you can buy. As can happen, however, and on very, very rare occasions does happen, one of the screens is defective; and a seed drifts in and takes root. *Did opening your windows constitute consent to serve as the person-plant's long-term host?*

A negative answer to this question is no less plausible than to the original.

## Bibliography

Thomson, Judith Jarvis. "A Defense of Abortion." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, No 1 (1971): 47-66.

Warren, Mary Anne. "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion." *The Monist* 57, No. 1 (Jan. 1973): 43-61.

**3.4. The Second Assignment**

Write a 3-5 page paper answering the following question:  
In the *Meditations*, Descartes argues that God is not a deceiver, despite that God allows us to err. Is his argument plausible? If so, defend it. If not, explain why not.

**3.5. A Paper that Needs Work**

The following examples follow the same format as in §§3.2-3.3. The topic is slightly more specialized, although many philosophy students have at least some exposure to Descartes' *Meditations* (which is one reason that I selected this topic). The length of this paper is equivalent to nearly four pages of proper-sized font.

Jane Doe  
Philosophy 102  
October 15, 2008

Descarte's Attempt to Absolve God

~~Philosophers consider some of the most challenging~~  
~~questions known to the human species. Asking these~~  
~~questions often leads to further questions, which can~~  
~~be frustrating. Still, philosophers hope to answer~~  
~~them.~~ One of those questions is why God allows us to  
err since he could have made us not err. It's like  
the problem of evil: if God is omnipotent,  
omniscient, perfect, and good, then why does God allow  
evil? I think that Descarte's explanation of why God  
allows us to make mistakes is ridiculous, and I will  
argue this, although one might disagree.

*Substantive question: what does God's omniscience and perfection have to do with the problem of evil?*

*Also: how is the problem of evil like the problem that Jane is considering?*

*Avoid openings like this. These claims are empty filler. Just explain to your reader what is at issue.*

*Of course one might disagree. This doesn't need saying.*

1

Use italics or underlining for longer works like the *Meditations*. Use quotation marks for articles.

Avoid the expression "from this." Students sometimes use it because they think it gives the impression that they have explained something. But what exactly is "this"? And how does what follows follow from it?

Overly long sentence.

Provide a page reference!

~~In the "Meditations," Descartes is worried that he is being deceived by an evil demon. But he concludes that he necessarily knows that he exists whenever the thought occurs to him. From this he argues that he is a thinking thing and that he knows the nature of the mind better than he knows the nature of body and that God exists.~~

But God, Descartes holds, is not a deceiver.

6 "And since God does not wish to deceive me, he surely did not give me the kind of faculty which would ever enable me to go wrong while using it correctly.

There would be no further doubt on this issue were it not that what I have just said appears to imply that I am incapable of ever going wrong. For if everything that is in me comes from God, and he did not endow me with a faculty for making mistakes, it appears that I can never go wrong." ("Meditations")

Since we often do go wrong, this is a problem for Descartes' philosophy.

Descartes responds to this challenge by saying a number of things. First, he claims that what appears to be an imperfection in me might not really be an imperfection, since evaluating whether something is more or less perfect is something that must be done while considering the universe as a whole, and something that seems like an imperfection to us might actually make the universe more perfect.

Here Jane is summarizing *Meditations* I-III. But this summary does not help Jane advance her argument. She should cut these passages.

Too much quotation.

When quoting in block form, don't use quotation marks.

Provide a page reference!

(A) Here Jane provides her reader some guidance about what is to come (assuming that Jane covers these "things"). The trouble is that this marker is vague: all we know is that "a number" of points are coming. Some more detail would be welcome.

This is a reasonable point. On the other hand, it's worth asking whether Descartes has other reasons for questioning whether we finite creatures are in a position to assess how perfect something is.

Additionally, Jane might consider cutting these last two paragraphs entirely from her paper, especially if she is short on space. Remember: if you disagree with an author, put his work in the best light possible. Since Jane thinks that Descartes' real case is distinct from the above, the foregoing criticism is, strictly speaking, otiose.

But how is this relevant? At issue is whether God is a deceiver. Descartes is saying that God may have a good reason for allowing us to err, but that doesn't negate the point that God is deceiving us. And Descartes holds that God doesn't do that.

Descartes' main case involves carefully formulating how he understands the case against God. He stipulates that if God can fairly be called a deceiver, then God must have given us either a faulty intellect or a faulty will. Since God has done neither, God is not guilty of the charge of deception.

