# Introduction to Philosophy: Exam 1

Due Date: **Monday, Feb 17 at 11:30 PM**

Here are the guidelines for Exam 1.

1. The exam consists of SIX questions. However, you should only answer **THREE** of them.
2. Each essay should be between **500** and **1000 words.** I won’t penalize you for going over, though please make an effort to be concise as is possible, given the material. Basically, make things “as simple as possible, but no simpler.”
3. Direct quotes from the book or handouts can be **cited** simply as (page number or handout name). If you choose to use outside resources, please use a standard citation style (such as APA, MLA, or Chicago), and provide a full citation. As a rule, **no more than 15%** of your paper should be quotes.
4. Please don’t use the words or ideas of others without proper attribution. Please see the syllabus for details on the policy regarding **plagiarism and academic integrity.** I regularly use [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) to check for plagiarism or related issues.
5. Since the goal of the exam is to demonstrate how well *you* understand the class material, you should try to **use your own words and examples to explain what you’ve learned.** Essays that simply reproduce the handouts will not receive good grades. Nor will essays that simply “give your thoughts” on an issue (without demonstrating knowledge of the class material, and the ability to apply it to novel cases).
6. Please submit your exam as a SINGLE MS WORD file to the D2L assignment folder. Each essay should start on a new page. I will grade exams on a **first-submitted, first-graded** basis. Please don’t submit your exam until you are ready for it to be graded.

## The Questions

Answer THREE of the following questions:

1. You’ve been asked to explain the Problem of Evil to a group of middle-school students of varying religious backgrounds. Give a summary of the argument that would be accessible to them (remember, they are kids, so give plenty of examples!). Then, try to think of at least two QUESTIONS they might have, and answer these.
2. In one or two paragraphs, describe a religious story or parable with which you are familiar (please “tell” the story in your own words, as opposed to simply taking it from an external source). Now, explain in detail how both a “realist” and an “instrumentalist” would interpret the meaning of this story. Finally, give an argument in favor of either a realist or instrumentalist interpretation.
3. Suppose that a super-powerful being approaches you and asks which of the following you would prefer. Once made, your choice cannot be taken back. Explain and defend your choice using class material. Make sure to consider potential objections or drawbacks to your choice, especially as these are presented by Bernard Williams.
   1. You will get to live out your life, die, and then cease to exist.
   2. You will be granted immortality in (more-or-less) your current form—you won’t age, can’t be killed, etc. If you’d like, the being will grant this same sort of immortality to your friends and loved ones (provided they agree to it).
   3. You will live out of your lives as normal, and then be reincarnated/reborn as a new human or animal of your choice, with no memories of your previous life.
   4. You will live out your lives as normal, and then go to a heaven in which there is no hunger, pain, thirst, and so on. You will spend your time contemplating God, thinking about mathematics, doing philosophy, or something else of the sort. Your psychology will be altered so that becoming bored with such things will be *unthinkable.*
4. Draw an original illustration of Plato’s “cave” analogy (please submit a digital copy along with your exam answer), and then offer a written explanation of why you’ve depicted each element as you have. (Note: Since this requires some art, the word count for the explanation can be 300 to 600 words, as opposed to 500 to 1000. You’ll be graded on the accuracy/comprehensiveness of your illustration and NOT on how good you are art!)
5. Write a short story about someone trying to decide whether or not to believe in God. In your story, you should make sure to explain at least ONE of the arguments for God we covered, as well as an objection to this argument.
6. Write an essay relating something we’ve studied in class to the “Truman Show.” Possible topics include:
   1. Did the Truman Show’s creator do something “wrong” in creating the show? If so, why? (Class material: Problem of Evil).
   2. How does Truman’s experience compare/contrast with Plato’s cave analogy?
   3. To what extent is Truman “responsible” for the person he is (his personality characteristics, etc.)? Does this change over the course of the movie? Why? Class material: Agnes Callard
   4. What is the “point” of watching something like the Truman Show? (After all, we don’t live in the Truman Show! Or do we?). Class material: Le Poidevin on Religious Fictionalism

## Exam Grading Rubric

Each essay is worth TEN points, and the whole exam is worth 30 points. Your grade will depend on how well you do each of the following:

1. How well are you able to **explain** the relevant course material? (Very important)
2. To what extent can you make an evidence-based **argument** for a **thesis?** (Very important)
3. To what extent do your paper’s **structure** (e.g. intro/body paragraphs/conclusion) and **language** (e.g. grammar, style) make it easy for a reader to follow your explanations and arguments? (Important to the extent that this impacts the two criteria above)

The grading rubric is as follows:

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| Grade | Description |
| *0* | No answer submitted, or evidence of plagiarism. |
| *1-4* | Significantly below minimal requirements, in terms of content (e.g., doesn’t address the question at all), or word count. |
| *5-6* | Fails to meet minimal requirements in terms of content (e.g., addresses a related question) or word count. Essays that simply report what you “believe” or “feel,” without providing an *argument* may receive this grade. |
| *7* | Meets minimal requirements in terms of both content (it clearly addresses the assigned question) and word count. However, there may be some significant errors or omissions when it comes to the explanation of relevant class material, or providing a detailed response to the question. |
| *8* | Fully meets both content and word count requirements, and provides satisfactory explanations of relevant arguments and concepts from class. There are no majorerrors in argumentation or explanatory gaps. |
| *9-10* | Goes *significantly* above the minimal requirements. The essay’s treatment of course material shows a full mastery of the relevant content, and provides a creative, well-thought out response to it. |

I will grade exams in the order they are submitted (first-come, first-serve). Grades go up in whole-number increments (there is no .5).

## Tips on Writing Philosophy

Philosophy essays can be a bit different from other sorts of writing. Here are some general tips:

1. You should have an **introduction** that concisely introduces the topic, and some sort of **thesis sentence** that clearly states your position. Philosophy papers often begin with theses of the form “I will argue X because Y.”
2. When discussing tough ethical or philosophical issues, **avoid phrases like “I feel,” “I think,” or “I believe.”** Part of taking these issues seriously involves granting that one’s actions and beliefs have consequences for other people, and that (for this reason) they need to be defended with the sorts of ***arguments*** and ***reasons*** that these other people could actually accept. For this reason, appeals to your *own* emotions, religious beliefs, etc. are generally (though not always) inappropriate.
3. Pretend you are writing to **an intelligent and interested (but relatively ignorant) 12-year-old** who doesn’t know anything about the subject (rather than your philosophy professor). This means you’ll need to write clearly, explain new concepts, and offer interesting, memorable examples. A significant portion of your grade will be based on your ability to explain the arguments/concepts we’ve been studying using your own words and examples.
4. Your essay should have multiple paragraphs, each of which has a clear **topic sentence** that clearly relates back to your thesis. When writing philosophy, it’s easy to get “off topic.” So, always ask yourself: is this paragraph helping me provide evidence for my thesis? If the answer is “no,” it should be cut or revised.
5. You should always consider possible **objections** to your thesis. Ask yourself: “How would a smart, well-educated opponent respond to my argument?” In some cases, this might be a real author who you can cite; in other cases, you’ll have to play your own “devil’s advocate.”
6. The conclusion should briefly note both what you have done and what you have NOT done. (for example, “I’ve argued that Blackmun’s argument fails; however, I haven’t provided an argument that abortion is immoral.”) The idea is here to show that you understand how and where your argument fits into the “bigger” picture.