

Helpful Hints for doing Philosophy Papers (Spring 2000)

(1) The standard sort of philosophy paper is what is called an “explicative/critical” paper. It consists of four parts: (i) an introduction (usually one paragraph); (ii) an explication of some philosophical argument or doctrine; (iii) some critical remarks; and (iv) a conclusion (also usually one paragraph). The explicatory and critical parts together make up the body of the paper, and the proportion of explication to criticism is approximately as follows: two-thirds of the body of the paper devoted to explication, one-third to criticism. Critical remarks may be either positive or negative; that is, they may either defend and extend the explicated argument or doctrine, or else attack it.

(2) The main virtue of a first-rate explicative/critical philosophy paper is clarity; there is no need to strive for profundity in a paper of this sort (the doctrines or arguments being studied will provide a more-than-sufficient supply of profundity). The best way to attain clarity is by trying hard to avoid unclarity in your explication and criticism. Unclarity typically has two distinct forms: superficiality, and sloppiness. Explicative superficiality consists in either the failure to give sufficient detail and supporting references when explicating doctrines or arguments, or else in failing to explain doctrines carefully in your own words. Critical superficiality consists in either merely accepting the philosopher’s arguments or doctrines without scrutiny, or else in being unfairly negatively critical (see also (4)). Both explicative and critical sloppiness consists simply in poor organization of the points you want to make. The logically coherent ordering of points is extremely important and will determine the cogency of your overall account.

(3) An argument or doctrine is best positively criticized by responding to an actual or imaginary critic of the philosopher being studied. In defending the philosopher, the critic is used as a foil for bringing out or reinforcing the most important features of that philosopher’s position.

(4) An argument or doctrine can be negatively criticized in two ways: by attacking the truth of one or more of its premises, or by attacking the validity of inferences from those premises. Either is sufficient to show that the argument is unsound. Charity should always be exercised in negative criticism: assume that the philosopher being studied is extremely clever and will always use the strongest possible argument consistent with her assumptions to defend any claim she makes; then attack only that argument. Then try to imagine what the philosopher might say in response to your counter-argument. Does your counter-argument stand up to the imagined response? If not, then you had better strengthen your counter-argument.

(5) Do as many rough drafts as you can possibly manage, given the usual constraints on time and energy. Above all, seek answers to your questions, and comments and criticism on successive drafts, from the instructor.

Abbreviations Used in Grading Papers (Spring 2000)

What follows is a list of typical marginal comments on style, spelling, and argument-form. You can employ it as a “checklist” for the proper mechanics of paper-preparation. But most importantly, the use of these abbreviations simply speeds up the grading process and allows more time and space for comments on the content of your arguments or analyses.

- AGR Lack of agreement in number, gender, or tense
- AWK Awkward; ill-sounding or ungrammatical construction
- CIT No citation or improper citation; footnote or page reference required
- CN Inappropriate contraction: please write out the entire phrase
- D This symbol or word should be deleted
- EX This term or phrase is not self-explanatory: please explicate it
- INF Split infinitive
- ME Please be more explicit; give more details
- MS More support needed; this claim requires more defense than you give it
- NP! Nice point!; an interesting remark or persuasive argument
- NS Non-sequitur; this claim does not follow from its premises
- NT I question the truth of this claim
- PG Start a new paragraph here
- RF The referent of this word is not obvious: please disambiguate
- RP Repetitious or redundant
- SE Sentence error; a sentence fragment or run-on sentence
- SP Spelling error
- TC Word or phrase is too colloquial; slang
- AL This sentence is too long: break it up
- UN Unclear meaning
- VA Too vague: please be more precise
- WW Wrong or clumsy choice of words
- X Apparent typographical error

A Very Brief Survey of Informal Logic (Spring 2000)

