

Thesis-Defense Paper Project

Phi 335 Epistemology

Jared Bates, Winter 2014

In the thesis-defense paper, you are to take a position on some issue in the area of *epistemic value* that will require some additional research on your part, support that position with arguments, and defend it against objections. There are various aspects of this assignment, and these are described below. The overall objectives for this project are for you (i) to gain experience staking a position on a substantial philosophical issue and supporting it with arguments and (ii) to achieve a level of self-reliance in your own intellectual pursuits.

Deadlines for various parts of the project

1. Research tutorial assignment	[25 pts]	Friday, 21 Feb
2. Initial consultation with me	[10 pts]	Friday, 7 Mar
3. Topic and bibliography (hard copy and presentation)	[15 pts]	Monday, 10 Mar
4. Issue and thesis statement draft section (optional)		Friday, 21 Mar
5. The paper	[75 pts]	Monday, 31 Mar
6. The presentation	[25 pts]	31 Mar - 11 Apr
	150 pts total	

1. Research tutorial assignment.

Objectives and purpose. On a separate assignment sheet, you will be given five tasks to perform using various online research tools. These tasks are designed to prepare you to do further independent research with using tools for your thesis-defense paper. We will reserve this class day for hands-on research activities.

Grading. Each task is worth 5pts, for a total of 25 pts.

2. Initial consultation.

Objectives and purpose. No later than the deadline mentioned above, you will meet with me in person to discuss possible topics, and to go over possible sources, for your thesis-defense paper. At the meeting, you should be able to describe at least one specific issue you would like to address in your paper, and bring in full citation details for at least three sources (outside the assigned reading) that squarely address the issue or issues you are interested in. The Philosopher's Index (linked at the Library's A-Z List of Electronic Resources: <http://library.hanover.edu/research/alphadb.php/#p>) is your best bet for locating articles, books, and book chapters in philosophy. You may also find GoogleScholar (<http://scholar.google.com>) or PhilPapers (<http://philpapers.org>) useful. It is not necessarily the case that the sources you locate will be used in your paper. The purpose of the initial meeting is for you to have made significant, independent progress toward shaping and defining your project, and for you to get feedback on that progress.

Grading. This stage of the assignment is worth 10 points, and will be evaluated by (i) how well-defined your project is (or projects are), (ii) how appropriate the project is (in scope, feasibility, etc) for a paper of this kind, and (iii) the quality of your selected sources and their relevance to your chosen topic(s).

9-10pts	Excellent, a model.
8pts	Very good, many overall strengths.

7pts	Adequate in almost all respects.
< 7pts	Deficient in some important ways.

3. Topic and bibliography assignment.

Objectives. You will write up a brief (less than one single-spaced page) prospectus for your paper. This document contains (i) a description of the topic (issue or problem) your paper will address, (ii) a clear statement of your position on the topic (i.e., your thesis statement), (iii) a sketch of your main supporting argument, and (iv) a list of your references. All of this is tentative and subject to revision. These will be presented briefly in class on the date specified above.

Grading. This stage of the assignment is worth 15 points, and criteria are the same as those above, though the quality of your presentation will also weigh in.

14-15pts	Excellent, a model.
12-13pts	Very good, many overall strengths.
10-11pts	Adequate in almost all respects.
< 10pts	Deficient in some important ways.

4. Issue and thesis statement draft, optional.

Objectives. I invite you to submit a draft of the introductory section of your paper. In this section, you are to introduce the philosophical issue you will be writing about – explain what it is and why it is important to think about – and state your position on your issue, that is, your thesis statement and a sketch of your argument. This will give me an opportunity to comment on the earliest stage of your paper in time for you to use this feedback in writing the actual paper, hopefully improving the entire project. This portion of the project is optional but strongly encouraged.

5. The paper.

Content and mechanics. The papers will be approximately 9 full pages in length (3000 words), using double-spacing and normal font and margin sizes. This does not include your Works Cited list. The papers are to be very well polished for organization, spelling and grammar. Style should conform to the accompanying Style Guide. In the thesis-defense paper, you are to explore some issue in *epistemic value* more deeply than was possible to do in class, take a position on that issue in light of your research, and defend your position by (i) providing arguments for it and (ii) defending those arguments against standard (or, if not standard, then serious) objections against it. Your papers are to have a separate title sheet with your paper’s title and your name on it. If you like, the course title, semester, and professor’s name may also appear on the title sheet. Additionally, page numbers should appear at the bottom of every page of the paper.

Grading. The paper is worth 75pts, and here is where those points are coming from:

10 pts	Mechanics & organization. Does your paper follow the formatting and length guidelines? Are there any errors in grammar, spelling, or style? Do you use direct quotations appropriately? (See below.) Is your paper structured in a logical and intuitive order? Are the transitions between the parts of your paper smooth and natural? Does your organization suggest a synthesis in your understanding of the material – that is, are the parts logically integrated or simply bolted together? How well did you follow the Style Guide? (See below.)
15 pts	Issue and thesis statement. Do you provide a compelling presentation of your issue? That is, does your presentation make clear the significance of your issue? Do you give a good,

clear statement of your thesis? Do you give a sufficiently clear sketch of the argument that follows?

30 pts Positive arguments. How well do you support your thesis? Do your arguments work? Are they presented clearly?

20 pts Objections & responses. How strong are the objections you present to your own view? How well do you motivate them? Are you able to defend your thesis against the objections? Are there any standard objections to your view that you do not consider?

