The four-sentence paper:
A template for considering objections and replies[1]

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Abstract: They say that argumentative writing skills are best learned through writing argumentative essays. I say that while this is excellent practice for argumentative writing, an important exercise to practice structuring such essays and build critical thinking skills simultaneously is what I call *the four-sentence paper*. The exercise has the template *They say…, I say…, one might object…, I reply…* One might object that the assignment oversimplifies argumentative writing, stifles creativity, promotes an adversarial attitude, or that students can't consider objections well anyway. I reply that a simplified form of argumentative writing is fine for beginners, especially since the template is ubiquitous in philosophy; that any assignment template has room for creativity; that considering objections is consistent with good manners; and that despite some pitfalls of trying to defend a thesis and consider objections, students are capable of considering objections well with proper instruction and practice.

Most everyone reading this who is a philosopher surely assigns argumentative, "thesis-defense" papers. Most everyone reading this surely struggles with grading such papers, and most everyone reading this surely thinks about how best to help students improve their argumentative writing skills. A first thought is that if we want students to be able to write good argumentative papers, we should assign more papers. But we all know we're limited in that—in terms of load on both students and us—and most of us wind up assigning just a few papers in any one course, and the consequence is that progress is slow. What to do? I agree with the common thought just mentioned, and also with the thought that practicing various components or subskills of argumentative writing is helpful too. One of the most important of these is that of *considering and replying to objections*. This might be the most important skill in argumentative writing after getting the expository material right and having clear and cogent arguments of one's own. But in my experience, and my own department's assessment data confirm this, students only rarely consider objections to their own theses and arguments. Or if they do, it is usually by way of just a passing mention of an opposing view. Again, what to do?

What I offer here is a tool to help build argumentative writing skills by way of making more practice of them possible, where the tool essentially includes practice at considering and replying to objections. I call it "the four-sentence paper." It is inspired by the approach to writing favored by Graff and Birkenstein's (2014) *They Say / I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*, which advocates using templates to help students see general argumentative "moves" in

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college-level writing. G&B argue that good, clear, effective writing always frames what it has to say in light of what others are saying. Such writing follows the template "They say…, I say…," hence their book's title. I say that a good template for argumentative writing, especially in philosophy, should have a four-step template: "They say…, I say…, one might object…, I reply…" Now take that template and consider its possible uses in short exercises for students, where just four sentences are involved—one for each component of the template. This makes possible a wide variety of short exercises that include all of a longer paper's main argumentative elements. I offer it as one tool we should use in teaching argumentative writing.

This being said, there are naturally objections to consider. They fall into two types: One type of objection raises concerns with using templates for teaching writing generally, for it might be objected that using templates oversimplifies argumentative writing and stifles creativity. G&B address these possible objections, and I have my own replies to such objections to the four-sentence paper's template in particular. Second, one might object to teaching writing with a focus on considering objections. For one might object that placing objections and replies in such a prominent pedagogical position promotes an adversarial tone to argumentation, and this is counter to other quite-worthy goals such as promoting inquiry and building consensus. One might also raise a concern from what some might say is a reality of undergraduate philosophy teaching: "They just can't do it," one might say of one's students, for they struggle to offer defenses of their own positions, and considering an objection *and* replying to it goes way beyond that. Perhaps the load really is too much. But this is too pessimistic. With judicious use of tools such as the four-sentence paper and other techniques to "chunk" or "scaffold" teaching the skills of argumentative writing, students most certainly *can* develop the skill of considering and replying to objections.

I've organized this paper as follows. The first section reviews what "they" might say by way of traditional teaching of argumentative writing through assigning whole papers. I give my own past practices here too. The second section presents and defends the use of the four-sentence paper: I say that we ought to use it as a tool to help build writing skills, or at least that use of it is consistent with our obligations as philosophy teachers. I also give some examples of the variety of practice possible based on the template. The third section considers how one might object to the use of the four-sentence paper. The fourth section replies to those objections.

<center>I.</center>

They say that a crucial exercise for building the skill of writing an argumentative paper is to write argumentative papers. I hope I don't need to go find a poll supporting this. It probably also doesn't need formal documentation to say that we all use writing assignments as a primary mode of assessing student learning in philosophy: Discussion is one thing, and content knowledge assessed through a quiz or multiple-choice test is another, but we test students' understanding of a philosophical issue, an argument, a text, their own positions, etc. by having them write argumentative essays. At least for upper-level courses, we all use paper assignments as a primary tool for building writing skills and for assessing learning. Why else do we assign such papers? Argumentative writing skills not only are prized as transferable across domains, but also because such good writing best shows the writer's critical thinking skills. Those skills again are highly transferable and valuable.

But how best to cultivate those skills? A standard thought is that "if you practice like you play, you'll play like you practice," so we assign papers to build skills at writing papers. The more papers, the more practice, and the more practice, the more improvement we should see.

And by and large we do see it. My department's program assessment includes fairly detailed assessment of student writing, and senior-level papers (from students who have had more practice and instruction) are significantly better in the dimensions we measure than papers from juniors and sophomores. The more practice needn't be claimed to be *the* cause of the improvement, but it's surely reasonable to infer that the practice is part of the cause.

My perception of the usual practices of teaching argumentative writing, at least in philosophy, is more nuanced than I've presented it so far. For we don't seem to just require papers, grade them, and leave it at that. We tend to supply *some* additional instruction at argumentative writing. The NSSE's 2014 "topical module on experiences with writing" data tell us that 44% of seniors say that instructors provide them with clear instructions for the assignment, for *most* of their assignments in the past year; 34% say that instructors explain in advance what they wanted students to learn from the assignment, again for most assignments; and 36% say that instructors explained the grading criteria in advance for most assignments. So we're providing students with *something* to help improve their writing beyond merely assigning papers. My own instructions run about three pages, built around elaborations on these directives:

Most generally:

- Have something to say.

- Focus the paper on a particular theory, thesis, or argument.

Structure/organization:

- Have a short but effective introduction.

- Organize the paper in a logically perspicuous way.

- Consider and reply to at least one objection to your own theses or arguments.

- Usually accomplish just one task per paragraph.

Documentation, basic writing practices:

- Document all sources properly.

- Write in complete sentences.

I take these as typical general guidelines (except perhaps for the direction to consider and reply to at least one objection—this I'll return to below).

