

PAPER I

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Intro Philosophy

3–5 pages (double-spaced, normal font and margins), due by email (sider@rutgers.edu) by the **beginning of class** (1:10pm) on February 16.

Please read all of these instructions carefully. This is a very focused assignment, based on one of the following selections from the textbook (choose one):

1. In Mackie’s “Evil and Omnipotence”, the paragraph on p. 124 that begins “First I should query...”.
2. Kelly Clark’s article “Without Evidence or Argument”, two paragraphs on p. 166: the one beginning with “The first problem...”, and the next paragraph, which ends with “...to see why”).

Although your assignment will be based solely on the short selection, you should read the whole article (re-read, if you choose the Mackie selection) 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. After that, your paper should *extract*, *justify*, and *evaluate* the argument in the selection. The articles contain much more than the short selections, but your paper should only extract, justify, and evaluate the argument in the selection. What do I mean by that?

Extracting the argument means formulating an argument in numbered premise form, as I’ve done in class, that captures what the author (Mackie or Clark) is arguing. And, that argument must be a logically valid argument. This means that there can be no “suppressed premises” omitted.

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 serving any purpose in the argument. 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? Well, that claim no longer appears in the argument, but it still plays a role. When you justify 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.

One other thing about this. You may be tempted to incorporate grandmother's being wise into the argument, by making premise 2 say:

2a. *Since my grandmother is really wise*, if she says that cheating on your taxes is wrong, then cheating on your taxes is wrong

or

2b. *My grandmother is really wise*, so [or: "*therefore*"] if she says that cheating on your taxes is wrong, then cheating on your taxes is wrong

That's not a good idea. For then, 2 would no longer be just a single premise. Rather, it would be a little mini-argument all on its own. "My grandmother is really wise" would be the premise of this mini-argument, and the conclusion would be "If my grandmother says that cheating on your taxes is wrong, then cheating on your taxes is wrong". (And notice that this mini-argument would have a suppressed premise!—namely, that "If my grandmother is really wise, then if she says that cheating on your taxes is wrong, then cheating on your taxes is wrong.") So it's best to keep the argument the way it was above, i.e., not mentioning the grandmother's wisdom at all. But if you really want to include a premise about the grandmother's wisdom in the argument, you could do it this way: "1. My grandmother says that cheating on your taxes is wrong. 2. My grandmother is really wise. 3. If my grandmother is really wise and says that cheating on your taxes is wrong, then cheating on your taxes is wrong. 4. Therefore, cheating on your taxes is wrong."

Justifying 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 justifications 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.

In the case of your assignment, the authors (Mackie, Clark) of course think the premises are true; the question is whether they are right. How might their opponents reply to the argument? Would such a reply be correct? Even if you agree with the argument, you should have something to say here. For example, you could imagine a hypothetical objection to the argument and then criticize it.

It is important that any objection to the argument must concern a specific premise. You might say, for example, "I think that premise 2 is false because...".

Finally, although the point of evaluation is to make your own contribution to the debate, you shouldn't merely express your feelings or opinions. You should give reasons for what you say.