- (1) All philosophy--indeed, rational inquiry of any sort--is carried out by means of argumentation. Informal logic is the study of argumentation.
- (2) A statement is an indicative sentence uttered or written and asserted by someone. An argument is a series of statements or assertions (the premises) put forward by a speaker or writer with the intention of establishing another statement (the conclusion) through one or more steps of inference.
- (3) An inference is how a speaker or writer relates the premises of an argument to its conclusion. An inference can be either good or bad. A good inference is called "valid." An inference is valid when it is such that no inference of that form can lead from true premises to a false conclusion. We might call this valuable property of an inference "truth-preservation."
- (4) A bad argument is called "invalid." An inference is invalid when it is such that some inference of that form can lead from true premises to a false conclusion. An invalid form of inference is called a "formal fallacy." Formal fallacies are not truth-preserving.
- (5) Arguments as a whole can be either good or bad. A good argument is called "sound." A sound argument is an argument in which all of the premises are true, and all of its inference-steps are valid. A sound argument has the following valuable feature: Since validity implies that one can never go from true premises to false conclusions, and since all of the premises are true, in a sound argument the conclusion must be true. We might call this valuable property of an argument "the truth-guarantee."
- (6) A bad argument is called "unsound." An argument is unsound either when not all of its premises are true, or when some of its inferences are invalid, or both. Unsound arguments do not possess the truth-guarantee.
- (7) I have said already that informal logic is the study of argumentation. More specifically, it is the analysis of arguments. Argument-analysis has three parts: (1) identification or recognition of an argument; (2) reconstruction of an argument; and (3) evaluation or criticism of an argument.
- (8) The main issue of argument-identification is the following: looking at a piece of writing, or listening to a stretch of speech, how are you to tell whether an argument is taking place or not?
- (9) The first consideration is to look for statement-indicators such as 'I assert that' or 'I believe that'. This will tell you that statements are being made.
- (10) The second consideration is to look for premise-indicators such as 'because...', 'for...', 'since...', 'the reason being that...', and 'follows from the fact that...' (there are others as well). This will tell you that premises or reasons are being put forward in support of some conclusion.

(11) The third consideration is to look for conclusion-indicators such as `therefore...`, `so...`, `hence...`, `thus...`, `I conclude that...`, `consequently...` and so-on. This will tell you, of course, that conclusions are being drawn from the premises.

(12) The fourth consideration is to realize that language can be used in ways other than to make statements or arguments—for example, to express emotion, to issue commands, make promises, ask questions, and make wishes (there are many others). Sometimes one of these other uses of language masquerades as an argument or part of an argument, so you will have to be sensitive to the nuances of the speaker's or writer's intentions.

(13) The fifth consideration is that people, even when arguing, do not always state explicitly everything they mean. So there will often be implicit premises or an implicit conclusion which the speaker or writer expects you to be able to fill in on your own.

(14) Once you have identified an argument, you are already moving into the domain of argument-reconstruction. The best way to reconstruct an argument is to write out an argument-schema, numbering the premises and flagging the conclusion.

(15) When doing this you will come to realize that in most written texts and verbal arguments, the best way of reconstructing the argument is usually not the same way that the arguer has put it forward. You will also realize that most arguments have intermediate conclusions, which themselves function as premises for the main conclusion.

(16) Also, any given premise may have further reasons or evidence to back it up, and this should be also indicated in your argument-schema.

(17) If you have successfully identified and reconstructed an argument, then you can move on to evaluate and criticize it. As we have seen already, a good argument must be sound (=true premises + valid inferences). So there are two basic ways of criticizing/evaluating an argument: testing the truth of the premises; and testing the validity of the inferences.

(18) In testing the truth of premises, you will have to decide whether the premise in question has sufficient support for its truth. Has any evidence been supplied by the arguer for her claim, and is that evidence compelling? If no evidence has been supplied, then you will have to decide whether the truth of the premise is so obvious as to need no special support, or whether there is a reasonable hope of supplying sufficient support. If not, then the premise can be rejected.

(19) In testing the validity of the inferences, you will have first to decide whether their forms are valid or invalid (this is part of the task of formal logic, which I will not go into here). All inferences possessing invalid forms (formal fallacies) are to be rejected.

(20) But just because an argument has a valid form does not mean that it will establish the conclusion in question. For valid forms can be misapplied to the subject-matter at hand. A misapplication of a valid inference-form to the subject-matter is called an “informal fallacy.”

**The Transcendental Ideality of Time
in Kant's "Transcendental Aesthetic," or
If Time is Subjective, Why Did I Spend Twenty Bucks on a Watch?**

**Model Paper
by Michael Handelman***

**History of Modern Philosophy
PHIL 3010
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In his discussion of the Transcendental Aesthetic, in the Critique of Pure Reason, Immanuel Kant asserts that time, as one of two forms of pure intuition, is both empirically real and transcendently ideal. By asserting both the a posteriori objectivity and a priori subjectivity of time, Kant argues that time has universal empirical objective reality, but only by acting as a subjective structure for empirical knowledge. In his arguments concerning the transcendental ideality of time, Kant succeeds first in proving the a priori necessity of time in providing a structure for all experience. He goes on to try to prove that time is necessarily ideal, or dependent on the subjective observer. While he does not succeed in disproving the possibility of an ontologically real time coexisting with intuitive time, the possibility of such an alternate form of time becomes irrelevant to the Transcendental Aesthetic given the inaccessibility of things in themselves.