Many of us also build additional writing practice into the course, and that in the form of essay exams, blog discussions, and short in-class writing assignments in the form of quizzes or CATs.[2] Some of this might even be targeted at individual components of a longer thesis-defense paper: We might have a quiz requiring students to summarize the main argument of a reading, or to raise a criticism of a thesis or argument, and this is intended as practice for a longer essay to come later. There have been various excellent articles in the literature devoted to such

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[2] The last is short for a classroom assessment technique, as discussed extensively in Angelo & Cross (1993).

"scaffolding" or "chunking" exercises.[3] This is all fine, but what about practice tailored toward larger argumentative structures? That is, what about repeated and varied practice[4] with the structures appropriate to complete argumentative papers, papers that include some expository work, a student's defense of his/her thesis, and a consideration of objections and possible replies? The next section offers a tool around which to build such practice.

II.

I say that an excellent way to extend our usual strategies in teaching argumentative writing is with what I call *the four-sentence paper*. The four-sentence paper is a template for argumentative writing. Here it is:

(1) They say _____.

(2) I say _____, because _____.

(3) One might object that _____.

(4) I reply that _____.

As mentioned earlier, the template is inspired by Graff and Birkenstein's *They Say / I Say* (2014). In addition to chapters on the two-step template of *They say…, I say…*, they include a chapter on considering objections. This being a crucial component of argumentative writing in philosophy, the four-part template above was born. But the idea here isn't merely to point out to students that their full-length papers should follow this template. It's to use *just four sentences* to practice an important and common general argumentative structure. This allows for repeated practice at thinking in terms of framing one's own ideas against those of others, and with possible objections in mind. To be able to do this in the form of multiple, short, in-class exercises is an excellent companion to more involved, more high-stakes writing in the form of full argumentative papers. The template can be the basis of other types of exercises too, as I'll list shortly.

But I owe the reader some examples first, one less philosophical to start, and then two more philosophical ones. My own university has just instituted a campus-wide smoking ban. Suppose we're discussing the morality of this in class. To help identify and frame some issues for discussion, suppose you're a student and I command you as follows: "Defend the freedom to smoke on campus, and do so in the form of a four-sentence paper." I might also say "It doesn't matter here what your own view actually is. This is practice at seeing how a position might be defended, and it's also to get us started talking about the smoking ban in rational terms." You'll need to remember that the view being defended goes in position (2) in the template. So you might start out writing something like this:

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[3] Recent examples include Mulnix & Mulnix (2010) and Coe (2011). See also various exercises in Angelo & Cross (1993) and Bean (2001). For a summary of the research literature on scaffolding exercises, as well as other examples, see Ambrose et al. (2010).

[4] Here and elsewhere, I mean *practice* in the broad sense used in the educational psychology literature, with practice including most any assigned writing targeted at the course's goals. If improving argumentative writing skills is a course goal, then I count any writing done in the course as "practice," whether long or short, graded or not, completed in class or not, etc. See Brown et al. (2014) for a summary of the research on varied practice in addition to repetition.

(1) They say _____.

(2) I say that we should be free to smoke, because even though smoking is bad, it's worse to restrict our freedom.

(3) One might object that _____.

(4) I reply that _____.

We have an argument for the freedom to smoke, but what now? I should say here that my suspicion is that many class discussions revolve just around step (2). It certainly is in my own classes. For we might say "Ok, let's talk a little about the new smoking ban. What do you think about that and why?" We might even get a vigorous discussion out of this. But the give-and-take between the two sides of the issue might get lost, and the different objections the two sides might have to each other's arguments might get lost too. Now back to the exercise. How to frame the thesis and its defense in (2) against "what others are saying" (to borrow from G&B's language)? What should a defense of smoking frame its defense against? Maybe you fill in the template some more, like this:

(1) They say we shouldn't be free to smoke on campus, since smoking is bad for you.

(2) I say that we should be free to smoke, because even though smoking is bad for you, it's worse to restrict our freedom.

(3) One might object that _____.

(4) I reply that _____.

We have our view and a defense of it, framed against a different view and its defense. Now we need a possible objection from that other side—ideally a strong one—and a reply. Something like the following would surely be on someone's mind, and this would complete a four-sentence paper:

(1) They say we shouldn't be free to smoke on campus, since smoking is bad for you.

(2) I say that we should be free to smoke, because even though smoking is bad, it's worse to restrict our freedom.

(3) One might object that that restricting our freedom is necessary in the name of public health.

(4) I reply that freedom actually carries more weight than public health, for with no freedom, public health would be meaningless.

I'm not saying that I agree with the arguments here—it's merely an example. The same would go for your point of view if you're a student. The idea is to practice seeing how to frame an argument against a different view, and to practice seeing how a position might be defended against an objection. If this were an in-class exercise, as I've pitched it here, we now have plenty

on which to base a class discussion. If it's preparation for a longer writing exercise, a skeleton of that longer exercise is on the desk in front of the student.

Here is a more philosophical example, and this time I won't draw out the thought process. Say our topic is the free will debate, and we've covered the general philosophical problem of reconciling freedom with determinism, what determinism is, and perhaps the hard determinist and libertarian strategies and their possible shortcomings. I say, "Using a four-sentence paper, defend the thesis that we're not free." There are a lot of possibilities here, but one option is this:

(1) They say we're free.

(2) I say we're not free, because freedom requires being able to do otherwise, and the world's being deterministic rules this out.

(3) One might object that determinism is false—there are some random events not guaranteed by the past and the laws of nature.

(4) I reply that locating our freedom in random events does no good here—randomly caused actions aren't free either.

Here is another example, this time using Descartes' Meditation I as the reading. I say "Defend the thesis that sensation isn't a foundational source of knowledge, and do it with a four-sentence paper." Yes, this would wind up generating a lot of parroting of Descartes, but that can be fine. You might write this:

(1) They say that sensation is a foundational source of knowledge.

(2) I say it's not, because the senses sometimes are in error—they sometimes misrepresent the external world.

(3) One might object that sensation is nevertheless reliable, for the senses do tell us the truth about the external world most of the time.

(4) I reply that we still can't tell with certainty exactly when the senses are being deceptive and when they're not, and a foundational source of knowledge has to give us certainty.

Again, this summarizes part of *Descartes'* line of thought in Meditation I, rather than a student's line of argument against sensation's not being foundational. But I give it just as an example, with the intention later to consider questions about four-sentence papers that parrot the arguments of others.

