

Final Assignment

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Your final paper must be *less than* 600 words long. It is due by 11:59pm on July 5. It should be turned in at the Sakai website:

<https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal/site/a1687e83-82cb-4546-8768-2b2069b0176a/tool/6a822353-c2be-4e65-8fd2-cebebacf3a8e>

Note the late paper policy on the course website:

<https://isaacwilhelm.com/bioethics/>

In particular, note that you are responsible for making sure that your file is uncorrupted and successfully loaded to Sakai. Technological mistakes will not avoid lateness penalties.

Please read the following instructions carefully. For the assignment, choose one of the readings for the course, and write a paper about it. In your paper, you should do three things.

1. *Summarize the thesis*: summarize the main thesis of the article that you will discuss.
2. *Summarize a specific point*: summarize a specific point made in that article.
3. *Evaluate*: either criticize that point (if you disagree with it), or argue in favor of that point (if you agree with it).

Feel free to write your paper by picking one of your discussion posts and expanding it.

You are allowed to structure the paper however you like, provided you stay within the word limit. Here is one easy way to structure the paper: devote one paragraph to each of the three things listed above. So write one paragraph summarizing the article's main thesis, one paragraph summarizing the specific point, and one paragraph evaluating that point.

In the rest of these instructions, I explain what I mean by 'Summarize the thesis', 'Summarize a specific point', and 'Evaluate'.

1 Summarize the thesis

In the first part of your paper, give an overview of the article you will discuss. Tell me what the main thesis of the article was. For instance, suppose you choose the article "The

Badness of Death and the Goodness of Life” by Broome. Then your summary might go like this.

In “The Badness of Death and the Goodness of Life”, Broome proposes his own account of what people lose when they die. According to Broome’s account, when you die, what you lose is the rest of your life (p. 6). In particular, you lose all the good things which you would have enjoyed, had you lived longer: the valuable friendships, the tasty food, the fun experiences, and so on. Broome contrasts his account with two others: an account which says that we lose nothing when we die, and an account which says that we lose everything when we die. Broome thinks that the former account is wrong because it is based on a faulty conception of harm: it is based on the view that because there is no specific moment when dying is harmful, death cannot harm us. But as Broome argues, your death can still be harmful even if there is no specific point at which it causes you harm (pp. 2-3). Broome thinks that the latter account is wrong because it is based on a problematic comparison: it assumes that your state before you die can be compared to your state after you die. But as Broome argues, you do not exist after you die, so there is no way to compare your pre-death state to your post-death state (pp. 4-5).

Note that I cited specific pages from the article. You should too. As a general rule, whenever you attribute a view to an author—whenever you write something like “So-and-so claims that...” or “So-and-so argues that...”—you should cite the pages where they endorse that view.

2 Summarize a specific point

In the second part of your paper, pick a specific point in the article and describe it in detail. That point could be an argument, or a claim that the author uses to argue for something else, or an observation that the author uses to defend their thesis against an objection, or some such thing. For instance, if you choose the article “The Badness of Death and the Goodness of Life”, then this part of your paper might go like this.

Broome advocates a specific method for determining the badness of a particular person’s death (p. 6). First, determine how good that person’s life actually was. Second, determine how good that person’s life would have been, if they had lived longer. Third, compare those two amounts of good. If the first amount is lower than the second, then the person’s death is bad. For if this person had lived longer, then they would have had a better life. But if the first amount of good is higher than the second, then the person’s death is not bad at all. Their death is good for them: for if they had lived longer, then their life would have been, overall, worse.

Again, note that I cited specific pages from the article. You should too.

3 Evaluate

In the third part of your paper, tell me what you think of the point you just summarized. Share your opinion. But do not just leave it at that. You should back up your opinion with a reasoned line of thought – that is, with some sort of argument. So suppose you think that the point you just summarized is wrong. Then (i) tell me that you think it is wrong, and then (ii) explain why. Or suppose you agree with the point you just summarized. Then (i) tell me that you think it is right, and then (ii) explain why.

For instance, if you choose the article “The Badness of Death and the Goodness of Life”, and if you chose to summarize the point discussed in Section 2, then the evaluation part of your paper might go like this.

Broome’s suggested method for determining the badness of death is, I think, not very effective. It requires that we have some way of determining how good someone’s life actually is, and how good their life would have been. But I do not see how to do that. I know of no compelling way to quantify the goodness of a person’s actual life. And I cannot even imagine how one might quantify the goodness of the life that a person *would* have had, if things had been different. That requires measuring how good a *possible* life is: it requires saying that a particular possible life is thus-and-so good (or bad). But it is unclear how that measurement would go, since it is unclear how we should measure mere possibilities. In other words, measuring the goodness of actual lives seems extremely hard. But measuring the goodness of merely possible lives seems harder still. Since Broome does not provide a way of doing so, his account of the badness of death leaves much to be desired.