

History of Modern Philosophy – First Essay Topics

Guidelines and policies

1. Papers are to be typed, double-spaced, with at least 1" margins all around; font no smaller than 12 point. Be sure to spell-check and grammar-check your work; minor spelling mistakes will not bring your grade down, but if they interfere with the clarity of the essay, points will be taken off.
2. Papers are to be submitted via Blackboard; but you must also provide a hard copy at the beginning of class, on the due date.
3. Please do not use any folders or binders; there is no need for a title page. Be sure that your name and e-mail address appear on the top right-hand corner of the first page.
4. Keep a personal copy (on paper or disk) of the paper you submit.
5. If you make any use of the work of others in preparing your essay, be sure fully to document this. Failure to do so may constitute plagiarism; see the University policy on plagiarism as it is stated on <http://osrr.missouri.edu/guidelines/index.html>. If you have any doubts about when and how to document the use of outside sources, see me.
6. Due date: Tue, September 30 at 1:59 p.m.
7. Late assignments will be penalized by 1/3 of a grade per day. Late submissions are only allowed due to doctor documented illness and other emergencies.

Essay Topics

Please write an analytical/critical essay around 4-5 pages in length (5 pages maximum) on one of the following topics ? you make the choice!

1. In the First Meditation, Descartes presents the method of doubt. Explain what the method is, and what it purports to accomplish. Do you agree with Descartes that all the things he says can be doubted can indeed be doubted?
2. In the Second Meditation, the Meditator claims to establish that she/he herself/himself exists. What type of existence is that? Do you agree with Descartes that this argument establishes the existence of the Meditator?

An analytical/critical essay, in this class, includes:

- (a) a clear and succinct statement of the author's main claim in the relevant passages;
- (b) a development of an objection which might be made to this claim, one that directly engages the claim in its own terms and which goes to the heart of the larger theory the author is advancing;
- (c) an evaluation of whether the author's initial thesis can withstand the force of the objection or not. To evaluate a thesis, you need to provide reasons showing that the author is right or the objection is devastating. Mere statement of opinion is not enough to accomplish this. There is no set format for your paper, but it should be a single well-organized essay (as opposed to a bullet-points presentation).