Why bother with the four-sentence paper? Perhaps the idea is just small potatoes, a minor suggestion to include among other tricks for teaching argumentative writing. But I say the idea is more important than that. For considering objections is central to the philosophical and argumentative enterprise, and thus it should be more central to our instruction both in philosophy and in argumentative writing. The four-sentence paper is a useful tool to make considering objections more central to philosophy pedagogy.

But to push this a bit further, why is it that considering objections is really so central? Why not consider theses and their defenses and leave things there? In answer to this, I appeal to the authority of Mill's *On Liberty* (1859/1978, pp. 35-36):

He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side, if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion… Nor is it enough that he should hear the arguments of adversaries from his own teachers, presented as they state them, and accompanied by what they offer as refutations. That is not the way to do justice to the arguments, or bring them into real contact with his own mind. He must be able to hear them from persons who actually believe them, who defend them in earnest and do their very utmost for them. He must know them in their most plausible and persuasive form; he must feel the whole force of the difficulty which the true view of the subject has to encounter and dispose of, else he will never really possess himself of the portion of truth which meets and removes that difficulty. Ninety-nine in a hundred of what are called educated men are in this condition, even of those who can argue fluently for their opinions. Their conclusion may be true, but it might be false for anything they know; they have never thrown themselves into the mental position of those who think differently from them, and considered what such persons may have to say; and, consequently, they do not, in any proper sense of the word, know the doctrine which they themselves profess.[5]

One might paraphrase Mill as follows: You don't fully understand a view (even your own) unless you understand the objections that can be raised against it. This is equivalent to: *If you don't understand the objections that can be raised against a thesis, then you don't fully understand that thesis*. We might even use this as a test for one's understanding, or more importantly here, a test to check one's students' understanding. Call this *Mill's test for understanding via awareness of criticism*. If student papers don't consider objections to a thesis under consideration, that suggests they don't fully understand that thesis.[6]

Now, *do* students consider objections in their papers? Do they demonstrate that they pass Mill's test? If they do, then the four-sentence paper is just a modest tool to maintain good habits. But if they don't, then the four-sentence paper is an important tool to help move students toward having more philosophical habits of mind.

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[5] Appropriately enough, after this passage Mill considers and replies to possible objections.

[6] I suppose one might agree with Mill, but still hold that *partial* understanding is possible without being aware of possible objections and the appropriate replies. Maybe *fully* understanding a view requires awareness of objections and replies, but partial understanding does not. If this is right, then we might defend our assignments that don't require considering objections still to push students toward understanding their own views and those of others. Two replies: First, we might say that the level of understanding appropriate for undergraduate students nevertheless includes having a clear awareness of objections to a theory, thesis, doctrine, etc., or at least the most obvious or standard of those objections. Considering possible objections is a reasonable expectation for any argumentative work no matter what level of understanding we're aiming for. This seems very plausible, even if we aren't seeking in our students the sort of maximal understanding Mill speaks of. Second, we might say that considering objections is certainly part of our field's standard argumentative activity, and arguably also for any other field where knowledge is sought. So for a slightly different reason than Mill cites—the need to understand philosophy's standard methods—we still might use a test like Mill's as a sort of measure of philosophical skills broadly.

The answer looks to be that they don't. In my own department, we have collected student papers since 2008 for assessment purposes. We're a small program, and our sample size of papers is somewhat small (N=74). We assess a number of different writing skills, including the general skills of presenting and defending one's own position and giving criticism of the views and arguments of others. We assess these two general skills by way of assessing more fine-grained skills such as clearly and accurately stating one's own views and arguments, giving supporting arguments, having one's arguments be relevant to defending one's overall thesis, and considering objections. We assess each skill on a 1-4 scale, with a 4 being a "target" score corresponding to mastery at the undergraduate level, 3 (or higher) being a "competent" score, and 2 and 1 being degrees of noncompetence. Our data are as follows:

	Proportion of papers judged competent (≥3 on 1-4 scale)				Mean scores			
	SR (N=27)	JR (N=32)	SO (N=15)	% diff., SO-SR	SR	JR	SO	p (SO-SR)
Presentation of student's views/arguments	**63%**	**41%**	**40%**	**23%**	**3.10**	**2.79**	**2.77**	**0.02**
Clarity/accuracy of views[7]	85%	50%	60%	25%	3.30	2.94	2.83	0.00
Clarity of arguments	56%	34%	33%	22%	2.93	2.59	2.47	0.01
Supporting arguments	67%	41%	40%	27%	3.04	2.59	2.57	0.00
Consideration of objections	33%	38%	20%	13%	2.57	2.44	2.37	0.18
Relevance of views/arguments	96%	94%	100%	-4%	3.89	3.75	3.80	0.22
Criticism of views/ arguments of others	**67%**	**50%**	**33%**	**33%**	**3.06**	**2.84**	**2.58**	**0.01**
Clear statement of criticism	67%	47%	33%	33%	3.09	2.78	2.53	0.00
Supporting arguments	67%	44%	33%	33%	3.00	2.63	2.37	0.00
Consideration of objections	37%	28%	20%	17%	2.57	2.39	2.23	0.06
Relevance of criticism	93%	97%	93%	-1%	3.80	3.80	3.68	0.29

I include more data here than that just for considering objections because if students struggle in all areas we assess, then one might put off focusing on considering objections. Yet students don't struggle in all areas (and this claim refers to many other skills not included in the above table). Take the two categories above for "relevance," for instance, which we use as a skill category tied to a paper's staying "on task" by way of building the paper around defending its overall thesis. The proportion of papers judged competent at that skill approaches 100% for all areas. So

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[7] If one wonders how a student paper could inaccurately present its own thesis, consider a paper that advertises one thesis in the introduction, defends a slightly different thesis in the paper's body, and concludes with something different from that at the end. Still, this is uncommon. Most papers falling short in this category of "clarity/accuracy of views presented" fall short on the clarity front rather than in accuracy.

philosophy students are evidently good at this.[8] But they struggle at defending their own positions clearly, and they struggle at clearly criticizing the views of others. Most of all though, they struggle at considering objections. It is quite striking that fewer than 40% of senior papers were judged competent at this skill. And even though we see change in the proportion of competent papers from the sophomore to the senior level, and an increase in the mean scores across the same class ranks, the increase in mean scores isn't statistically significant (note the p-values above, though the mean change for considering objections to criticism is very close to .05). Even if the changes were significant, the end result is still a body of senior papers that largely don't consider objections competently. Our institution is somewhere in the middle of rankings of colleges and universities, so I take our data to be typical of what would be found among most philosophy majors.