~~The view that our intellects are limited is "Descartes acknowledges that our intellects are limited."~~  
~~acknowledged by Descartes.~~ Nevertheless, he insists that while they <sup>are</sup> finite, this is not a design flaw. "Now all that the intellect does is to enable me to perceive the ideas which are subjects for possible judgements; and when regarded strictly in this light, it turns out to contain no error in the proper sense of that term" ("Meditations," 39). ~~What seems like "Descartes seems to think..."~~  
~~Descartes' view is~~ that the intellect is just our ability to entertain various thoughts. One ~~doesn't err when they~~ <sup>grammar!</sup> ~~are simply entertaining some given thought.~~ <sup>"One does not err simply by entertaining a thought."</sup> So there is nothing broken in our intellect, despite the fact that there are many things I have no

Main case for what? Say!

(B) Why these faculties?

Jane might have anticipated here—even quite briefly—how she will respond to Descartes' argument. For instance: is Descartes' presumption that God is only a deceiver if one of these faculties is faulty false? Does Descartes fail to justify his contention that these faculties are in good order?

ideas of, which is why Descartes thinks the intellect is finite.

By contrast, Descartes thinks that our wills are practically divine:

I cannot complain that the will or freedom of choice which I received from God is not sufficiently extensive or perfect, since I know by experience that it is not restricted in any way. Indeed, I think it is very noteworthy that there is nothing else in me that is so perfect and so great that the possibility of a further increase in its perfection or greatness is beyond my understanding ("Meditations," 39).

Do not misquote an author! It is "which," not "that."

The will, for Descartes, is the ability to do or not do something--to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid. And he holds that while our wills are not accompanied by the knowledge and power that God possesses, they are still perfect in themselves. So our wills by themselves cannot be the source of our errors, either.

(C) Jane is taking this from Descartes' Meditations at AT 7:57 (p. 40), slightly amending the text. There is nothing wrong with quoting this passage. But Jane gives no indication that she is getting these words from Descartes, and that is unacceptable scholarly practice.

This makes it seem as though we cannot err, which is obviously false. Descartes holds that the "source of my mistakes"

must be simply this: the scope of the will is wider than that of the intellect; but instead of restricting it within the same limits, I extend its use to matters which I do not understand. Since the will is indifferent in such cases, it easily turns aside from what is true and good, and this is the source of my error and sin ("Meditations," 40-1).

In other words, neither of the mind's faculties is flawed. Rather, my use of them is the source of my

mistakes, specifically when I affirm or deny thoughts (an act of will) that I do not sufficiently understand. But then the falt for my errors lies squarely with me, not with God. He is not deceiving me; rather, I am misusing faculties that he gave me.

*This seems like an apt distinction to consider.*

But Descarte's argument is absurd. First, Descartes distinguishes *me* from my intellect and will. I have no objections to this, but Descartes does not consider that I am created by God just as much as my intellect and will are. Perhaps my intellect and will themselves contain no flaws, but then surely *I* do. Since God made me and since he made me prone to error, God is, strictly, a deceiver.

*(D) What tools? Jane should not presuppose that her audience is already familiar with this material.*

One might respond that while God made me able to err, he did not *force* me to err, and that here lies an important distinction. God is not a deceiver simply because he permitted me to go wrong. Indeed, Descartes argues that ~~I was given by God~~ the tools to avoid making mistakes. If we wonder why God did not simply make it impossible for me to err, one possible explanation is one that Gary Hatfield offers: that our being free requires our being able to make mistakes, and that being free is a great good, one that is worth our erring from time to time (Hatfield).

*Here Jane is doing something importantly right: She's thinking against herself, anticipating objections.*

*Provide a page reference!*

Avoid autobiography.

I thought that this was a good response until I thought of the following example. Imagine that an elementary school teacher is preparing her students for a standardized exam. The teacher decides to withhold certain lessons from her students. She doesn't give them any false information, but she does fail to teach them things that she could easily teach. Is she deceiving her students?

She is: or if she isn't technically deceiving them, since she isn't lying to them, she is doing something just as bad. But the teacher is in the same situation as God is regarding us. He could easily have made us so that we did not err. He didn't. So God is a deceiver, or something just as bad. Or maybe God isn't doing something that awful, <sup>run-on</sup> maybe he had his reasons, even very good reasons. But that doesn't mean he isn't deceiving us. He's just deceiving with very good reason for doing so.

