

Personal Philosophy Assignment



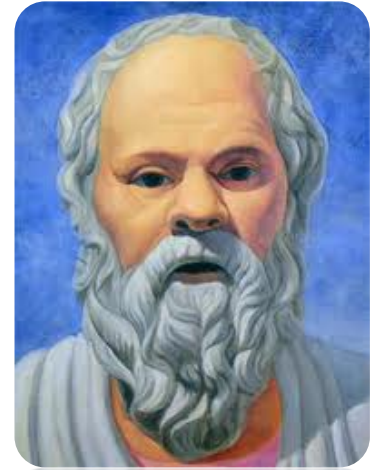
The Assignment

This assignment represents the culmination of our study of philosophy. Your task is to develop and articulate a personal philosophical position (argument) that you present to the class in written and oral form.

Your philosophy can be about a defined subject like friendship, education, respect, justice or can be a broader concept like Confucianism's *jen* which you apply to a number of areas.

While your ideas will no doubt be influenced (hopefully deeply) by the thoughts of philosophers we've discussed this year, your paper and presentation should reflect an **original, personal** philosophy that you actually believe in.

The final paper and an accompanying presentation of 3-5 minutes are due the final day of class. During the presentation, you should be prepared to answer questions.



Socrates

Four Options

The Straight Essay should be a tightly-written, interesting argument of 750-1250 words.

A Satirical Piece uses the tools of irony to present an argument in which one attacks a view by stating it in such a way that it becomes ridiculous. I'd avoid this unless you have previously studied irony.

A Dialogue should be written in the style of Greek philosophers like Plato. In this format, the presentation is in the nature of a play, with characters speaking lines which convey the philosophical argument. Very challenging!

A Collection of Aphorisms should consist of a series of linked observations written in brief, well-written sentences. They need to tackle a central philosophical problem in a well-written, pithy observations. While this may seem like a tempting option, it presents a real challenge, as Robert Solomon notes: "The most difficult style of all is the aphoristic. Like acupuncture, it hits all the vital points, but it is, figuratively, like dozens or hundreds of little pinpricks in a body of views that are already well established. What is essential, therefore, is that it be extremely clear to your reader what the point of these pricks is supposed to be. And it is equally important that the pricks be sharp and to the point. A dull aphorism is like a dull needle; it either doesn't get through at all or else it is very painful."

Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? –Ralph Waldo Emerson

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Some Important Things to Keep in Mind

- **Consider responding to other philosophers.** The world ideas developed as thinkers across the world critiqued each other and built upon their ideas. An 'A' paper will likely include 1-2 references to the thoughts of other philosophers, either those we have studied or others.
- **Don't try to do too much.** Plato didn't discuss human nature, the universe and political science in one 1,000 word piece. You are likely to do much better with a tightly focused argument on one major idea or a few linked concepts.
- **Use examples.** One of downsides of the study of philosophy is that many writers present excellent ideas in a written form that is quite challenging or dry. Think about our study of Taoism: without the examples of the Cook and the Butterfly, would the concepts have made a lot of sense to the reader? Examples will anchor the reader in the argument and give it strength.