

Required Essay

Title goes here

Name of student goes here

For Professor Dechene's Introduction to Philosophy, spring 2011

Rules and Suggestions for the Required Essay

The Philosophy Department requires at least one written assignment for each course. Here is the information you will need for your essay in our course.

Some suggested topics:

1. In the required readings list for Professor Dechene's course you will find short essays by the philosophers Berkeley, Hume, and Nietzsche. Write a summary of one of those. Tip: These are required readings, so read all three and then pick one to write your essay on. Also, be sure you have studied the section in the textbook regarding the philosopher you are going to write on.
2. René Descartes "proved" that certainty was possible in philosophizing about the things of this world with his famous "Cogito ergo sum." Critique Descartes' idea using Parmenides' and Hume's principles. This is a more advanced essay topic than the others.
3. Write an essay that summarizes what you think are the most important points in the classic Taoist philosophy as laid out in the *Tao Te Ching*. Show how these most important points are related to one another, and state why this philosophy is important for the individual.
4. Write a summary and critique of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Compare that story to Parmenides' and Empedocles' philosophies.
5. Write an essay on meditation explaining what it is and why it is important for ontology. Refer to the required reading on meditation on our required readings list, and discuss your own experiences, difficulties, and successes in meditating.
6. Read, summarize, and analyze the book by Shinn on our required readings list. It is a good example of the American "New Thought" philosophy. It is a practical philosophy, so learn and start using its principles and include your experiences of using it in your essay. You might get some help by reading my essay "Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life," which is on the required reading list. The New Thought philosophy is an updated version of what *Tao Te Ching* called "naming"—which is a very important concept in our course.
7. The first two and most important sections of our course emphasized some of the earliest philosophers' efforts to explain the oneness of the cosmos using the highest form of logos, or logic. This effort culminated in Western philosophy with Parmenides, and caused a crisis in philosophy (be sure you understand the textbook pages 39-40 on this) that, unfortunately, caused most philosophers to ignore the problem from just after Parmenides to today. It marked the transition from philosophy as a search for wisdom—a search for what's really important for individual human beings to know—to what one contemporary philosopher has called "theorymongering."

Write a brief essay describing your take on this important issue in the history of philosophy. You might take a look at the course description on the course home Web page to help pull your

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ideas together. You may also refer to the nondualistic philosophies from China and India that we compared to the Western philosophies to help clarify this issue. You may also refer to later philosophies, such as those of Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, New Thought (Shinn), and others.

8. You may write on another topic of your choice. You must first get Professor Dechene's approval of your topic in writing. Submit your topic, typed, with a brief explanation, to Professor Dechene and get him to sign off on it. Submit this signed approval sheet with your essay.

Instructions:

Length:

600 to 1000 words (about two to four pages).

Note: Verbosity will be penalized.

Formatting:

Essay format, not outline or any other format; standard 8½ by 11" paper; typed; double spaced; 11 point easy-to-read type such as Calibri, Arial, or Verdana; spellchecked; a header such as shown above that repeats on every page; a footer on every page with the page number and the total number of pages, as show below; stapled; and place the word count at the very end.

Essays that do not follow these rules or that are just sloppy in appearance will be returned to the student without being read.

Grading:

The essay will be treated like one of five tests (the other four will be Scantron-type tests), worth 50 points each. Remember that your lowest grade of the five will not be counted.

The essay will be graded for factuality, clarity, and conciseness.

Deadline:

Due in class April 5. If your essay is handed in one class day late, I will deduct 5 points (out of 50). Two class days late, 10 points. I will not accept essays after that.

Note:

Be sure you keep a copy in case you claim it was lost.