I take this to establish a need in argumentative writing pedagogy that the four-sentence paper helps serve to fill. So how might the exercise be used? I promised a variety of uses back in the introduction, and here is a sampling. Students might write four-sentence papers as part of their *preparing for writing longer essays*. One could imagine a sequence of prompts in class such as these:

> "Ok, you brought your paper's thesis to class. Now frame it against a common opposing view, using a four-sentence paper."

> "For your four-sentence paper, what's another reply to that objection?"

> "Look at your 'one might object' sentence. What's another objection to your thesis or argument? Is it stronger than your first one? What might the reply to it be?"

The class might then have group discussions for any or all of these steps, perhaps with groups assigned according to general paper topic. Such four-sentence paper assignments might be stand-alone assignments, in the sense that they would serve as practice at argumentative writing independently of preparing for something longer. Or, they might be preliminary to more formal assignments by way of expanding four-sentence papers into full essays. Four-sentence papers might also be used for various exercises in *revising existing student papers*. One might have students analyze their first drafts with the aim of sharpening the structure. "Reduce your paper to a four-sentence paper," we might say. This is the reverse of an exercise above, where one starts with a four-sentence paper and expands it. Here one takes a full paper and reduces it to see its general argumentative structure more clearly. We could then say as a general suggestion, "Once you have your paper reduced to a four-sentence paper, go to your draft and see how the first sentence of each section of your paper matches up with your four-sentence paper." This helps encourage use of effective transitions or metatext, for a good directive is to lead off sections of a paper with the appropriate "They say…," "One might object…"-type of signal. The same kind of "Reduce your draft to a four-sentence paper" exercise might be done as part of a peer review exercise.[9] As part of such peer review, a step in the reviewing process might be to reduce the

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[8] Not all students are—I've seen samples from nonmajors at various levels.

[9] I thank an audience member from my presentation at the 2014 AAPT Workshop-Conference for the suggestion here.

paper one is reviewing to its bare elements—a four-sentence paper. One might then comment constructively on that skeletal version. It also helps reviewers learn to distill another person's work into its elements, and that leads us to the next use for the exercise.

Four-sentence papers might be used for *building reading skills* too. For the readings in our field are by and large organized along the lines of the four-sentence paper. The readings we assign might not be organized into sections of similar length or detail corresponding to all four components, but overwhelmingly the structure is present. One might have reading quizzes or class questions like these:

"Summarize the article for today, in the form of a four-sentence paper."[10]

"Summarize the debate over X, in the form of a four-sentence paper."

If a reading contains some deviation from the four-sentence paper's structure, one might just build that into the instructions for the quiz or question: "Today's reading considers more than one objection. Adjust your four-sentence paper summary accordingly," or "For the quiz, include in your four-sentence paper only what you think is the *best* objection the reading considers." A reading might also deviate in the metatext it uses to signal the different components that might wind up in a four-sentence paper. Then one might have prompts such as these (say for an online, open-book quiz):

"What metatext on p. 432 signals that an objection is being considered?"

"On p. 434, is 'A possible reply is…' being used to signal that the author is *considering an objection* to her own argument, or does it signal that she is *replying to an objection* to her own argument?"

In all of these exercises, students have to read with an eye for identifying general structures of argumentative writing. Not only would this promote better reading comprehension, but it also encourages the habit of students considering objections in their own writing.

Four-sentence papers might also be used as a tool for *prompting class discussion* of an issue. The exercise might take the form of a quiz like what was suggested above ("Summarize the article for today in the form of a four-sentence paper" or "Summarize an argument for compatibilism in the form of a four-sentence paper"), with ensuing discussion built around different student answers. One might also use the exercise to allow the group to formulate the structure of a general debate, say on whether a carbon tax to curb CO_2 emissions is appropriate: "This side of the room, everyone over here…you write a four-sentence paper that defends instituting a carbon tax; everyone on the other side of the room…you write one that opposes a carbon tax." One can then sort out some different arguments for and against a carbon tax, and the

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[10] At some point in introducing the template to students, probably when introducing the template for the first time, one needs to give alternatives to the metatext: Instead of "they say," the metatext might be "determinists say" or "Holbach says." Instead of "I say," we have variants such as "My view here is…" For "one might object," we have "a critic may say that." For "I reply," there is "The best response is," and one might point out that the latter expression is ambiguous between introducing an objection to be considered and giving a reply to an objection.

sorting should also reveal which arguments stand alone in defending a position and which are criticisms of arguments on the other side. This should clarify the overall debate by way of clarifying the logical relationships between the different arguments one way or the other. This has the added bonus that students would generate the relevant pieces of the debate themselves (or at least with that appearance, depending on what they've read, been lectured to about, etc. beforehand).

Finally, and this would overlap with some of the suggestions above, students might write four-sentence papers as part of our *using classroom assessment techniques*[11] (or CATs) to gauge student learning in the context of individual class meetings. One might have a short lecture on a philosophical dispute, then conclude with students writing four-sentence papers summarizing that dispute. We then get to see what students didn't see, or didn't see clearly enough, and we revisit various arguments accordingly in a subsequent class meeting. Did they not understand the initial argument for compatibilism, say, or did they not understand the incompatibilist's objection? Among the students as a group, what proportion understood, didn't understand, and what in particular got misunderstood? What proportion of them passed Mill's test? A four-sentence paper exercise can tell you.

Still, one might wonder about the efficacy of the method. Is there evidence that it works? Is there evidence that it produces better argumentative writing by way of considering objections? Yes, though the evidence admittedly falls short of what science might demand. This is the case for most teaching tools. But there is strong anecdotal support for the four-sentence paper, there is more tailored supporting evidence from my department's assessment data, and there are a number of favorable results from scientific studies of tools similar to the four-sentence paper. First, in my own teaching experience, the method is quite powerful at pushing students to consider views with objections to them in mind. Indeed, before starting to use the four-sentence paper in various ways in my courses, I'd assign papers with the strong suggestion to consider objections ("The ideal paper will consider at least one objection to its overall argument…") and leave it at that. I'd have some points in the grading rubric devoted to considering objections, under the heading of the student's defense of his or her own position. That would generally be all, and as one might expect, maybe half of the papers would show some awareness of an opposing view, and maybe one in ten would actually consider an objection. But after developing the four-sentence paper and using it for a variety of course tasks, it's rare now to see a paper that fails to consider an objection. This I'm sure is partly due to my emphasizing the skill of considering objections more in the grading. But still, most readers surely have experience at emphasizing something in the grading—say by weighting it with more points—and then being dismayed to find that students don't respond to the incentive. Again, repetitive and varied[12] use of the four-sentence paper has in my experience made for dramatic improvements in students' skills at considering objections. The students perceive this too. They report to me in conversation that four-sentence paper exercises make it much clearer to them what an argumentative paper

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[11] The term is from Angelo & Cross (1993). See their work for an extensive list of other such tools.

