

PHILO 36400: PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE | SPRING 2019

FIRST ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

INSTRUCTIONS

A paper copy of your midterm is due in class on **Tuesday, April 9th**.

Your essay should be clear and concise, approximately 2500–3000 words. Do your best to stick to this length; it is not better to write a longer essay.

You should cite any sources that you use, including required readings, whether you discuss them explicitly or just use them as inspiration.

The exact formatting and citation style doesn't matter, as long as it is clear.

QUESTIONS

Your job in the expository paper is to clearly explain the central arguments and philosophical context of one of the main readings. This means that you will have to

- (i) Clearly explain the reading's main thesis or theses.
- (ii) Explain the author's main arguments for this thesis or theses.
- (iii) Explain how defending this thesis fits into the author's broader philosophical project and theoretical viewpoint.

The first two of these aims requires that you have a deep understanding of the reading that you choose. The third requires that you go beyond the main reading into the additional readings and perhaps further primary and secondary sources in order to understand the author's broader aims. There is no particular number of secondary sources required, but I will expect you to display a solid grasp on what the author's broader philosophical aims are, and how what we read fits in.

Note: some of the authors we discussed defended many loosely-related theses. In this case, you may bracket some of their theses in order to focus on one or two. In general, it is better to do a small number of things clearly in your essay rather than to explain too many things in a way that isn't clear.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- **Do what the assignment asks:** The whole thing, and nothing else!
- **Clarity:** It should be easy for the reader 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 claim. And when you summarize another author's argument, you should make it clear what is persuasive about this argument.
- **Accuracy:** If you're discussing other people's ideas—including those in the readings—you should show that you understand them properly.