Weekly Response Paper Guidelines

1. Assignment: Ten times during the semester, and **no more than once during any given week**, you will write a 250-350 word (~1 page) paper, responding to an assigned class reading. Your paper should include the following two elements:

(a) **Synopsis:** Provide a brief synopsis of the reading. What conclusion was the author trying to argue for? What were some of the reasons that the author used to support his/her conclusion? Keep this portion brief, though. This is not a book report. This is a *response* paper. So, most of your essay should be devoted to part (b).

(b) **Response:** Share some of the thoughts that you had in reaction to the reading. Here are some examples of the sorts of things you might want to discuss:

- Did you agree with the author(s)? Why or why not? (Defend your evaluation.)
- While you were reading, did you think of a potential reply or answer to some question raised by the author—i.e., perhaps something that they overlooked, or failed to consider—or a potential solution to some puzzle or problem that was discussed? If so, share a brief synopsis of your ideas about how to answer that question, or solve that problem.
- Could the ideas in this paper be applied somewhere else? (e.g., perhaps some problem identified in this paper also gives rise to problems in some other area of philosophy? Or, perhaps some solution identified in this paper might help to solve a similar problem elsewhere? Etc.)
- Did the reading remind you of anything interesting? (e.g., maybe something that you learned about in one of your other classes; or a book you've read; an experience you've had; etc.?) If so, say a bit about the connection that you perceived between our reading and that other piece of the world.
- Did thinking about this topic cause you to see the world differently in any way? (or, perhaps re-evaluate your beliefs, goals, actions, etc.?) Is there some important lesson here that you think we could all benefit from learning? If so, say a bit about how this reading affected your worldview, or how we might benefit from it.
- Were there any portions of the reading that you were confused about? If so, identify the confusing passage, and then say a bit about what you think that passage *might* have been trying to convey, and why.

You get the idea.

2. Due Date: For each paper, whatever reading(s) your paper is on, the assignment is due **at the beginning of class on the scheduled day of that assigned reading**. For example, if you are writing on Boonin's 'How To Solve the Non-Identity Problem', then your paper is due by the beginning of class (9am), on Wednesday 9/10.

Reading responses should be submitted on Blackboard. (Click *PHIL 403* → *Written Assignments* → *Reading Responses* → *Start Submission* → scroll to *Submission* → add your file; to do so, either click the paper clip icon or drag and drop your file. Note: Do **not** merely copy and paste text into the submission box, as this prevents me from adding annotations when giving feedback → click *Submit*).

Late papers will not be accepted.

(*Note that only 13 of the 15 weeks have assigned readings, so be sure not to fall behind!*)

3. Grading Rubric: I will be looking for three things when I assign grades:

(1) Following Instructions: Did you complete the assignment according to the instructions above?

(2) Clarity: Do you explain yourself in a way that is *clear*, *concise*, and *well-organized*? You should think of this as a somewhat informal assignment. However, your writing should still be clear enough and careful enough that someone who has never taken philosophy could read it and understand it (and perhaps even learn something from it!).

(3) Careful, Contemplative Reasoning: It should be evident that you have actually thought carefully about the reading that you are responding to, and that you have put some time and consideration into your response. In short, this is not meant to be the sort of assignment that can be completed successfully 10 minutes before class.

Extra Credit: If you like, you may turn in an 11th reading response paper after completing your first ten. If you do, I will count your best 10 papers toward your Response Paper grade (which constitutes 10% of your final grade); i.e., your lowest score will be dropped.

4. The Ultimate Goal: Improving Your Writing Skills: Some additional things to note:

- Instructor Feedback: Check back on Blackboard within a day or two after the due date, and you will see that I have provided you with comments and feedback there. Over the course of the semester, I will try to help you to identify instances where your writing is clear or unclear, persuasive and well-supported with reasons, or unpersuasive. I'll often simply push back on a claim that you've made, to help you gain some sense of how your opponent might respond. And so on. In short, slowly but surely, I'll be attempting to gently guide and shape you into becoming a better philosopher, and a clearer and more persuasive communicator more generally.

- Honing Your Skills in a Low Stakes Environment: This an *informal* writing assignment. Your writing here will likely be more speculative and exploratory (rather than a clear, persuasive, and rigorous defense of some particular thesis, as will be expected of you in the formal papers). In short, in the reading responses, I won't be expecting you to have it all worked out. So do feel free to use this assignment as an opportunity to really *explore* your thoughts and ideas *freely*, in a low-stakes setting.

- Idea-Generating Laboratory: It is not uncommon for a student to discover something so excellent in their reading response, that they find it is worth investigating in far more detail in a formal paper. (And I will be quick to let you know when you've stumbled upon something remarkable, or ripe for further exploration.) In short, the reading responses can also be used as a laboratory or testing ground, to test out some of your ideas in a low-stakes environment, with the prospect that, perhaps, they just might become the seeds for a longer paper.