[12] Brown et al.'s (2014) review of recent research on the psychology of learning emphasizes the notion of such "repeated and varied" practice, and this together with "interleaved" practice (or practice combining different skills to be learned). The four-sentence paper exercise conveniently fits with all three recommendations: It can easily be repeated since the exercise is short. It can be varied in all of the ways suggested in the text. It interleaves practice at different skills—considering objections and replies, exposition of arguments, use of metatext, understanding philosophical positions, etc.

should be, and that the exercise makes it much easier to plan out a paper where they have something to say and defend.

Our department's assessment data support the efficacy of the four-sentence paper too. As mentioned above, my own desire to help students build the skill of considering objections came out of our assessment data gathered since 2008. Across all of the writing samples assessed up to Spring 2012, the lowest scores were for two categories tied to considering objections (considering objections to the defense of one's own view, and considering objections to one's criticism of someone else's view). Back then, we judged less than a third of senior papers to be competent at considering objections. As I prepared to teach our department's course in philosophical writing in Fall 2012, I took it as a central task to help the students improve in this area. The four-sentence paper was a crucial element in that instruction, and the students rose to the occasion. For the two renditions of the course in Fall 2012 and Fall 2013, eight of thirteen papers were judged competent at considering objections (and seven of seven in Fall 2012). This is a small sample. But even so, against the background of the rest of the assessment data from 2008-2014, the results are significantly better for the two sections of the writing course where the four-sentence paper was used: For the two skill categories tied to considering objections, scores improved with p-values less than 0.001 on our scale of 1-4 for each category. While one obviously ought not to infer that use of the four-sentence paper is *the* cause of students' improved writing skills, the results are very encouraging. It seems reasonable to infer from the assessment data that the exercise played a role in the improvements.

Finally, several empirical studies support the four-sentence paper's efficacy.[13] The inference here is by analogy, as several studies have examined tools very similar to the four-sentence paper by way of teaching argumentative writing. For instance, Nussbaum and Schraw (2007) compared mere "criteria instruction" with use of what they called a "graphic organizer." Criteria instruction used a brief handout on the "criteria" for a good argument, including both support for one's own position and considering counterarguments.[14] The graphic organizer was much like a diagrammatic form of the four-sentence paper, and was similar also to introductory logic's familiar argument diagrams. The organizer had spaces to fill in an overall or "final" conclusion, reasons for that conclusion, counterarguments, and reasons in support of those counterarguments.[15]

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[13] For a general review of the empirical research on argumentative writing through 2010, see Newell et al. (2011). They discuss the use of templates on p. 284, citing several of the studies discussed in what follows in the text.

[14] For N&S, a counterargument could be an objection to the final conclusion or an argument for a position contrary to that final conclusion.

[15] The graphic organizer had no space for what N&S called "rebuttals"—my "replies to objections." The handout for criteria instruction gave "refute one side" and "explain why one side is stronger or more convincing than the other" as options in developing the final conclusion. N&S's study also had students read a short text that included arguments on two sides to an issue, in order that students would have some exposure to possible counterarguments. In philosophy courses with papers expected to consider objections to their theses or arguments, the texts, lectures, and discussions in the course provide possibilities for considering such exchanges of views, arguments, objections, and replies. These are similarities between N&S's assignment and the four-sentence paper. However, there are some dissimilarities. N&S's study evaluated short "essays" of just a few paragraphs at most, with a short time limit for students to generate their essays, and on a topic somewhat less challenging than the average philosophy paper. (For the study, the topic was whether nudity at the 2004 Super Bowl halftime show

One would expect that using such tools would show improvement over not using them, and this was indeed the case in N&S's study. N&S scored the results by both number of counterarguments and rebuttals (which would include my "replies to objections"), and also by a holistic score for the integration of arguments and counterarguments. Integration scores were to give the extent to which essays gave developed arguments, counterarguments, etc., rather than merely counting instances of such elements. Groups using one or both tools generated more argument components on average than the control group, which used neither tool. Those using just the graphic organizer included more replies to counterarguments. Groups using one or both tools received higher holistic scores for integration too, compared with the control group. Interestingly, groups using just criteria instruction had better integrated papers on the whole than those using the graphic organizer. This suggests that filling in blanks in a graphic organizer in planning an essay won't necessarily result in a well-*developed* essay that considers objections and replies more deeply.[16] The group using both tools scored the highest in both measures, and this is perhaps the best result in support of the four-sentence paper. For in practice, most anyone using such a template would do so in combination with instruction on the criteria for a good paper—what elements should be included and why, how the paper will be graded, etc.

In a follow-up study, Nussbaum (2008) tested a redesigned version of the graphic organizer in the form of what he calls an argumentation vee diagram (AVD), combined with criteria instruction, and in the context of a sequence of essay assignments (rather than just one). The diagram had a 'V' shape, with arguments supporting two positions on an issue listed on either side of the 'V', and with an overall conclusion at the bottom. Use of the redesigned graphic organizer was hoped to generate better-integrated papers, and this was the result in the study.[17] Without going into more details of the study or the redesigned tool, the point regarding the four-sentence paper is that here again, a "fill-in-the-blank"-style tool, especially when used in combination with criteria instruction, tends to improve integration of a thesis, its defense, and consideration of opposing positions and criticism.

III.

Despite the case made above for using the four-sentence paper, there are objections to consider. These fall into two general categories. One might object to use of templates generally

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deserves a fine). Yet despite the dissimilarities, the point here is that N&S's study involved exercises sufficiently similar to the four-sentence paper, especially with respect to the skill of considering positions contrary to one's own.