Kant writes that time is empirically real because of "its objective validity in respect of all objects which allow of ever being given to our senses." (p. 78) This "objective validity" is manifest exclusively in respect to all empirical knowledge, because all objects of experience must exist inside the framework of time, and time as such a subjective function is thereby objectively universal. Time is additionally transcendently ideal. It is transcendental, or a priori, because it is necessary as a precondition for any experience. It has the quality of ideality, however, in that it is inexorably bound to the subjective observer, and is not ontologically real because it

is not a quality of any object of experience. As Kant writes, "if we abstract away from the subjective conditions of sensible intuitions, time is nothing."(p. 78) It is this, the transcendental ideality of time, which this paper will focus on.

Kant argues that time cannot have been derived from experience, since the concepts of coexistence and succession presuppose the a priori intuition of time. In other words, the intuitions of coexistence and succession can only exist within the framework of time. Our understanding of coexistence involves a distinction between a given moment in time and all others, and that of succession is an ability to experience a progression of moments in time in a consistent order. Both are thus necessarily dependent on a structurally coherent temporal framework, but such a framework is not derivable from any given experience.

It might be argued that, even if it can not be derived from an specific object of experience, that time may be understood as nothing more than a progression of experiences. Kant argues that such a model of time is impossible because "we can well think of time as void of appearances."(p. 75) It is possible for us to mentally abstract away all objects of experience, but it is impossible for us to imagine the absence of time. A moment without sensation is distinct even if it is preceded by and followed by similarly sensationless moments. In such a case, there is no progression of experiences, but there is a progression of moments within the structure of time. Time is not dependent on sensation, but the ordering of sensation must exist within the framework of time. Thus time is necessarily a priori

to experience.

Although Kant provides several additional arguments for the a priori nature of time, those discussed above are most essential to his proof of the subjective nature of time. It is to this proof that I will now turn, for, of all the arguments in the Transcendental Aesthetic, those for the ideality of space and time seem most intuitively questionable. Kant argues that, although it is possible to abstract away empirical experience from time, that time "does not...remain when abstraction is made of all subjective conditions of its intuitions." (p. 76) Thus although time is empirically real, he maintains that it has no ontological reality outside of the subjective observer. Although Kant fails to prove the impossibility of there being an ontologically real structure of time, he does not really have to make that proof in order to defend the transcendental aesthetic.

Kant argues that time cannot be ontologically real on two grounds. The first is that such a structure would "be actual and yet not an actual object," (p. 76) which he views as an impossibility. The second is that, if time were "a determination or order inhering in the things themselves, it could not precede the objects as their condition." (p. 76) Neither of these arguments address the possibility for an externally imposed sequence in nature which provides a necessary structure for things in themselves, in the same way that our pure intuition of time provides a structure for sensation. Such a hypothetical model would have ontological realism as a structure independent of the subjective. It could hypothetically exist without having

to be an "object," in the strict sense. Additionally, such a structure would precede the thing in itself structurally in the same way that intuitive time is a priori to objects of experience. Kant has no way of showing why such a model of time could not exist, since the inaccessibility of things in themselves prevents him from proving the impossibility of a time structure to governs them. Because of the impossibility of knowing things in themselves and Kant's exclusive concern with what is known through sensation, the mere possibility of an ontologically real system is irrelevant.

For the same reason that Kant is unable to prove the impossibility of time as a thing in itself, however, the ontological realist would have difficulty in proving its necessity. An argument which would attempt such would probably try to show that concepts such as succession, which presuppose time, transcend the subjective. An example to illustrate such a point is the death of the last person, or subjective observer, on earth. Let us pick a moment A, at the exact moment when that person dies, and moment B, when the person is dead. If time is truly purely subjective, then presumably time would cease to exist at the time of death, moment A. If we relate moment B to moment A, however, it seems that by causality it must necessarily come second. How, after all, could a person be dead without having already died? Such necessary ordering presupposes a temporal structure which would be impossible were such a structure dependent on the presence of the subjective observer. It would seem, then, that time must necessarily be independent of

subjectivity in order to avoid paradox.

