

Reading Questions for November 6

These questions cover three readings regarding how to write philosophy papers, one from Jim Pryor, one from Helena de Bres, and one from Kareem Khalifa. The answers do not have to be turned in.

Background:

At times in this half of the semester we're going to look at some tips about how to improve some skill we're practicing in this class. For today, the tips will be about reading philosophically. After we discuss these, we'll switch back to the question for this week and discuss omnipotence. In particular, today we'll be focusing on your own views of it.

Questions:

1. I've given you three readings on how to read philosophy papers. That's a fair bit of reading, so you shouldn't feel obliged to read them all thoroughly if you don't want; it could be that you'll find some more useful than others. Here are some questions to think about when reading them: What tips that you read do you think are most important? Which ones were most surprising? Are there any that you disagree with?
2. Aquinas said that omnipotence requires being able to do what it is possible to do. There yields a question: what does "possible" mean? I've distinguished 9 senses of "possible" and given each of you one of them. You should think about your sense of "possible," and decide if you think omnipotence means doing everything that's possible in your sense. In class, we'll do the circle activity in which each person talks for a minute. During it, you should explain your sense of "possible" (giving some examples), and then say whether you think omnipotence amounts to being able to do everything that's possible in your sense and why. (There is no need to look up outside information on your sense of "possible").

- Chris – anything that’s not analytic. “Analytic truths” are truths that are made true by the meaning of words. So, for example, “all bachelors are unmarried” is analytic because it’s true merely because of the words involved. But “my uncle is a bachelor” is not analytic because it’s not true merely because of the words involved.
- Emma – anything that is not formally contradictory. “Formal contradictions” are statements of the form P and not P . So for, example, “my phone is a hotdog and it’s not the case that my phone is a hot dog” is a formal contradiction, whereas “my phone is a hotdog” is not a formal contradiction.
- Hanna – anything conceivable. By “conceivable”, I mean such that you can imagine it coherently.
- James – anything epistemically possible. By “epistemically possible”, I mean consistent with one’s knowledge.
- Josephine – anything intelligible. By “intelligible”, I mean possible to understand the meaning of. So, “my uncle is a bachelor who is married” is intelligible, whereas “asdfnp ere knlkn” is not.
- Kyle – anything logically possible. By “logically possible”, I mean consistent with the rules of logic.
- Lucy – anything mathematically possible. By “mathematically possible”, I mean consistent with all true mathematical claims.
- Natasha – anything metaphysically possible. By “metaphysically possible”, I mean consistent with all true metaphysical principles. Metaphysics involves laws about objects and properties and the ways they are related. This category is sort of controversial. One example that a lot of people like is the following: something being completely red and green all over. A lot of people think that this is metaphysically impossible, because they think that given the way redness and greenness work, nothing can be red and green all over.
- Tara – anything nomologically possible. By “nomologically possible”, I mean consistent with the laws of science.