

Writing Assignment 2: Personal Identity & Death

Phi 107—Spring 2020 : Theories of Knowledge & Reality

Basic instructions

Assignment : Defend a view on personal identity, and use this view to support an answer to the question ‘Can we survive the death of our bodies?’ See **Detailed Instructions** below.

Due Date : Submit it through Blackboard/Turnitin by 11:59pm on **Apr 27** (Monday). [Go to Blackboard>Assignments>Writing Assignment 2. There is a link called “View/Complete”. Click on it to submit.]

Header : include a header at the top of your paper. The header must include i) your SUID and ii) a word count. **Do not** put your name. (This is so that grading can be anonymous.)

Words : Your paper must have at least 1200 words and at most 1500.

Format and requirements : double spaced, 12pt size, any legible font, any style (APA, MLA, Chicago etc.) can be used.

Detailed Instructions

Main instruction : ‘Defend a view on personal identity, and use this view to support an answer to the question ‘Can we survive the death of our bodies?’.’ Here is a *suggestion* for how to do so:

- *Introduction*: This should be one short paragraph in which i) you indicate to the reader what will be your answer to the main question, and ii) you indicate how you will support your answer. (For example: “I’ll argue that the *X* view on personal identity is the best one, and that it implies that we can/cannot survive our bodily deaths.” [‘*X*’ can be the soul, body, brain, memory, or psychological view.])
- *Part I*: explain your view on personal identity (i.e. give examples, explain technical terms, contrast to other views, etc).
- *Part II*: argue for the view. (That is, explain what you think are the best features of, or arguments for, your view, or what you think are the main problems with alternative views.)
- *Part III*: defend the view against an objection (either consider an objection to your view on personal identity and then argue why you think this objection is unsuccessful, or consider an argument in favor of another view and then argue why you think this argument is unsuccessful.)
- *Part IV*: explaining how your view implies a positive/negative response to the question ‘Can we survive the death of our bodies?’.

* Please feel free to imagine a different way to structure your paper. Maybe you’ll find a structure that will make more sense to you. This would be nice. If so, I recommend that you send me an email with an outline of the structure before you start writing the paper.

Citations

Cite sources. For lecture or textbook readings it's OK to just cite in parenthesis e.g. (Lecture, day ...) or (Slides, day ...) or (Papineau, textbook p. #). [For other sources give author's name and date in parenthesis and complete citation at end of paper: author, title, date, journal/publisher or web address. These should not be included in the word count though. Any citation style is fine.]

Academic Integrity

N.B. **Turnitin** generates automatic plagiarism reports.

Every source *must be cited*. Every phrase that appears elsewhere *must be put between quotation marks*. Please see syllabus and the 'Academic Integrity' folder on *Blackboard*, under the tab 'Content'.

Further tips

How to explain a position : Explain *technical terms*. Give examples. Contrast it with other views.

How to explain and defend an argument for a position : i) State the argument in the standard (numbered) format; ii) then defend each one of the premises; iii) when defending each premise you *might* want to respond to objections against one or another premise. [If I want to explain the premise that 'the body is divisible', for example, I can explain what 'divisible' means and what it doesn't mean; and then, to justify the premise, I can give an example of how one could divide a body.]

How to respond to an argument against a position : i) First, you must state the argument in the standard (numbered) format; ii) second, you must *briefly* explain the argument [Briefly explain what do the premises mean and how they lead to the conclusion.] iii) finally, say *exactly* why you think the argument is not convincing.

– How to say exactly why an argument against a position is not convincing? You have to show that *one of the premises is not true* OR that *the premises don't support the conclusion* OR that the argument is *circular*.

* How to show that a premise is not true? Give an argument against it or give a counter-example. (For example, if the premise is a conditional statement a statement of the form 'IF p THEN q ', then you have to tell a story where p is true but q is false. This will be a counter-example to this statement.)

* How to show that the premises don't support the conclusion?

· If the argument is deductive, you show that the premises do not support the conclusion by showing that the argument is not valid — that is, you have to tell a imagined story that, if true, would make the premises of the argument true but the conclusion false.

· If the argument is an inference to the best explanation, you show that the premises do not support the conclusion by showing that there is an alternative explanation that is better than the one the argument concludes. Explain exactly why you think it's better. Is it more simple, closer to common sense, parsimonious? Why?

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- * To show that an argument is circular you have to explain exactly which premise depends on the conclusion being true, and why. [The paradigm case here is the argument from the bible to the existence of God. You can see it in the slides of the first week.]

Even more tips

Examples and Imagination : As you might have noticed from the previous tips, *examples* are really important. Philosophy is very abstract; examples help us thinking about abstract things. They sometimes help clarifying statements (premises and conclusions). They sometimes help justifying premises. And they sometimes help raising objections against statements. Thus, your paper will end up having many of them. This is how it's supposed to be.

I mentioned many examples in classroom and on slides for these various purposes. The more *original* your examples are, the better. [That is, the more 'original' they are in the sense that we didn't talk about them in class, the more you show that you understood a statement and that you thought about why that statement is true or false.] So use your *imagination*. The more you do this, the better your paper will be.

Clarity : Be as clear as you can. Use simple prose. Besides the technical, philosophical terms, use words that you would normally use in a conversation. No need for fancy big words when a short one will do.

Use space effectively : Don't repeat points already made. (If you think you might not achieve the required number of words, remember that there is *always* something *substantial* to clarify, to exemplify, to explain or to justify. Don't assume that your reader knows the topic. Write as if your reader was a colleague who is not taking our course.)

Enjoy! Writing a paper is a good opportunity to think and imagine cool stuff!

Send me an email if there is anything unclear or if you need help to plan your paper. The earlier the email, the more I can help you. txdemelo@syr.edu