

# PHILO 36400: PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE | FALL 2024

## SECOND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

### GOAL

The purpose of this paper is to further deepen your understanding of something that we read or discussed in class, this time by going beyond the required readings. There are lots of ways to do this, but any way that you do it will require reading at least two high-quality sources on your topic in addition to the required readings.

### INSTRUCTIONS

The paper is due no later than 11:59pm on **Thursday, December 19th**.

Please attach the paper as a **PDF** and send it by **email**. Make sure to save a copy for yourself.

Your essay should be clear and concise, **approximately 2000 words**. Do your best to stick to this length; it is not better to write a longer essay.

The exact formatting/citation style don't matter, as long as it is clear and consistent, and you provide enough information about sources that I can find them if I need to.

### WHAT KIND OF SOURCES?

This time, you should use and cite at least two sources in addition to our required readings from class. These can be secondary sources on one of our required readings (this means that they talk about the required readings, but present original arguments about what it means) or they can be primary sources on the same topic (this means that they are the original source of an argument).

What you should *not* cite is a secondary or tertiary source that just summarizes a reading or argument from another source (for example, an encyclopedia article). A source like that could be useful to you as a starting place for your research, but only for finding the original source of a reading or argument that you want to cite. For example, it's great to use the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy or Wikipedia as guides to other things to read, but not as potential sources in their own right. The most important parts of these encyclopedia articles is their bibliographies.

I will also be evaluating the quality of your sources. This means that you should try to cite scholarly publications, and not just random discussions that you found on the internet. (There are interesting exceptions to this rule. Sometimes a Youtube video or a reddit post or a tweet will contain an argument that doesn't (yet) exist in a scholarly publication. If you're unsure about a particular source, just check with me about it.)

The most important thing is that you use these sources to further deepen your understanding of some topic or required reading that we discussed in class. So, if they just seem like they're thrown in to meet the requirement, with no serious evidence that they have deepened your understanding, that's not good.

### SOME IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO WRITE YOUR PAPER

The purpose of this paper is for you to further deepen your understanding of something we've been learning about in the class, this time by using additional sources beyond the required readings. There are lots of ways that you could use the paper to do this, and I am open to discussing various options. But here are a few specific things that you could do:

1. Find something that is confusing about of the required readings that we've covered so far. Explain what is confusing about it, and why it is important that we figure it out. Summarize a debate in the

scholarly literature about how to interpret the relevant passage, and take a side, defending your interpretation or explaining why one of the scholarly interpretations makes more sense.

2. Find something in a text we've read that you disagree with. Explain why the author has this view, as charitably as you can. Then explain, as clearly and concisely as possible, why they are wrong, making sure to discuss and respond to the most relevant scholarly work that supports or is opposed to your argument.
3. Find something in a text we've read that you agree with, and provide an additional argument for this claim that goes beyond what the author gave. Explain and respond to the most relevant arguments that other philosophers have made on this topic.
4. Explain a specific way in which two of the authors we've discussed this semester disagree, and take a side, giving your own argument why one author's position makes more sense than the other's. Explain and respond to the most relevant arguments that other philosophers have made on this topic.

These are examples of the form that your paper could take. But I am open to other options, which you can discuss with me in class, in office hours, by email, or on Discord.

## **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

- Did writing the paper deepen your understanding of something we talked about in class? This is what this assignment is all about, and it is the most important thing I'll be looking for.
- Clarity: It should be easy to understand what point is being made at all times. This means writing well, but also structuring your essay carefully so that it's obvious how each thing that you say fits with your overall aims.
- Persuasiveness: When you make an argument for some philosophical or interpretive claim, it should be a rationally persuasive one, even to someone who wouldn't otherwise agree with your conclusion. And when you summarize another author's argument, you should make it clear what is persuasive about this argument.
- Appropriateness of sources: You should try to cite the primary or secondary sources that are most relevant to your argument, not just any old random discussion you found on the internet. You should always cite the original source of some argument, rather than something else that merely summarizes it.
- Accuracy: If you're discussing other people's ideas—including those in the readings or in your additional sources—you should show that you understand them properly.