Spring 2026 Introduction to Philosophy Syllabus

Category	Excellent Full Points Awarded	Good 3/4 of Available Points Awarded	Needs Improvement 1/2 of Available Points Awarded	Unacceptable 1/4 of Available Points Awarded
Thesis	A clear statement of the main conclusion of the paper.	The thesis is obvious, but there is no single clear statement of it.	The thesis is present, but must be uncovered or reconstructed from the text of the paper.	There is no thesis.

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Premises	Each reason for believing the thesis is made clear, and as much as possible, presented in single statements. It is also clear which premises are to be taken as given, and which will be supported by sub-arguments. The paper provides sub-arguments for controversial premises. If there are sub-arguments, the premises for these are clear, and made in single statements. The premises which are taken as given are at least plausibly true.	The premises are all clear, although each may not be presented in a single statement. It is also pretty clear which premises are to be taken as given, and which will be supported by sub-arguments. The paper provides sub-arguments for controversial premises. If there are sub-arguments, the premises for these are clear. The premises which are taken as given are at least plausibly true.	The premises must be reconstructed from the text of the paper. It is not made clear which premises are to be taken as given, and which will be supported by sub-arguments. There are no sub-arguments, or, if there are sub-arguments, the premises for these are not made clear. The paper does not provide sub-arguments for controversial premises. The plausibility of the premises which are taken as given is questionable.	There are no premises—the paper merely restates the thesis. Or, if there are premises, they are much more likely to be false than true.

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Support	The premises clearly support the thesis, and the author is aware of exactly the kind of support they provide. The argument is either valid as it stands, or, if invalid, the thesis, based on the premises, is likely to be or plausibly true.	The premises support the thesis, and the author is aware of the general kind of support they provide. The argument is either valid as it stands, or, if invalid, the thesis, based on the premises, is likely to be or plausibly true.	The premises somewhat support the thesis, but the author is not aware of the kind of support they provide. The argument is invalid, and the thesis, based on the premises, is not likely to be or plausibly true.	The premises do not support the thesis.
Student Response	The paper considers both obvious and unobvious counter-examples, counter-arguments, and/or opposing positions, and provides original and/or thoughtful responses.	The paper considers obvious counter-examples, counter-arguments, and/or opposing positions, and provides responses.	The paper may consider some obvious counter-examples, counter-arguments, and/or opposing positions, but some obvious ones are missed. Responses are non-existent or mere claims of refutation.	No counter-examples, counter-arguments, or opposing positions are considered.

This rubric is used to grade philosophical papers (or similar argumentative writing) in a Philosophy of Law (or related) course. It evaluates your work across five main categories, each describing what makes an argument excellent, good, needs improvement, or unacceptable. The Five Categories:

Thesis (main conclusion of the paper) Excellent: A single, clear, obvious statement of your main point. Good: The thesis is present and fairly obvious, but not stated in one sharp sentence. Needs Improvement: You have to dig through the paper to find or reconstruct the thesis. Unacceptable: No real thesis at all.

Premises (the reasons supporting the thesis) Excellent: Every reason is clearly stated (ideally in single sentences), you distinguish premises taken as given from those you defend, you provide sub-arguments for controversial claims, and the basic premises are at least plausibly true. Good: Premises are mostly clear (though maybe not always single statements), sub-arguments appear for controversial points, and basic premises are plausible. Needs Improvement: Premises are hard to identify, unclear which are basic vs. defended, missing sub-arguments for controversial claims, or basic premises are questionable. Unacceptable: No real premises, or the premises are very likely false.

Support (how well the premises actually justify the thesis) Excellent: The premises clearly and strongly support the thesis; the argument is either logically valid or makes the conclusion very plausible. Good: Premises support the thesis reasonably well; the argument is valid or at least makes the conclusion plausible. Needs Improvement: Premises only weakly support the thesis; the argument is invalid and the conclusion isn't really made plausible. Unacceptable: The premises do not support the thesis at all.

Student Response (how you handle objections/counter-arguments) Excellent: You thoughtfully address both obvious and less obvious objections, counterexamples, or opposing views, and give original or insightful replies. Good: You address the most obvious objections and give reasonable responses. Needs Improvement: You miss some obvious objections, or your responses are weak/empty (e.g., just saying "this is wrong" without explanation). Unacceptable: You ignore objections, counterarguments, and opposing positions completely.

This rubric rewards clear, well-structured, carefully defended, and critically aware philosophical writing. The strongest papers have a sharp thesis, transparent and plausible reasoning, strong logical support, and serious engagement with possible criticisms.