Fall 2010

Research Paper Assignment

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DRAFT Research paper assignment

Write a research paper of 3,500 words or less on a topic in the philosophy of gender. I have supplied some possible topics below, but most of them are too broad for a paper of this length. Whether you start with one of these topics or come up with your own, your final topic should be very specific. (You can think of your topic as the question that the thesis of your paper answers.) You should also be sure to pick a *philosophical* topic. Though you may use empirical data (psychological, biological, etc.) in your paper, you should ensure that the question you are answering is not one that would be properly answered solely by empirical research.

To write a good research paper, you must go through a number of steps:

1. Decide on a general topic, such as one of those below.

2. Locate material that might be relevant.

3. Read this material, summarizing it and beginning to think critically about it in your notes. (This might lead to (i) further questions, and (ii) locating more material.)

4. Begin writing your paper. For some, this stage begins with writing an outline. For others, it's a matter of leaping into writing part of a draft, be it some exegesis, some critical discussion, or a draft introduction. You should do whatever gets you writing soonest. (This should lead to (i) narrowing your topic, will probably lead to (ii) further questions, and might lead to (iii) locating more material.)

5. Revise your paper. This involves reading your paper from the point of view of someone who is not familiar with the topic you are addressing. Would such a person understand the topic, and be able to follow your discussion of it? Would the point of your paper – the thesis you defend – be clear to such a reader? You might do some revision as you go, but you should try to get a full draft written as soon as possible.

Deadlines

Friday, October 22: Paper-topic assignment

Complete this assignment, and hand in a hard copy at the beginning of class on October 22. This assignment will count for 2% of your final grade.

November 9: Annotated bibliography assignment

There are three parts to this assignment:

1. Revised topic

The bibliography should being with a *paragraph summary of your paper topic* as it currently stands, including the thesis you intend to defend.

2. Annotated bibliography

Next should come an annotated list of *at least five* chapter- or article-length texts (no complete books), subject to the following constraints.

> (i) At least one item should be from an entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
> (ii) At least one item should be a chapter from a book by a single author.
> (iii) At least one item should be a reading from an edited collection.
> (iv) At least one item should be from the references in another piece in your annotated bibliography.
> (v) No more than two items should appear on the course syllabus.

All your items should be scholarly essays or chapters (no introductions from textbooks, no newspaper or magazine articles). Note that you are required to have *read* the items you annotate. *To give an annotation of something you have not read is a violation of academic integrity.*

Each item in the bibliography must include (i) a full bibliographic reference, (ii) a paragraph summary of the reading (the 'annotation'), and (iii) a short paragraph evaluating the usefulness of the source for your project. For example:

> Kania, Andrew (2011) 'All Play and No Work: The Ontology of Jazz,' *Journal of Jazz Studies* 14: 25-34.

> Kania argues that jazz is a musical tradition in which there are no works of art, only performances. He argues for this view by rejecting alternative theories of the ontology of jazz, according to which (i) jazz is a tradition of works for performance, (ii) jazz performances are artworks in their own right, and (iii) jazz recordings are works of art. He argues that the centrality of improvisation to jazz, and the ways in which musicians and knowledgeable audiences talk about jazz, favor his view over these alternatives.

This article supplies a useful taxonomy of different ontological theories of jazz, which may be a useful way into my paper (on free jazz). But the article says very little about free jazz itself, so I will not make extensive use of the it in my paper.

You may use any system of reference you like (MLA, Chicago Style,…), as long as (i) you use the same system throughout, and (ii) you include *all* the relevant information for each item (author, year of publication, title of chapter/article/book/journal, volume number, publisher, place of publication, page numbers, etc.). See my handout on giving references in philosophy papers for more information.

You may include additional items in your bibliography that you think might be relevant, but which you have not had a chance to read yet. These will not count towards your minimum of five pieces, of course, since you cannot annotate them. But I might be able to offer some advice on which are worth pursuing first.

3. Research narrative

You must also include a narrative describing your research process. How did you find the materials you include? What resources did you use? How did you select these particular texts from the others you came across in your research? You should also address why you did *not* use resources that are commonly used in philosophical research (e.g. *Philosopher's Index* or interlibrary loan). (There is no word limit for your research narrative, but I'm expecting it to be only a page or so.)

Friday, December 3: Final paper and research narrative

You must submit, in person to me or the secretary of the Philosophy Department by noon on Friday, December 3: (i) a hard copy of your paper and (ii) another research narrative. The research narrative should describe your research process since handing in the annotated bibliography.

Relevant parts of the syllabus and my handouts on how to write and give references in a philosophy paper constitute parts of this assignment. Failure to follow the guidelines therein (even seemingly trivial ones) will result in a lower grade for your paper.

Possible topics

What is the best characterization of feminism? Who should be a feminist, so characterized?

What is sex (the classification, not the act)? How many sexes are there?

What is the point (if any) of distinguishing sex from gender? What is the right way to draw this distinction?

What is 'gendered language'? Is there anything wrong with gendered language? If so, what should we do about it? If not, why not?

What is 'eco-feminism'? What is the relationship between feminism and eco-feminism?

Is there such a thing as *normal* sexual desire? If so, what is it? If not, why not?

What is 'cybersex'? When you have cybersex, are you having sex?

What (if anything) does philosophy have to offer when it comes to the scientific study of sexuality?

What is prostitution? What should we say about it morally?

What is pornography? What should we say about it morally?

Is it ethical for a college student to participate in a sexual relationship with a professor?