6. Presentations.

Objectives and purpose. The last two weeks of class are reserved for student presentations. Students will have 25 minutes for their presentations, with 15 minutes for the formal presentation and an additional 10 minutes to field questions from the class. Each presentation should clearly lay out the main issue, position, and arguments that make up the paper, and presenters should be prepared for a critical discussion of their work – i.e., to clarify, justify and defend their position.

Grading. The in-class presentation is worth 25 points, and will be evaluated by (i) the intrinsic merits of the presentation on the criteria described for the paper above, and (ii) the quality of the presentation itself, in terms of how clearly and effectively it conveys the contents of the paper.

23-25pts	Excellent, a model.
20-22pts	Very good, many overall strengths.
17-19pts	Adequate in almost all respects.
15-16pts	Deficient in some important ways.
<15pts	Seriously deficient or not worthy of credit.

Stern words about direct quotations and close paraphrases

In these papers you should aim at a very high, very professional level of writing. The above guidelines are provided to help you achieve this level. But another issue that needs to be addressed is the use of direct quotations and close paraphrases of another writer's words. To quote another writer's words directly is to insert a string of the writer's words into your paper surrounded by quotation marks (in the case of short quotes) or displayed in a block paragraph (in the case of longer quotes). When you use quotation marks or a block paragraph, you attribute the words to another. You should always cite the page number(s) and source of the original text when doing this. To paraphrase another writer's words is to use *your own words* to express basically the same idea as the original. Again, when doing this, you should attribute the idea to the writer by citing the page number(s) and the source. To paraphrase another writer's words closely is to insert a string of the writer's words into your paper, without quotation marks, changing just a word or two in order to express the same idea as the original. This is plagiarism – whether or not you provide citation details – and you should never do it. For one thing, you will be in violation of the Student Conduct Code. (An even *worse* violation of plagiarism is to give a direct quotation without the quotation marks or the block paragraph; again, it's plagiarism whether or not you cite your source.) I don't intend to give you a tutorial on plagiarism, so I encourage you to educate yourself on the topic by looking at the Library's guide here <http://library.hanover.edu/help/plagiarism.php>. The Style Guide below shows you how to provide citation details when you use other writers' ideas in your papers.

Let's set the issue of plagiarism aside and focus on when you should directly quote another writer's words. This no doubt differs in different disciplines, but I have a very simple set of guidelines I want you to follow in your papers. You may use direct quotation *only if*:

1. You need to prove that a writer holds a certain view. If it is controversial whether or not so-and-so believes that such-and-such, then it is appropriate to quote so-and-so saying “such-and-such.”

Or:

2. The meaning of a writer’s words is unclear (or ambiguous) and some interpretation is needed. When a writer’s words need some interpretation, you need a direct quote. The quote is the evidence for your interpretation. In this case, you are using a direct quotation specifically to discuss the language in it.

If you find yourself using a quote for any reason other than the above, then your quote is unnecessary and should be omitted. You are likely using the quote as a crutch. And you will be a stronger writer by putting the point in your own words.

Style Guide

Unlike some other disciplines, philosophical publications do not have a uniform style guide for the citation of published works. Still, it is a good habit to have a convention down, and for your thesis-defense paper, I want you to use the convention illustrated below.

These examples illustrate how to cite a work if you want to ...

1. cite an entire work:
Tye (2009) changes his position on phenomenal concepts.
2. cite a page number in a particular work:
According to Melnyk (2003, 298), another line of empirical support for physicalism comes from the fact that mental processes depend for their occurrence on the occurrence of some neural processes. *A range of pages would be cited like this: Melnyk (2003, 298-303).*
3. cite a footnote or endnote in a particular work:
Tye suggests that there is some disagreement over how to formulate the thesis of physicalism (2009, 203n2).
This refers to p.203, note 2.
4. provide a direct quotation from a particular work:
As Shoemaker puts it, “introspection, whatever else it is, is the link between a man’s mental states and his beliefs about (or his knowledge or awareness of) those states” (1975, 296).
If you provide a much longer quote (say, one that takes at least four lines), you should display the quote in a block paragraph, drop the outer quotation marks, and move the citation details to the right of the final period.

Complete citation information for all of your sources should be listed, alphabetically by the author’s last name, in a section at the end of your paper, under the heading “Works Cited.” Here’s how to list each type of publication. This covers the most common ones.

Book Tye, Michael. 2009. *Consciousness revisited: materialism without phenomenal concepts.* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

Book title is italicized, with only the first letters of the initial word and proper names capitalized.

Journal article Shoemaker, Sydney. 1975. "Functionalism and qualia" *Philosophical Studies* 27: 291-315. *Article title is in quotation marks, with only the first letters of the initial word and proper names capitalized. Journal title is italicized with all main terms capitalized. With the punctuation displayed above, provide the volume number of the journal (27) and the page numbers for the article (291-315).*

Article in book Chalmers, David. 2007. "Phenomenal concepts and the explanatory gap" in Torin Alter and Sven Walter, eds., *Phenomenal concepts and phenomenal knowledge*. (New York: Oxford University Press).

Kim, Jaegwon. 1993. "Supervenience as a philosophical concept" in his *Supervenience and mind: selected philosophical essays*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Unpublished manuscript on the web Cole, David. unpublished ms. "Cheap Nativism"
URL: <http://www.d.umn.edu/~dcole/cheap.nativism.090710.doc> Accessed 03 Jan 2014.

You do not need to provide the URL for print publications, even if you downloaded them from the web. Citations for all print publications should follow the guidelines above.