

PAPER I

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Intro Metaphysics

3–5 pages (double-spaced, normal font and margins), due by email at 9:50am on 9/26

In “Human Freedom and the Self”, Roderick Chisholm defends a form of libertarianism, and defends it from objections. Your assignment is to discuss just one of those objections, the one that Chisholm discusses in section 7 of his paper. This assignment is a very focused one, so please read the following instructions carefully.

Although your assignment will be based solely on the short selection, you should re-read the whole article to be sure you understand the context in which the selection occurs.

Your paper should begin with a short introductory paragraph that explains briefly to the reader the topic of your paper and what you plan to say. In this paragraph you should also say what Chisholm’s libertarianism says (since the objection you’ll be discussing is an objection to that view).

After that, your paper should *extract*, *explain*, and *evaluate* the argument in the selection. (That’s all you need to do.) What do I mean by “extract, explain, and evaluate”?

Extracting the argument means formulating an argument in numbered premise form, as I’ve done in class, that captures what the person offering the argument (in this case, an objector that Chisholm is imagining) is arguing. And, that argument must be a valid argument—this means that there can be no suppressed premises omitted, no “gaps” in the reasoning.

For example, suppose you had to extract an argument from this paragraph:

People that cheat on their taxes should talk to my grandmother. My grandmother is a great woman. She’s wise about all sorts of things, especially morality. Now, lots of people nowadays cheat on their taxes, but I know whose advice to take. Grandma was always clear: never cheat on your taxes!

A first attempt might be:

1. My grandmother is very wise
2. My grandmother says that cheating on your taxes is wrong
3. Therefore, cheating on your taxes is wrong

Notice that the conclusion of this argument—“cheating on your taxes is wrong”—is never explicitly stated in the paragraph. That’s OK. The point of the paragraph is clearly to establish that cheating on your taxes is wrong. (Sometimes it can be hard to figure out exactly what the conclusion is supposed to be. The surrounding context of the selection can give you clues.)

The first attempt above at extracting the argument is unacceptable, since that argument is invalid. Premises 1 and 2 don’t logically imply the conclusion, 3. In order to make the argument valid, a premise needs to be added:

1. My grandmother is very wise
2. My grandmother says that cheating on your taxes is wrong
3. If my grandmother says that cheating on your taxes is wrong, then cheating on your taxes is wrong
4. Therefore, cheating on your taxes is wrong

(Alternatively, the new premise 3 might say that “everything my grandmother says is true”.) Premise 3 doesn’t appear explicitly in the paragraph (it’s a suppressed premise), but it is clearly being assumed, and it is needed to make the argument valid.

This second attempt is better, but still not perfect. Premise 1 isn’t needed to make the argument valid, so it isn’t doing anything. So it should be removed. Here is the final form of the argument:

1. My grandmother says that cheating on your taxes is wrong
2. If my grandmother says that cheating on your taxes is wrong, then cheating on your taxes is wrong
3. Therefore, cheating on your taxes is wrong

What happened to the claim that my grandmother is wise? Isn’t that crucial? Yes, it is, but it still plays a role. When you explain the argument (see below), you’ll need to say why the defender of the argument thinks that premise 2 is true. And the answer is that the defender of the argument thinks that the

grandmother is so wise that she's bound to be right about the morality of cheating on taxes.

Explaining the argument requires going *line by line* through the argument you've presented, and saying why the person who offered the argument thinks the premises are true. In the example above, the person presumably thinks that premise 1 ("My grandmother says that cheating on your taxes is wrong") is true because s/he has heard the grandmother say this; and s/he thinks that premise 2 ("If my grandmother says that cheating on your taxes is wrong, then cheating on your taxes is wrong") is true because the grandmother is so wise, especially about morality. (Do the line-by-line explanations for the premises only, not the conclusion. The conclusion is supposed to be supported by the premises, so it requires no further support.)

Evaluating the argument means assessing whether the argument is sound. Hopefully you will have extracted a valid argument; if so, soundness will then just amount to whether the argument's premises are true.

You should first evaluate the argument from Chisholm's point of view. In section 7 of his paper, Chisholm gives his response to the argument; you must present that response as an objection to the argument you've just formulated. This must take the form of a reason for rejecting a specific premise. You must say, for example: "Chisholm thinks that premise 2 is false because...".

Finally, you should give your own evaluation. Do you agree with Chisholm? If not, what's wrong with what he says? Also, if you think that there's another problem with the argument that Chisholm doesn't address, you could discuss that as well.