In order to make the grading process more straightforward, I’ve put together a rubric. The numbers I placed in your essays correspond to general concerns. I’ll add more specific concerns and your grade in comment boxes.

The point of this paper was to test your knowledge of arguments for God’s existence and your ability to demonstrate that knowledge in an argumentative format. You therefore had to pass two challenges: characterize one of the arguments correctly and analyze it thoughtfully.

In general, I was pleased with the papers. They were a considerable improvement over the first papers and many of you advanced original arguments to defend your core claims. However, there were also a number of common mistakes. First, many of you would give a large number of brief arguments in favor of your thesis or (more often) against your thesis. Philosophy papers go better when they focus on a small number of arguments (1 or 2 in papers like the mid-term) and develop them in detail. Second, many of you did not properly engage or cite the text. Sometimes people ignored the text entirely and relied too heavily on the lecture. Other times people used enormous block quotes to engage the text without explaining what the quote meant. Still other times people did not properly cite the text and produce an adequate bibliography. But, as I said, the papers were good as a whole.

I hope that my comments have helped you to write better papers in the future. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Rubric

(1) No Thesis Statement – If you receive a (1) your paper had no thesis statement. This counts as a significant flaw.

(2) Unclear Thesis Statement – Almost as bad as (1), receiving a (2) means that your thesis was unclear. I had trouble figuring out the point of your paper.

(3) Prompt Violation – You receive a (3) if you failed to follow one of the guidelines in the prompt. For instance, you may not have focused on one particular argument or set of readings in the course, instead analyzing two or three loosely related arguments.

(4) Off-Topic – A (4) means that you have wandered off-topic at some point in your argument. A (4), in contrast with a (3), means that you have veered off-topic from your own thesis and arguments.

(5) No Argument – You received a (5) if one of your key claims went entirely undefended. In other words, you did not even attempt to defend a critical assumption or point in your main argument.

(6) Flawed Argument – a (6) means that one of your arguments commits a standard, clear argumentative error, such as a straw man fallacy, ad hominem attack or a non-sequitur.

(7) Weak Argument – while your argument may not contain a blatant argumentative flaw, it still made one or more points that needed noticeably more defense.

(8) Anecdotal or Editorial – if you receive an (8), your paper contains a significant personal story or off-hand editorial remark that will almost certainly be irrelevant to the paper.

(9) False Claim – a (9) means that you make a straightforwardly false claim about the text or some other empirical fact.

(10) Unclear Sentence or Phrase – I give you a (10) if there is some specific sentence or phrase that I cannot make sense of.

(11) Grammar Error – an (11) means you have made a serious grammar error.

(12) Citation or Bibliographical Error – (12) means that you have failed to cite or quote your source or that your bibliography is absent or flawed.