(E) Substantive point: Descartes would pretty clearly deny that Jane's analogy is apt. It would be good if Jane would consider what Descartes would say in response to her analogy.

(F) Jane has a reasonable worry here. But she may or may not appreciate that her presumption—that if our natures are not of our own creation, what actions result from them

There is another problem with appealing to freedom in order to explain why God allows us to err, namely, that it assumes that we can be free in the first place. But ~~our faculties are made by God,~~ <sup>“... God creates our faculties...”</sup> and we first enter the world with natures produced by God. These, along with the environment we find ourselves in, determine everything that we go on to do, which



are not of our own free will—is enormously controversial. In the final draft of Jane's paper (see §3.6), this objection has evolved into a different one, one which presumes less.

means that everything that we do is determined by factors outside of our control from the get-go. It doesn't even make sense to say that we are free on Descartes's metaphysical picture, so Descartes can't appeal to our being free to help explain how God isn't deceiving us.

~~In conclusion, Descartes faces the difficulty of explaining how God is not a deceiver despite the fact that we err. I have presented Descartes' case, but it is insufficient.~~

This conclusion limps. Better to cut it entirely.

#### Bibliography

Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy, with Selections from the Objections and Replies*. Trans. John Cottingham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Hatfield, Gary. *Descartes and the Meditations*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

### 3.6. The Same Paper, Improved

The following is an updated and improved version of the paper from §3.5. You will notice that Jane has completely rewritten and restructured it. *Do not be afraid of doing this.* Rewriting a paper typically requires rethinking how one packaged it to begin with. It is very often a good idea to start again with a blank sheet, culling ideas from the earlier draft only when necessary. You may find that you change your mind significantly from draft to draft.

Jane Doe  
Philosophy 102  
October 15, 2008

#### Descartes' Attempt to Absolve God

Descartes holds a traditional conception of God according to which God is perfect. Yet Descartes accepts the obvious fact that we err. This leaves him with a problem similar to the so-called "problem of evil." The problem of evil is a problem for the traditional monotheist, who seems committed to the following three theses:

- (1') God is omnibenevolent.
- (2') God is omnipotent.
- (3') Evil exists.

The difficulty is that (1')-(3') appear to form an inconsistent triad: if God is both all-good and all-powerful, then he has both the will and the power to eliminate evil. It seems to follow that evil does not exist. Yet it does. Descartes' problem is slightly simpler. He recognizes that the following two theses appear incompatible:

*A much better introduction. Note, however, that while Jane's comparison to the problem of evil is helpful—especially to those familiar*

- (1) God is perfect.  
 (2) Persons err.

They appear incompatible for the following reason. Deception is a mark of weakness, which is an imperfection (AT 7:52, 53).<sup>1</sup> And God seems deceptive if he has created us in a way that makes us prone to err. So it appears that either (1) or (2) must give way.

In Part IV of the *Meditations*, Descartes explains how he thinks that (1) and (2) are compatible. In this paper, I present Descartes' case. I then argue against it. Assuming that God exists, he does deceive us by allowing us to err, whatever his reasons for doing so.

In the background of Meditation IV are two pictures of God's relationship to us. In one--and this is the picture that gives rise to the problem--God has designed us badly. But God is no bumbling engineer; he knows what he is doing. It thus seems that God knowingly created us so that our erring was inevitable. This construal of our relationship to God, Descartes seems to think, does make God a deceiver. Or, to put the point as Descartes does:

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I refer to Descartes' *Meditations* by way of the Adam/Tannery ("AT") pagination.

with that problem--Jane could probably cut it if she were pressed for space.

In a longer paper, Jane might examine the consequences of this conclusion. For instance: would Jane conclude that God does not exist, since it is impossible for God to be a deceiver? Would Jane argue instead that in fact deception need not be an imperfection?

In professional publications, scholars try to use the most standardized pagination possible in their references. The Adam/Tannery pagination is found in the margins of many editions of Descartes' works, including the translation that Jane has used.

since it is absurd that God would deceive us (AT 7:62), the equally absurd conclusion "that I can never go wrong" appears to follow (AT 7:54).

There is another picture, and Descartes prefers it. In it, God has created us with no design flaws. Rather, error arises when we misuse the faculties that God has given us. That is not God's fault. God is like the teacher who has given us all the necessary tools to ace an exam, if only we use them carefully. It is not the teacher's fault if we slack off, and it would be unjust to suggest that the teacher has deceived us when we do. Likewise, persons are in fact sometimes rash in their judgments, and this is why (2) we err. But this hardly contradicts the claim that (1) God is perfect.