[16] Using a four-sentence paper to plan out a longer essay seems to avoid this consequence. For if students are made aware that the four sections of their longer essay are to be substantial (say at least a paragraph each), then not only should all four sections be present in the longer paper, the sections on objections and replies will be more developed than just a quick mention of them because they are required. If students know that the four sentences of a four-sentence paper are just the lead sentences of four sections of their papers, then one should see more developed treatment of objections and replies.

[17] Nussbaum et al. (2007) found similar results for using the AVD diagrams as preparation for online argumentative discussions. See also Shehab (2011), which compared AVD diagrams with mere lists of arguments pro and con by way of studying several types of integrated arguments in comparison with cognitive load. For a study supporting the efficacy of teaching disciplinary conventions in literature—*topoi* that mirror philosophy's convention of considering objections and replies—see Wilder & Wolfe (2009).

in teaching writing, or one might object to use of the four-sentence paper based on its focus on considering objections. Take these in order. First, one might object that using templates to teach writing in general, and argumentative writing in particular, results in students having an oversimplified view of the structure of good writing. It also (or thus) stifles creativity, and it focuses students on overall structure instead of content. Second, one might object that encouraging a focus on objections promotes an adversarial model of philosophy and critical thinking, and such a model is itself objectionable. One might worry also that the four-sentence paper exercise is in the end too difficult for most of our students to complete—"they just can't do it," we might say—and we should focus on more accessible argumentative tasks for our students instead. I'll return in §IV to reply to all of these concerns.

What motivates the objections? As for the charge of oversimplifying writing instruction, one might object that using templates such as the four-sentence paper template forces students into following specific structures for their writing. As Graff and Birkenstein put it, "this represents a return to prescriptive forms of instruction that encourage passive learning or lead students to put their writing on automatic pilot (2014, p. xxii)." Using the four-sentence paper template as the sole example of a global argumentative structure would indeed be to force students to follow just one global structure to their writing in the course. If there are other general structures worth knowing or following, then use only of the "They say…, I say…, one might object…, I reply…"-type structure oversimplifies argumentative and philosophical writing. To the extent this would be bad, we have an objection to consider. Second, and this objection is logically related to the first, forced use of templates seems to stifle creativity in student writing. For if following the template is mandatory, one can't be creative in following other general argumentative structures. If we shouldn't stifle such creativity, then we have another objection to consider. Finally, focus on the four-sentence paper's template threatens to focus students' attention on the global structure of their papers instead of the details of their arguments (summarized or otherwise). If those details are more important than general structure, then the focus in teaching argumentative writing ought to be at that more fine-grained level instead.

What of the objections related to the four-sentence paper's focus on considering objections? First, the template might be seen as promoting what some have called "the adversarial model" in philosophy.[18] This is a model of doing philosophy where opposing sides of an issue attempt to demolish each other with their reasoning, and this is objectionable on the grounds of its neglecting quite-reasonable goals such as building community and consensus, respecting different views and perspectives (such as gendered ones), and perhaps even being humble in one's philosophical inquiries. The four-sentence paper template indeed sets up a mode of thinking with one's own side framed against that of someone else or some other group, and then reinforces it with that other side firing an objection back one's way, and finally with a parry or counterargument in response. While I prefer the image of a friendly and thoughtful chess game[19] instead of fighters standing toe-to-toe trading blows, the four-sentence paper template is consistent with the latter, more pugilistic image of philosophy.

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[18] The name of the model goes back at least to Moulton (1980, 1983). For more recent discussion of the model, and especially in light of recent concerns about inclusiveness in philosophy, see Rooney (2010), Rooney & Hundleby (2010), Hundleby (2013), and Cohen (1995).

[19] To be sure, chess has its own militaristic "adversarial" language. So perhaps there is a parallel set of challenges for the image of a supposedly friendly chess game, and perhaps replies to those challenges similar to what I'll suggest below.

The final objection is also related to the four-sentence paper's focus on considering objections. Considering objections and replying to them is indeed a difficult task, perhaps even the most difficult task that undergraduates might be expected to perform in writing. To do it well, students have to not only understand the framework of the debate they're entering, and not only to have something to say on one side or the other of that debate, but also to anticipate a strong objection from an opponent and reply to it. And this needs to be done without accidentally refuting oneself with the objection one considers (for the reply has to be good too). If one has students who struggle mightily at the first step of the four-sentence paper, namely that of just summarizing a philosophical position one has studied and its possible defense, one might say of the exercise I'm promoting, "They just can't do it." If one's students are under too much cognitive load for an assignment, we should start with smaller steps or avoid the assignment altogether.

<div align="center">IV.</div>

I reply that none of these objections can be sustained.[20] Take the first set of objections, and for the first two of those I'll work also with Graff and Birkenstein's replies (for they consider the same objections). It is true that using templates simplifies argumentative writing. But does it *over*simplify it in some objectionable way? Probably not. For on G&B's view, all academic writing, or any prose writing that succeeds in being both valuable and maximally readable, has to frame what it has to say against an existing background of what others are saying. Without the "they say" component, one's writing fails to answer the essential questions of who should care or why anyone should care (G&B, 2014; pp. xix, xxii-xxiii, Ch. 7). But now consider the extra components of the four-sentence paper template: the "one might object" and the "I reply" components. Does this oversimplify argumentative writing in the sense of leaving out some distinct but legitimate argumentative structures? It seems the structures one might have in mind are either partial versions of the four-sentence paper or are less-general argument structures (or argument forms) instead. For example, what of this template, corresponding to a type of *argument by counterexample* to a definition?

(1) A P is a Q and an R.

(2) _____ is a P, but not a Q and an R, so the definition in (1) is false.

This is either an argument form, which one might use standardly to critique a definition, or it is a structure following part of the four-sentence paper's template. I say it's both, for yes, this is a standard way of objecting to a definition, and it's also a more detailed template for the four-sentence paper's first two steps. For (1) is a "they say"-type claim, against which the criticism in (2) (an "I say"-type claim) is framed. And after the sections above, we might then ask for two

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[20] I would normally structure a paper considering multiple objections with the replies given concurrently with the objections. But for obvious reasons, I chose to structure the present paper with the replies all given in their own section. It is a reasonable question as to which arrangement is best. After instituting use of the four-sentence paper as a preliminary exercise for writing longer papers, I've had several students ask in earnest where to place replies to objections they consider. My thought is that it depends on the number of objections and whether they are related to each other. But that students would *ask* such a structural question is something I doubt I'd have gotten if not for the four-sentence paper exercise.

more components, corresponding to a *revision* of a definition in light of a possible counterexample:

> (3) One might object that revising (1) to say that a *P* is a *Q* and an *R* and an *S* is both more plausible than (1) and rules out the example in (2).

