

Philosophy Research Paper

Over the course of this semester, you will be tasked with reviewing one of the great philosophical works in human history. You will select one of your own choosing, and are free to change your mind provided your other choice isn't already selected. You will examine this philosophical work and explain your findings to the rest of the class. While each writing will be unique, some general questions to think about should be:

- In what historical context did this writing emerge?
- What other philosopher influenced this writing/philosopher?
- What are the main ideas of this philosopher?
- In what way(s) did this writing impact the world?
- What critiques have others had for this writing?
- What parts of the book resonated with you? Why?
- What parts did you find confusing? Why?
- What did you do with other resources to aid your understanding of this philosopher's work?

Part 1: Selection (9/6-9/30)

You will first need to select one influential piece of philosophical writing. This document contains a list (just a little farther down) but that list is not meant to limit you. I simply expect that most of you won't really know where to start.

Once you sign up for a particular piece, you will have one week to acquire that book. If you don't go physically get the book, I'll allow someone else to claim it instead.

Part 2: The Reading (10/1-10/31)

You will simply read your book. You should begin by gathering some sense of historical context so that you can make some sense of the book, but the reading should be your own. I'm not expecting that you'll take advantage of any other resource that might aid you just yet. There will be time for that later. I just want to know YOUR take is, even if that means that you understand very little of what you're reading. If necessary, I reserve the right to assign some "book review" type of assignments if I feel that it's necessary to keep people honest and ensure that you are truly reading and not trying to skip this step, but I expect that we'll be OK here.

You will start November by giving the class a brief (5 min) update on your struggle so far. At this point you should be able to tell us a little about the author, when and why it was written, etc. Share what you've learned and where you are getting stuck. The rest of the class should be able to help you find new ideas.

Part 3: The Struggle (11/1-1/9)

This will be your time to work through any other available resources you can find: youtube, Wikipedia, cliffnotes, the class, etc. Try to find things that help you develop your understanding of the writing in question. This will be the bulk of the work. You will turn in a rather substantial (probably 7-10 pages) paper detailing your responses to the questions listed at the top of this document. Over the course of the last week, you will present to the class your final (10-15 minute) presentation. The two should closely reflect each other and demonstrate a comfortable knowledge level of what you did. These can be complicated and difficult writings, and I understand that. As such, I don't expect that your paper will be about Plato's *The Republic* as much as it will cover your struggle with Plato's *The Republic*.

Some good options may include:

Immanuel Kant- Critique of Pure Reason

Joseph Hegel- Phenomenology of Spirit

Friedrich Nietzsche- Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Plato- The Republic

Rene Descartes- Meditations on First Philosophy

Karl Marx- The Communist Manifesto

Martin Heidegger- Being and Time

Thomas Hobbes- Leviathan

Lao Tzu- Tao te Ching

St. Thomas Aquinas- Summa Theologica (abridged version, please)

Niccolo Machiavelli- The Prince

Herman Hesse- Siddhartha

Ayn Rand- Atlas Shrugged

Ayn Rand- Fountainhead

Voltaire- Candide

Henry David Thoreau- Walden

Richard Dawkins- The God Delusion

Jean-Jacques Rousseau- The Social Contract

John Stuart Mill- Utilitarianism

David Hume- Treatise on Human Nature

Simon de Beauvoir- The Second Sex

Friedrich Nietzsche- Will to Power

Franz Kafka- Metamorphosis

Anonymous- The Bhagavad Gita

John Locke- Treatise on Government

Sun Tzu- The Art of War

Robert M. Pirsig- Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance

David Hume- Dialogues concerning Natural Religion

Thomas Paine- Common Sense

Adam Smith- The Wealth of Nations

Jean-Paul Sartre- The Age of Reason