If we are to accept the latter picture, then it is crucial to explain how our mistakes do not indicate a flawed design; and to understand Descartes' account, one must have a rough sense for how Descartes thinks that error arises in the first place. There are, for Descartes, two faculties at work when we make judgments: the faculty of the intellect and the faculty of the will. Judgment works as follows (AT 7:56-8). The intellect entertains a thought--e.g., "The angles of a triangle sum to 180 degrees." Then

*The set-up here is much better than that of Jane's previous draft. Cf. (A) and (B).*

*Here is an instance of Jane re-packaging some of her previous draft for a better presentation. She continues to use a helpful analogy of a teacher and his students; but the analogy is rather different and is doing different work. The way that Jane advances her argument here addresses the worry in (E).*

the subject, through her will, either endorses or denies it. Error arises when something goes wrong with this process, the details of which I return to shortly.

If God is responsible for our error and is guilty of deceiving us, it can only be, Descartes thinks, because he designed badly one (or both) of the faculties responsible for judgment. If God did do this, then our relationship to God would be as the first picture suggests, and God would be a deceiver. But Descartes argues that neither faculty contains such a flaw. Not the intellect: “[A]ll that the intellect does is to enable me to perceive the ideas which are subjects for possible judgements; and when regarded strictly in this light, it turns out to contain no error in the proper sense of that term” (AT 7:56). The intellect is just our ability to entertain and inspect various thoughts. We do not err when we simply entertain or inspect a thought, no matter how absurd it is. So the intellect is not flawed. It is only finite, since one cannot consider every possible thought.

Moreover, Descartes thinks that our wills are practically divine and are thus far from flawed:

I cannot complain that the will or freedom of choice which I received from God is not sufficiently extensive or perfect, since I know by experience that it is not restricted in any way. Indeed, I think it is very noteworthy that there is nothing else in me which is so perfect and so great that the possibility of a further increase in its perfection or greatness is beyond my understanding (AT 7:56-7).

The will, for Descartes, is the "ability to do or not do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid)" (AT 7:57). And while our wills are not accompanied by the knowledge and power that God possesses, they are still perfect in themselves. So our wills contain no design flaws, either. cf. (C).

Error arises only when one endorses or denies a proposition (will) that one is considering (intellect) whose truth or falsity is unclear (AT 7:58).<sup>2</sup> In other words, error arises only when a person misuses her will, which by itself is well-designed. This is Descartes' case for the second picture of God's relationship to us, according to which God is no deceiver. He has given us flawless faculties for judgment; we make mistakes when we misuse them.

But Descartes' argument fails. The crucial difficulty is that Descartes searches for a design flaw only in the faculties involved in judgment. But

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<sup>2</sup> Which is not to say that one cannot get lucky. We sometimes say true things about matters that we do not understand. Error is not inevitable in these situations.

there is something else to consider: the person who uses those faculties! Persons are one and all God's creation; their natures are, ultimately, the product of God's design. If I misuse my faculties, that is a result of how I am. How I am, it seems, must ultimately result from a design flaw.

One might reply that my propensity to err is in fact no flaw. Descartes speculates that our erring may, for all we know, contribute to the overall perfection of the universe (AT 7:55-6, 61). Perhaps, then, our propensity to err should not even be called a "flaw."

But this response does nothing to absolve God of the charge that he designed us to err. In fact, it makes matters worse, since it assumes that God positively needs our mistakes to maintain the perfection of the universe. If God uses our errors for the perfection of the universe, presumably he did not leave this to chance but ensured in advance that we would make them. This is clearly deceptive.

Alternatively, one might respond that while God designed us to be *able* to err, he did not design us to *err*, and that here lies an important distinction. It is no design flaw that God gave me the freedom to make mistakes. Indeed, the ability to err is needed in

Here Jane goes some way to responding to difficulties noted in (D). It would be nice if Jane could explain what clarity and distinctness amount to. The trouble with this desideratum, however, is that it is a vexed question what clarity and distinctness are. In a paper whose main subject matter is Descartes' theory of judgment, the author would probably be obliged to say more here. Given the scope of this paper, however, Jane probably need not go into greater detail.

order to be free, which is a great good (Hatfield, 187, 191). Moreover, Descartes argues that God gave me the tools to avoid error. I need simply withhold judgment unless the truth or falsity of the thought that I consider is "clear and distinct" (AT 7:59-60, 62).