> (4) I reply that _____ is a *P* but not both an *R* and an *S*, so the definition in (3) is false.

It seems the same would apply to most other general structures one might cite here. The structure is either an argument form (like a constructive dilemma, an argument from analogy, or an inference to the best explanation), or it's a more detailed four-sentence paper structure or part of one, or both. Still, what if there are some structures that *don't* match up well with the four-sentence paper? This would be fine, for I don't claim in this essay that the four-sentence paper structure is at the heart of *every* paper that we would say is "argumentative" or philosophical. But I would also say that a structure paying attention to objections and replies to them is *so* common that if one were to choose a single template around which to "oversimplify" writing an argumentative paper, the four-sentence paper template is the best choice by far. Finally, if one favors a template fitting one's own view of how argumentative papers should be structured at the general level, then one surely could build assignments either in tandem with the four-sentence paper or analogous to it.

As for the "stifling creativity" objection, G&B concede that the "they say, I say" model does restrict students' writing options somewhat. But first, the template is so basic and widespread that students ought to learn a basic structure before branching out to more complex ones. Second, there is vast room for creativity even in a restricted template such as the two-step "they say, I say" or the four steps of the four-sentence paper. I agree with both replies.[21] The second reply is especially powerful in the case of the four-sentence paper. For the structure is ubiquitous in philosophy. The "they say" section might only be a sentence or two in some professional essays, or the "one might object" and "I reply" sections might include many objections and many replies. But the structure seems present everywhere. Even the papers I cited earlier that raise concerns about "the adversary method" in philosophy take care to consider possible objections and reply to them. Templates do foreclose on creativity, but in a way that makes for more effective argumentative writing. To put it a different way, it's just not true that "anything goes" in structuring a defense of one's view. We can't say we should be allowed to use arguments that affirm the consequent to defend our views, for example, and justify this on the grounds of respecting creativity. Perhaps be creative with modus ponens instead, for that template not only has gotten some good mileage over the years, but it also has the advantage of being valid.

The next objection raised the concern that focus on the four-sentence template takes focus away from more detailed argumentative moves regarding the content of what is under consideration and the details of one's arguments. I concede the point. Exercises with the four-sentence paper template do burn time and student effort on general argumentative structure, and that time might be spent on more detailed content-related discussions or on formulating or clarifying the students' own arguments. But I don't mean to say here that the four-sentence paper

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[21] For a further defense of using templates in teaching writing, and in education generally, see Graff & Birkenstein (2008).

should be the *sole* exercise one uses. Just as a class exercise can be overused, so too can the four-sentence paper. But as I argued earlier, the worth of considering views opposed to one's own, and the worth of considering objections coming from those viewpoints different from one's own, seem to be crucial to one's larger understanding and to one's philosophical education generally. Striking the right balance between attention to fine-grained details of arguments, to larger argumentative structures, and even to more general "virtues of inquiry" is something for all of us to juggle.

  Now to the second sort of objection to use of the four-sentence paper, where the two objections here both are tied to the heart of the four-sentence paper: its focus on objections and replies. The first objection was concerned with the exercise's fostering an image of philosophy as not just argumentative, but perniciously *adversarial*. Again, one imagines a barfight of trading objections and replies. Here, I think the objection certainly would be sustained if an instructor uses the exercise with the aim of glorifying intellectual combat. The mere combat isn't the point, and I agree that other harms can well result if we teach our philosophy courses aiming to instill the warrior virtues with the purpose of achieving victory in argument. As others have noted of our discipline, one might cite such a mindset as partly explaining the presence of significantly underrepresented groups in philosophy.

  But I don't think the four-sentence paper exercise on its own promotes any sort of pernicious adversarial model in philosophy. One can consider objections and replies in an objectionably adversarial mode or not. For nowhere is being combative or adversarial in *tone* required for framing one's own views against those of others, or in replying to possible objections from those holding other views. For example, nowhere in *On Liberty* does Mill say that the goal of argument is to intellectually crush one's opponent and rejoice in it. Instead, Mill holds up as a pariah the person who *fails* to consider different views, who *fails* to consider the objections that representatives of those different views might raise, and who *fails* to work out what the replies to those objections might be. Bertrand Russell (1912) does the same in "The value of philosophy": We might get less certainty when raising possible doubts about what we think is true, but we gain in being freed from dogmatism. Considering objections is a way of raising possible doubts about our own views. Helping our students develop the habit of considering objections seems quite consistent with goals of being empathetic, fair, aiming to solve problems communally by building consensus, and by way of promoting "inquiry" in the sense of being in the habit of exploring philosophical issues further. We should inculcate and model such virtues in our own behavior where appropriate. One can have good manners and still reply to possible objections. One can consider objections and reply to them without being boorish, and without gently and nonverbally ushering members of underrepresented groups out of philosophy.

  But according to Moulton (1980, 1983), Hundleby (2013), Rooney (2010), Cohen (1995), and others, there is more to the objection than what I have replied to so far. For on their view, the so-called *adversary view* of philosophy or its method isn't merely a matter of tone. It is a matter of substance as well. For the adversary view of philosophy just *is* the model of doing philosophy that Mill and Russell champion, namely that of defending one's views against the competition. Framing one's arguments against those of others *is* adversarial, Moulton and others say, and they see this general method as wrong. I disagree. For there are different views on any given subject, and there are distinct answers available to any philosophical question. We can't all be correct. The way to sort out which views are strongest or most plausible is to compare the arguments, the reasons and evidence, for each. Some of these arguments will be positive arguments for a thesis,

some will be objections to other theses or arguments, and some will be replies to objections. Ignoring such arguments is to incompletely consider the issue in question. This seems uncontroversial to me, though I think I understand the opposing position. But there is something in my paper for these opponents still. For those who would see good philosophy as paying attention to views different from one's own, but without framing the discussion in terms of objections and replies, what general structure should such a paper have? I already granted that there may be structures other than that of the four-sentence paper. Use a template for that other structure if one likes. Perhaps frame it against the "traditional" template of the four-sentence paper, and perhaps ask students to analyze their relative effectiveness at whatever is appropriate for philosophical writing.

