

Critical Inquiry Seminar

Manifest versus Scientific Image



Writing Assignment Due Tues, Sept. 14

Austin is attempting to rebut the skeptical argument. In roughly **two pages**:

1. Lay out the skeptical argument that Austin is challenging.
2. Explain why he thinks this argument is unsound.

With regard to the second task: be as *specific* as you can. Does Austin think that one premise of the skeptic's argument is false? If so, which one, and why? Does he think that the conclusion does not follow from the premises? If so, why?

I would like you to **email** me your paper (in Word format) sometime *before* class.¹

Guidelines

Your goals are, first, to explain the argument to which the author objects; and second, to present, as clearly as possible, the objection to that argument. Because **precision** is a central virtue in philosophy (running a close second only to clarity); you need to give more than a *rough idea* of the argument and objection. (For instance, it is not enough to simply describe an example that the author uses. You must explain *what the example shows*, which premise it establishes or falsifies, etc.)

Your explanation may go beyond what is written in the text; if it does, aim to make your reasoning as clear and as plausible as you can. Are you relying on general rules or principles, or is this a unique case? If so, what makes it unique? Does your reasoning depend on understanding one of the key terms in some specific way? If so, what is it? (See the note on appeals to the dictionary below.)

You are *extracting* the argument and objection from the reading; this is not necessarily the same task as summarizing the entire article from beginning to end. In many of the readings, the author does not present the argument all in one place, or in the clearest way possible. If you just paraphrase the reading, that shows only that you have the fairly low-grade skill of paraphrase, and not that you genuinely understand the material.

Audience

The intended audience for your paper is not myself, nor the other students in the class — you know we are familiar with the argument and the vocabulary in which it is stated. Your

¹ Come talk to me if you don't have Microsoft Word and can't save documents as Word or RTF files.

aim is rather to make this argument easily understandable to someone completely *unfamiliar* with the material, like your average college student. By far the best way to do this is to express the view or arguments in your own words. If you introduce a bit of new terminology you think your average reader won't know, you should explain what it means (though you may assume your reader is familiar with the basic logical vocabulary discussed in the next section).

Pretend your reader will be another Pomona freshman who switched in to IDI, and your paper is all they have acquaint themselves with the argument or objection in question. You aren't trying to catch them up on everything that has been said in class up until this point, or even on everything in this particular text. You are giving them a concise summary of the argument or objection, the sort of thing they'd need to answer a test question about focused narrowly on this argument or objection.

Philosophical Terms

Some ordinary terms have acquired very specific meanings in philosophy. For example, in our discussion of arguments we discussed what it is for an argument to be valid, or sound. Some other logical terms and expressions include "it follows", "therefore", "thus", "prove", "refute", "always", "false", "true", "begging the question". Try to avoid loose use of logical language. If you mean to say that a point or a claim is true, do not say that it is valid. Only arguments can be valid. Do not use "thus" or "therefore" or "it follows" to make assertions or state opinions; these words should be reserved for stating the conclusion of a chain of reasoning.

There is no need to include dictionary definitions in your paper ("Webster's dictionary defines 'evidence' as ..."). If this term is one under philosophical scrutiny, the dictionary's authority will not settle the matter. If it is not a philosophical term, you may assume that your audience already understands the meaning of the term.

Mechanics and Style

It should go without saying that papers will be word-processed or typewritten and should always have the following: a large, easy to read font (at least 12 point); double spacing; standard margins; page numbers; correct spelling and grammar.

Do not use quotations, unless you think a crucial claim either is so dense or so confused that it has to be unpacked word-by-word.

This is not a complete essay, so you do not need an introduction or a conclusion.

Avoid rhetorical flourishes; e.g., "Throughout the ages, humans have been mystified by everything from thunder to drought to the meaning of life, and they have consistently turned to God for explanation and solace." Get right to the point.