

Writing Exercise — Using Quotations

Writing an effective philosophical essay requires that you are able to use quotations accurately and effectively. This handout will introduce you to a few key features.

1. *Introducing Your Quotations*

Terms to Introduce Quotations

In introducing quotations, you will want to avoid a repetitive use of ‘says’, e.g. (X says A, while Y says B). This does not tend to be very informative and can be stylistically off-putting. Instead, diversify the introduction of quotations when appropriate, e.g. (X *objects* that ‘A’, but Y *replies* that ‘X’). Here are a few introductions commonly used in philosophical discourse.

writes	adds	argues	claims	observes	replies
notes	remarks	comments	objects	asserts	attests

2. *Long Quotations, Paraphrases*

When and How to Block Quote

Typically, longer quotations (between 4-5 lines) and quotations that need particular emphasis should be formatted as block quotations. Unlike a single line quotation, block quotations are indented and do not make use of quotation marks. For example,

Philosophy ought to imitate the successful sciences in its methods, so far as to proceed only from tangible premises which can be subjected to careful scrutiny, and to trust rather to the multitude and variety of its arguments than to the conclusiveness of any one. Its reasoning should not form a chain which is no stronger than its weakest link, but a cable whose fibres may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected. (Peirce 1992:29).

Using Ellipses and Braces

Occasionally, it is desirable to omit part of the block quotation. When this occurs, make use of ellipses to indicate that text has been removed. For example, see the following:

Philosophy ought to imitate the successful sciences in its methods, [...] and to trust rather to the multitude and variety of its arguments than to the conclusiveness of any one. Its reasoning should not form a chain which is no stronger than its weakest link, but a cable whose fibres may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected. (Peirce 1992:29).

The use of *braces* around ellipses indicates that the ellipses are *not* the author’s but inserted by you.

3. Using a Quotation with Purpose

The meaning and purpose of a quotation is rarely self-evident. Whenever quoting someone, indicate *why* that quotation is there and/or *explain* the meaning of that quotation. Here are a couple different functions of a quotation.

- *Provides evidence that someone holds a position.*

Example

Peirce rejected a distinct form of philosophical investigation that proceeds by a purely mental analysis. Instead, he claimed that “philosophy ought to imitate the successful sciences in its methods.” (Peirce 1992:29).

- *Illustrates a contrast*

Example

Peirce’s claimed that philosophical investigation should *not* proceed by a deductive method where the first premises are indubitable beliefs. Instead, he maintained that a belief is justified if it is supported by a variety of dubitable yet scrutinized premises. Peirce illustrates this difference of opinion by a contrastive metaphor. The foundationalist theory of Descartes takes the form of “a chain which is no stronger than its weakest link” where the Peircean theory take the form of “a cable whose fibres may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected” (Peirce 1992:29).

- *Sets the stage for an analysis or discussion.*

Example: Peirce writes the following:

Philosophy ought to imitate the successful sciences in its methods, [...] and to trust rather to the multitude and variety of its arguments than to the conclusiveness of any one. Its reasoning should not form a chain which is no stronger than its weakest link, but a cable whose fibres may be ever so slender, provided they are sufficiently numerous and intimately connected. (Peirce 1992:29).

In the above passage, Peirce notes two significant points of contrast between Cartesianism and his new platform for philosophy. The first is that [insert discussion]. The second is that [insert discussion].

Blog Assignment (50 points)—Due Thursday Evening

Find a substantial quotation from “The Fixation of Belief” that might be relevant for a paper you are writing. Introduce that quotation in the form of a block quote and use ellipses (sparingly) to remove a part that might not be necessary. Finally, either analyze this quotation or contextualize it within a point made in your paper.