

Critical Inquiry Seminar

Manifest versus Scientific Image



Writing Assignment Due Thursday, Nov. 4

For this assignment, you will be providing critical feedback on someone else's paper. A word of warning: I don't think this is an easy assignment! Writing good feedback is time consuming.

- Comment on any one of the papers emailed to you. (Try to comment on an unfamiliar paper — and certainly don't comment on your own!)
- You may write on a hard copy of the paper, use Microsoft Word's comment feature, or devise some other method. I ask only that your comments be legible.
- Don't forget to put your name somewhere on the paper.
- Please indicate whether you have read Descartes's reply to the circularity objection.

Your aim is to give the author *constructive* feedback.

- 1) First and foremost, remember that this is the work of one of your peers, so be respectful. Your goal isn't to tear the paper to shreds and make the author feel crappy. You are trying to help the author improve their writing.
- 2) Give positive as well as negative feedback.
- 3) As you read each paragraph, ask yourself if you're sure you understand what the author is trying to say.
 - a) Is the author assuming that you already know the topic?
 - b) Are there sentences that don't really make sense until after you've read down a bit further?
 - c) If the author is explaining a position, distinction, argument, or problem, is it easy to understand the explanation, or follow the reasoning?
 - d) Do you understand the point of the paragraph? Do you see how this paragraph fits into the paper as a whole?
- 4) Try to give specific, constructive suggestions for improvement. This is (I think) very difficult to do.

- On the one hand, you are not rewriting their paper for them. Nobody wants to get a paper back from a friend in which every sentence is changed.
- On the other hand, it's not very helpful to have a sentence or passage simply marked with 'I don't get it' or a question mark. The author wants to know what's wrong and how to fix it.

You'll have to balance these two competing points.

- a) Is there a pivotal word, phrase, or sentence in the paragraph that is unclear (maybe it's ungrammatical, maybe it's awkward, maybe it's ambiguous, maybe it's too vague, etc.). Can you suggest an alternate formulation?
 - b) Is there a particular question that you thought the paragraph would answer that wasn't answered? Would answering the question help make the paragraph clearer?
 - c) Based on your understanding of the philosophical material, do you agree with the author's take on the issues?
- 5) Are there any issues with the organization of the paper? Does it seem like the author knows where the paper is going throughout?
- 6) Give general comments. What do you see as the most important two or three things the author can do to improve the paper?