

General Instructions

You are asked to submit an essay on **one of the topics below** of 1,500 words ($\pm 10\%$). You must include a word count. Your response essay must be clearly structured, precisely worded, validly argued, and diligently spell-checked. Be as concise as possible without compromising clarity. Because the essay you are asked to write is not long, I expect that you spend more thought on just how you want to organize your answer, and perhaps take the time to write and rewrite the paper. Make sure that you address all the questions of the topic you choose. No need for an elaborate introduction or conclusion—just answer the questions as best you can. Build strong arguments by looking at the issues from both sides while answering likely objections to your position.

There are some additional rules to keep in mind, as specified on the syllabus. The deadline is **27 April 2010 at the end of class**. All sources, including discussions with classmates, must be appropriately acknowledged. *No internet references unless it comes from a legitimate refereed source*. Ask me or a TA if you are uncertain about citing and the use of sources. Cases of plagiarism will be reported to the Academic Integrity Coordinator. You are responsible for reading the leaflet concerning the proper use of sources.

The paper is worth up to 20 points. For each day your paper is late, five points will be deducted from your point total, although no negative point totals will be given. The midterm paper must be submitted **both as hard copies as well as through turnitin.com by the deadline** in order to earn credit.

Paper topics

1. What are universals? According to Russell, why do we need them? Does he think that they are mental entities, physical entities, or something else? Explain your answer, including how universals relate to mental and physical objects.
2. What is Descartes's wax argument meant to show? Does it succeed in showing this? What role does it play in Descartes's argument in the *First* and *Second Meditations*?
3. In "Are we living in a computer simulation?", Nick Bostrom argues that at least one of the following hypotheses is true (although he thinks that we don't know which one):
 - (a) Our species will most probably become extinct before we reach a stage at which our technologies are so advanced that they essentially exhaust the physically possible.
 - (b) Any civilization at such a stage is very unlikely to run a large number of computer simulations of its ancestral history.
 - (c) We are almost certainly living in a computer simulation.

Reconstruct Bostrom's argument to this conclusion and discuss both the argument and the conclusion. In particular, identify the two substantive assumptions that Bostrom needs in order to arrive at the conclusion and discuss their plausibility.