

# PHILOSOPHY 22: CONTEMPORARY MORAL PROBLEMS

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## GRADING STANDARDS

Students are often puzzled by the grading standards for critical philosophy papers. Some ask, “If I answered the question competently without making any significant errors, why didn’t I get an A?” Here is a rough outline of the standards I use to grade your long essay.

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### B: THE BASELINE GRADE

The grade of *B* functions as a baseline grade, signifying competent but not exceptional work. Essays are graded up or down relative to the following baseline criteria. A *B* paper:

- ♦ Addresses all major parts of the assignment
- ♦ Conveys a solid understanding of the relevant readings and ideas
- ♦ Offers clear and consistent arguments for a clearly articulated position
- ♦ Considers significant objections to that position and replies to those objections
- ♦ Contains no significant misunderstandings
- ♦ Is generally well written and well organized, with few or no grammatical, punctuation, or spelling errors

### B+: THE BEGINNINGS OF DISTINCTION

A *B+* paper meets *all* of the standards for a *B*, but might in addition:

- ♦ Offer the beginnings of an original or powerful argument or idea, such as an unusually apt analogy that illuminates a previously obscure aspect of the problem, a clever counterexample to a seemingly persuasive claim, a sharp distinction that does real philosophical work, or a subtle observation drawn from a close reading of a text; or
- ♦ Work out ordinary ideas to a greater depth than usual (perhaps by discussing more iterations of significant objections and replies)

### A– OR A: OUTSTANDING WORK

An *A–* or *A* paper meets *all* of the standards for a *B+*, but might in addition:

- ♦ Work out the original or powerful idea or argument fully and deeply—that is, in a way that demonstrates a firm grasp of the underlying concepts, principles, and argumentative strategy; or
- ♦ Offer an unusually comprehensive and systematic (rather than scattershot) survey of possible moves by both sides and clearly and systematically evaluate them, coming to a closely reasoned conclusion

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### B-: ERRORS OR OMISSIONS

Most of a B- paper is fine, but somewhere it contains significant errors, misunderstandings, or omissions. A B- essay falls just short of B standards by, for example:

- ♦ Failing to address a major part of the assignment
- ♦ Misunderstanding a substantial philosophical point, or conflating different positions
- ♦ Failing to articulate a consistent position
- ♦ Offering fallacious arguments, or arguments that don't actually address the question at issue
- ♦ Failing to consider objections to the position defended therein
- ♦ Wasting space on issues or ideas that are not pertinent to the assignment
- ♦ Lacking a clear organization and logical structure
- ♦ Containing numerous grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors

### C+, C, OR C-: MORE SERIOUS PROBLEMS

A C paper exemplifies one or more of the problems of a B- paper, more often or more pervasively. C grades may also be assigned to papers that miss the point of the assignment.

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Note: these are the grading standards for papers *prior* to the assignment of late penalties. *Moreover, I reserve the right to refuse to assign a passing grade to a seriously defective paper until major problems are corrected.*