But this response is untenable. First--and here I appropriate a point made by J.L. Mackie--to be free one need not be able to err (Mackie, 209). Even if I could not make mistakes about what is true and false, I could still make free choices about what actions I wish to take: e.g., between seeing a movie and reading a book. Perhaps I would have less freedom if I could not err; but that does not imply that I would have no freedom.

Second, invoking human freedom papers over the difficulty without responding to it. This can be seen as follows. God gave us the natures with which we entered the world. Those natures either dictated that we would err or they did not. If they did, then God did not simply give us the ability to err. He designed us to err, in which case he is a deceiver. On the other hand, perhaps the natures that God gave us did not dictate that we would err. But in this case, it no longer appears that there is an exercise,

In a longer paper, Jane would have to consider this response more thoroughly. After all, perhaps she is right. But her opponent might respond that the "great good" that God has given us is not any degree of freedom but the more significant degree of freedom that results from being able to make mistakes.

Cf. (F).



let alone a free exercise, of our wills in cases of error. Instead, factors outside of our natures force us to endorse propositions that we do not understand. This is not the picture of human error that Descartes wants us to accept. He is committed to the position that God gave us the wherewithal to avoid error. But if our errors are forced on us from without then error is unavoidable. More importantly, one must wonder whether this picture is any more compatible with the position that God is no deceiver. It seems unlikely that a God who placed us into a world where mistakes were unavoidable is any less deceptive than a God who designed us to err.

*Perhaps there is some wiggle room here for Jane's opponent. Jane assumes that the natures that God gave us were fully designed by him. But perhaps God decided to leave portions of our natures up to chance? If so, perhaps these portions of our natures are responsible for our errors?*

It therefore seems that our relationship to God is more or less as the first picture suggests: either God designed us to err or he did not give us the resources to avoid error, which he could easily have done. Either way, God is deceptive. Descartes claims that God may well have excellent reasons to permit our mistakes. But a well-intentioned deceiver is a deceiver all the same.

## Bibliography

Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy, with Selections from the Objections and Replies*. Trans. John Cottingham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Hatfield, Gary. *Descartes and the Meditations*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Mackie, J.L. "Evil and Omnipotence." *Mind* 64, No. 254 (Apr. 1955): 200-12.

**3.7. Checklist of Some Key Points**

Have you ...

- cut unnecessary observations from your introduction (§2.1)?
- stated a thesis in your introduction (see §1.3 and §2.1)?
- insured that every sentence of your paper contributes to supporting your thesis (see §1.3)?
- written your paper as if you were writing it for a philosophical peer not taking this course (*not* for your professor or simply for yourself) (see §2.2)?
- considered objections to your argument (see examples from §3)?
- edited your paper multiple times and written multiple drafts (see §1.2)?
- provided proper credit to those who have in whatever way influenced your work—including, especially, page references (see §1.4)?
- answered the assigned question (*not* merely a similar question) (see §2.2)?

## 4. Final Remarks

### 4.1. Other Resources

A terrific text that every undergraduate should read is *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White. This short book is not specific to philosophy and is very affordable (especially if purchased used). An on-line edition can be found at <http://www.bartleby.com/141/>.

Other helpful on-line guides to writing philosophy papers, which I consulted while finishing this one, include:

“A Guide to Philosophical Writing,” by Eli Chudnoff

<http://www.as.miami.edu/personal/echudnoff/A%20Guide%20to%20Philosophical%20Writing.pdf>

“Writing Tutor for Introductory Philosophy Courses,” by Joe Cruz

<http://www.williams.edu/philosophy/faculty/jcruz/writingtutor/>

“Writing Tutor for Introductory Moral Philosophy Courses,” also by Joe Cruz

[http://www.williams.edu/philosophy/fourth\\_layer/faculty\\_pages/jcruz/moraltutor/index.html](http://www.williams.edu/philosophy/fourth_layer/faculty_pages/jcruz/moraltutor/index.html)

“Writing a Philosophy Paper,” by Peter Horban

<http://www.sfu.ca/philosophy/writing.htm>

“The Pink Guide to Taking Philosophy Classes,” from the MIT Department of Philosophy

<http://web.mit.edu/philos/www/guides/pinkguide.pdf>

“Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper,” by Jim Pryor

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

### 4.2. Acknowledgments

My thanks to Anthony Coleman, Brian Cooney, and John Partridge for valuable feedback to earlier drafts of this guide.