The error in this argument is that it imposes temporal order onto causal relationships between non-empirical articles of knowledge. It is necessary, in order to show that the above scenario is consistent with Kant's system of time, to show that the body is essentially an unknowable thing in itself. Although it seems intuitive that the body is somehow knowable to a greater extent than are regular objects, we must recognize that the body too is an object of experience. To be sure, we are more intimately associated with the body than we are with ordinary objects of experience, but we know all parts of the body only through sensation. There is no extra-sensory direct knowledge of the body as a thing in itself. Given this, it does not seem valid to assume anything about what happens to the body in the absence of a perceiving consciousness. In other words, it is wrong to assume that a corpse will continue to exist in time after the last person dies.

Even if we grant that the body would continue to exist after death, however, this still does not prove the existence of an objectively real time. To use the above example as a proof of such a temporal structure is to assume that causality is dependent upon time. It is only necessarily true that the cause precedes the effect from the standpoint of our consciousness, however. We might hypothesize about the possibility that, outside of the subjective observer, all events occur simultaneously. In such a case, our ordering of events within time would simply be a way of interpreting them, not necessarily

a reflection of an objectively real time structure. We are deceived into thinking that time passes after death in the imaginary scenario because we are imagining the events as subjective observers. Although such a hypothesis could not be proved, its very possibility shows that the scenario presented above does not act as a proof that time exists outside of the subjective.

It would seem, then, that we are at a standoff. Kant is unable to prove the impossibility of the existence of time outside of the mind, while the ontological realist is unable to argue its necessity. We have no way of knowing for certain whether there is a non-subjective structure of time or not. In order to resolve this dilemma, we must look once at the criteria for knowledge which Kant imposes on his critique. In his introduction, Kant stresses that it is necessary to ground argument in logic, and what we can know without doubt, warning that,

reason is so far misled as surreptitiously to introduce, without itself being aware of so doing, assertions of an entirely different order, in which it attaches to given concepts others completely foreign to them and moreover attaches them a priori. (p. 48)

Kant adequately proves the necessary a priori nature of a subjective temporal structure by showing such a structure to be necessarily logically prior to our ordering of empirical knowledge in the concepts of coexistence and succession. He additionally shows that time as an intuition must be non-dependent, and non-derivable from objects of experience, because experience can be abstracted away from the structure of

subjective time without destroying that structure.

Such a transcendental model of time, if not dependent on objects of experience, would most certainly be totally independent of any temporal structure governing things in themselves. This is true by virtue of the fact that we cannot know objects beyond their appearances, but time as intuition is concerned only with empirical knowledge. As Kant says, "the true correlate of sensibility, the thing in itself, is not known, and cannot be known...and in experience no question is ever asked in regard to it." It thus becomes meaningless to discuss the existence or nature of ontologically real time for the same reason that we cannot discuss the nature of things in themselves, because to do so would be to stray into the realm of uncertainty, committing the error of reason which Kant warns against in the introduction.

It does not matter, then, that Kant does not prove the impossibility of purely objective time, for even if such time could hypothetically exist, it would be independent of transcendently ideal time. The latter is necessarily a priori and tied to the subjective by the very fact that it orders the only external knowledge we have, empirical knowledge. The former is necessarily unknowable to the subjective observer because it orders the essentially unknowable things in themselves. Thus, even given the possibility that the pure intuition time is not the only type of time, Kant preserves the Transcendental Aesthetic unscathed by showing the necessity and autonomy of transcendently ideal time.

(21) In identifying, reconstructing, and evaluating/criticizing an argument, charity must be exercised at every stage. The aim of informal logic is not to destroy your opponent's argument by any means: that is sophistry (debating tricks). The aim of informal logic is to bring out argument-structure with an eye on the truth.

(22) So you want to be as fair as possible to your arguer in order to see the rationale behind what she is saying (that is, to understand the point of her remarks) and to see whether what she says--on its most favorable construal--stands up to the way things really are (to assess the truth or falsity of what she says).

(23) Since we all care about understanding other people and about the truth (although of course that is not all we care about), informal logic cannot help being important to you.
--Not to mention that its study will improve your ability to understand and criticize arguments in every academic discipline!

(24) The preceding remarks are meant to provide only the barest of outlines of informal logic. Each remark needs to be supplemented with explanations and examples. Please ask the instructor or your teaching assistant for clarification. Moreover, many books have been written on this subject and are easily available at the library. But here is a particularly good one: Alec Fisher, The Logic of Real Arguments (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). This book also contains a helpful brief appendix on formal logic.