

Philosophy 2300: Beginning Philosophy
Spring 2019
Fourth homework assignment

Please type your answers and bring them to class on Mon, April 1st. **ALSO** please make your answers anonymous by putting your R# at the top of the page and **NOT** your name.

You are to produce two “four-sentence papers.” One of these essays will be on personal identity and the other on the nature of consciousness.

A four-sentence paper looks like this:

- (1) They say _____.
- (2) I say _____, because _____.
- (3) They might object that _____.
- (4) I reply that _____.

Learning how to write very short four-sentence papers like this helps you to better understand the structure of philosophical argumentation.

For this assignment, in one paper you should use Dennett, Swinburne, or Mitchell-Yellin and Fischer instead of ‘they’ in the first and third sentences. In the second paper, you should use Nagel, Chalmers, or Churchland.

Here is an example four-sentence paper using John Stuart Mill’s views on the Harm Principle.

- 1) Mill says that the government should not interfere with anyone’s liberty unless it is to prevent harm to others.
- 2) I say that this is sometimes okay, for example in passing laws requiring the use of seat belts, because they save lives.
- 3) Mill might object that people will never develop autonomy if we don’t allow them to make choices for themselves.
- 4) I reply that it is true that the government should not make every choice for people; however, preventing people from making very large mistakes leading to their death is something that actually allows them to live longer and so develop autonomy more fully.

Here is another example four-sentence paper using Galen Strawson’s views on moral responsibility.

- 1) Strawson says that we are never ultimately responsible for what we do.
- 2) I say that we are sometimes ultimately responsible, because when you act the way that you want to and you were not forced to do so, you are responsible for your actions.
- 3) Strawson might object that when you acting in this way, your choice was merely a function of the way that you were at that time and you are not responsible for the way you are.
- 4) I reply that it is true that you acted the way you did because of the way you are. However, when your actions flow out of your own character you 'own' your actions and can rationally endorse them. This is sufficient for others to hold you accountable for these actions such that you would be deserving of praise or blame for example.

These two four-sentence papers above are good examples. You should use them as models for your own papers. What I recommend is finding a key conclusion in one of the papers that we read that you disagree with. Then use that conclusion as the first sentence in your essay. The author(s) will undoubtedly defend that conclusion somewhere in the text. This defense will then be the third sentence in your paper.