

Midterm Paper

PHIL 29S

due Sunday, July 23

One of the goals of this course is to help you learn how to identify the implicit assumptions being made in others' discussions of technology, and to use this knowledge to help guide the discussion forward. In this paper you will do just that. Your assignment is to write an **argumentative analysis** of a popular article responding to some current technological debate. This means *identifying the argument* within the article, **presenting an objection** to that argument, and **offering a response to your objection** on behalf of the article's author.

Topic

Your paper will present an argumentative analysis of one (and only one) specific article. You have five articles to choose from, each on a different issue:

1. "To Hit the Road, Driverless Cars Must Be Safe, Not Perfect", by Nidhi Kaira (on the ethics of driverless cars)
2. "Reducing Mosquitos Is Vital to Human Health", by Shannon LaDeau (on the ethics of genetically engineering mosquitoes)
3. "The Genetically Engineered Salmon Is a Boon for Consumers and Sustainability", by Nina Fedoroff (on the ethics of genetically engineering salmon)
4. "Put Aside Prejudices" (response to 'Can Biotech Food Cure World Hunger?'), by Paul Collier (on the environmental ethics of genetically modified crops)
5. "Nuclear Power Needs to Be an Option", by Nathan Myrhvold (on the environmental ethics of nuclear power)

All five articles can be accessed from bit.ly/phil29s or through the course website (in either case, go to the folder: Assignments/Articles for Midterm Paper).

Guidelines

Your paper should be **approximately 750 words in length** (i.e., 3 double-spaced pages). Your paper should consist of the following four sections:

- Summary of the article's argument (150 to 250 words)
- Objection to article's argument (150 to 250 words)
- Response to the objection (150 to 250 words)
- Final assessment (150 to 250 words)

Begin by **summarizing the *argument* of the article**. Note that this is not the same as summarizing the article! Rather, you are to distill the article down to its core argument. This argument will consist of: (i) a conclusion (i.e., the author's main thesis); and (ii) a series of premises, by which the author reaches that conclusion (whether they are explicitly stated or implicitly assumed by the author). Your summary need not, and should not, mention every point that the author raises, since not every point is crucial to the article's core argument.

Next, **present and develop one (and exactly one) objection** to the argument you've just summarized. Your objection can take various forms. You might, for example, deny the truth of one of the argument's premises; or you might deny that the premises entail the conclusion; or you might show that the argument relies on a controversial background assumption. Be sure to clearly explain both what your objection is and why it is an objection (i.e., why it causes trouble for the article's argument).

After this, **present and develop one (and exactly one) response** to the objection you've just raised. Imagine you are responding on behalf of the author. Ask yourself: How would the author defend her argument in light of your objection? Be sure to explain both what the response is and why it is a reasonable response (i.e., how it addresses the original concern(s) that were raised by the objection).

Lastly, **offer your own final assessment** of the issue addressed by the article. Do you agree with the article's conclusion? Do you agree with the article's argument? How might you argue things differently?

Note that your paper does not need (and indeed, does not have space for) an introductory paragraph. Start your paper by simply jumping into your summary.

(For example, your first sentence may be “In her article ‘Reducing Mosquitos Is Vital to Human Health’, Shannon LaDeau argues that...”.)

Formatting

Prepare your paper for blind grading: the only piece of identifying information on your submission should be **your student number**. Please do not include your name, email, or any other identifying information.

Your paper may be formatted however you wish, but please remember that it is going to be read by another human (namely, your grader). A legible font, ample margins, and appropriate line spacing will all be appreciated. **Please also give your paper a title** which concisely prepares the reader for the paper to come.

You need not include a bibliographical citation for the article you are analyzing. You need not reference any other material in writing your paper – but if you do, you *must* include a full bibliographical citation of this material. No specific citation style is required; just follow some standard style of your choosing. Quotations from the article you’re analyzing should be put in quotation marks, but need not be followed by any further citation information (e.g., year or page numbers).

Turning it in

Please submit your paper, in PDF format, via Canvas by end of day on Sunday, July 23 (or, for all your night owls, by 6 A.M. the following morning).

Grading

Your paper will be graded on the quality of its analysis, the cogency of its argument, and the clarity of its writing. The grading rubric I will be using will be made available on the course website.