For your final paper you will write a five-page essay (~1500 words) defending a particular view on a philosophical topic we’ve discussed in the class.

**You are strongly encouraged not to consult any texts that weren’t on the syllabus** -- you should be able to complete the assignment just based on the course readings and your own thoughts. I am not interested in a book review or what other outside sources have to say.

Your paper should be comprehensible to an otherwise intelligent and educated reader with little to no familiarity with continental philosophy.

For each template, I’ve given some representative examples of specific topics. Feel free to write on any of those specific topics, or to substitute other ideas into a template, as long as your ideas fit the

general structure. (If you’d like to write an essay on a topic that doesn’t fit into one of the given

templates, send me an email with a short description of your paper idea and I’ll decide whether

it’s appropriate. Note that you may be graded more strictly if you choose your own topic).

Your final paper can be one of the following templates:

1. **Compare and Contrast**

Pick two thinkers who we’ve studied and a topic or contemporary issue or topic that you think they both have a lot to say about. discuss the similarities and differences in their views on that topic, and explain whose view you find more plausible, and why.

* Examples: Mill and Wolf on the good life, Taylor/Wolf and Craig on meaning in life, Smith and Mill on pleasure, Nagel and Camus on the absurd

The four-sentence paper is a template for argumentative writing. You will fill in the blanks for your chosen topic.

**B:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ is an important issue for humans because \_\_\_\_\_.

[Introduce the topic you will be comparing and contrasting and why it matters.]

1. Thinker A and Thinker B are/were both concerned with \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ because ­­­­\_\_\_\_\_.

[Here you want to state what the philosophers think about the topic which is the position that you will ultimately be analyzing. Fleshing this out with be the majority of your paper. Statements 1-2 will eventually be your thesis]

1. Thinker A/B has a superior view on \_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

[Here you take a position on which view is superior, and the reason(s) why.]

1. One may object that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but I reply that \_\_\_\_\_.

[This is a possible objection to your position, with the reason why and a brief response - this will be the conclusion of your paper]

*Example*: (1) Meaning in life is an important issue for humans because we are aware of our own finitude. (2) John Stuart Mill and Zadie Smith are both concerned with the role of pleasure in a meaningful life. (3) Smith has a superior view of a meaningful life because her concept of joy encompasses a larger set of experiences that people think are meaningful than mere happiness. (4) One may object that pleasure can also encompass pain and strife, but I reply that hedonists like Mill are ultimately confused about what matters in life because we cannot quantify joy in the way they think we can for pleasure.