PHILOSOPHY 201 – GUIDELINES FOR WRITING AN ARGUMENT SUMMARY AND RESPONSE PAPER

You have to write three short “argument summary and response” papers (each around 750 words or three pages in length) on some philosophical problem covered this semester—one paper for each of the three books (and one article) we are going to read. Each of these papers is worth 20% of your final grade. Although there are four papers assigned (due on 2/12, 3/5, 4/16, and 5/7), you only have to turn in three of them. The papers have several objectives:

- Reconstruct an argument that you find interesting (and briefly quote from it).
- Identify both the argument’s conclusion and the author’s support for this conclusion.
- Explain whether or not you think this argument is persuasive, and identify weaknesses with, or possible objections to, the argument.
- Could the argument be improved or strengthened? If so, how?

Perhaps the easiest way to write your paper is simply to do a “close reading” of one of the photocopied passages we have discussed in class. If you choose this approach, please begin by following these guidelines:

I. Pay attention to the distinctive style of writing:

   A. Note the larger (literary, intellectual, and historical) context.
   B. Read the passage quickly through once, then reread it slowly, carefully, and critically.
   C. Note (by circling or underlining) difficult, obscure, or technical language.
   D. Be charitable! (Approach the passage in such a way that it becomes more, rather than less, interesting and persuasive.)

II. Analyze the passage:

   A. Identify the problem to which it is responding.
   B. Identify the position being defended.
   C. Reconstruct the argument in support of this position.
   D. Be charitable!

III. Evaluate the passage:

   A. Decide whether or not the reconstructed argument is persuasive.
   B. Consider ways of strengthening the argument.
   C. Identify alternative positions on the problem.
   D. Be charitable!

Be sure to select a passage that you personally find to be interesting, challenging, or peculiar. This is an assignment in which you are encouraged to struggle to formulate your own position on a philosophical problem. Have fun doing so!