A last objection to consider is more practical, and again is tied to the four-sentence paper's focus on objections and replies. Again, most of our students find it difficult to consider objections to their own views. Many of my students find it difficult enough to defend a thesis of their own, with it being even tougher to identify what a critic might say in response and reply to it. They might even find this task the most difficult writing task they've faced. If the challenge is too much, then the four-sentence paper exercise looks limited in its possible applications. And despite the exercise's simplicity, there are indeed many ways to go wrong in completing it.

There are several replies. The first is to concede the difficulty for many students with considering objections. It's not an obvious argumentative move to make (as the assessment data above suggest), likely because it's not obvious that it's a good idea to let your reader know how you might be wrong. "Why undercut my own view?" a student might ask. But even so, students readily see the point of considering objections, often by exposure to Mill's points I cited earlier. But even after understanding the *need* to consider objections, the difficulty in *doing* the considering remains. The solution, as many readers surely would anticipate, is to chunk or scaffold the different tasks involved. For example, if students haven't reached the stage of being able to conceive of criticism of their own views, they might start with summarizing a short reading in terms of a four-sentence paper. That enables them to see what raising an objection to one's own view looks like. One might do the same for a larger philosophical issue, where again the different sides to the issue, along with their arguments back and forth, are already on display. One might also break the four-sentence paper exercise into stages. One exercise, perhaps repeated across some different summarizing tasks or brainstorming exercises, would be a two-step exercise corresponding to the "they say…, I say…" components. Identifying views different from one's own is a reasonable first task before moving on. A second stage might have three steps, with the addition of the "one might object" component, and then one might practice with the full template afterward. One might scaffold full paper assignments too. One might have the first few writing assignments only need to follow the "they say…, I say…" template (essentially just a "summary and response" type paper), with subsequent papers having to follow the full template.[22]

I've also found there are some common confusions on students' parts with respect to using the template, and this might be another reason for a "they just can't do it" objection. But the reply is that the confusions are easy to rectify, and in fact the confusions are a *good* feature of the exercise. For getting student confusions out in the open, prior to longer, higher-stakes writing

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[22] Or, one might have students work on a single paper over the course of a semester, with different stages scaffolded along the way. This is Mulnix & Mulnix's (2010) suggestion, and the process they recommend includes attention to considering objections and replying to them.

assignments, allows for everyone to learn how to avoid such mistakes before they would be costly. The four-sentence paper template mirrors the global structure of an argumentative essay. Avoiding mistakes at that level saves both instructors and students a lot of frustration.

But what common pitfalls are there for the exercise? The first can occur when students haven't reached the stage of being able to formulate their own position or its defense, beyond what they've read or heard about from a lecture or preceding discussion. A paper assignment might ask for a thesis to be defended, and what one might receive is a paper that *structurally* follows the four-sentence paper template, but the "thesis" and its "defense" merely summarizes an existing position, an argument for it, and possible objections and replies. For my example earlier with the prompt of "Defend the thesis that sensation isn't foundational," I parroted some arguments from Descartes' Meditation I. Imagine a student paper that parrots Descartes, but still follows the four-sentence paper's template. This is just an exposition, with an "I agree" thrown in. A thesis-defense paper needs to go at least *somewhat* beyond the course's content—"We need to hear from *you*," we might say in the margins as feedback. If we're using the four-sentence paper exercise to prepare students to write longer papers, then we've identified a problem to solve. One strategy might be to help students see how they might generally agree with a philosophical position studied in the course, but nevertheless disagree on some subtle point. That would be an appropriate focus for a paper. (Graff and Birkenstein would call this "agreeing with a difference.") Another might be to help students find other ways to defend a given philosopher's position differently than that philosopher actually does. This might involve finding new positive arguments for that position, or it might involve seeking to find stronger objections to consider than that philosopher does him/herself, or better replies, or some combination of these.

Two other content-related pitfalls students might fall into are having *logically unrelated components* in the template, and/or having *repetitious components* in the template. For the "reply" considered to an objection might be logically unrelated to that objection. It might give an independent argument for the paper's thesis, for instance, where that would ignore the objection. Or, the "reply" might reply to some different argument than what the "one might object…" section gives, say to an objection studied in the course but not considered in the paper. Again, the reply is logically unrelated to the objection. I've seen repetitious content in four-sentence papers too. For this type of slip, perhaps the "one might object" sentence merely rephrases the argument given in the "they say" sentence. Similarly, the "reply" might just restate the "I say" section's argument. This is easy for students to do. Here is a contrived example:

> "They say that freedom and determinism are incompatible, and this is shown by the consequence argument. I say that freedom and determinism are compatible, for free acts are just those that are caused in the right way—by us. One might object that if determinism is true, then everything is a consequence ultimately of things beyond our control, so freedom and determinism are incompatible. I reply that if I'm the cause of what I do, then it doesn't matter whether that action is determined or not.

The "one might object" sentence restates the consequence argument, but that supports what "they say." Moreover, the "I reply" sentence restates classical compatibilism's basic claim, and that was given in support of what "I say" earlier. So we have the four-sentence paper's metatext but with repetitious content. All of these sorts of slips are common enough, I've found, but for students and instructors to find them is actually a good thing. It seems to be a perfectly healthy way for students to discover their shortcomings and address them. If students generate four-

sentence papers ahead of a class discussion, it also allows students to discover how others might make such slips and how to avoid them in the future. Again, the presence of these pitfalls seems to be a strength of the four-sentence paper exercise, rather than a weakness serving as the basis of an objection to its use.

A final point to make in reply to the "they can't do it" objection is fairly simple. In my experience, with the right repetitive practice, chunking and scaffolding, communication of expectations, and so on, students *do* consider objections and reply to them effectively. They learn to do it in the form of a four-sentence paper, and they can apply the lesson in longer papers.[23] I mentioned earlier that considering and replying to objections might be a very high-level critical thinking skill, one that students might gain only after becoming competent at other skills such as identifying and summarizing arguments. This might explain why students either do a poor job of considering objections or aren't in the habit of it at all. But in my own admittedly narrow experience, students seem to acquire the skill readily enough, and they're quick to see the value in it. The explanation for the dearth of objections considered by students might instead be that we simply don't encourage it much. We might not require that papers consider objections (and if it's not required, students readily might think "Why do it? Why do that extra work?"). We might not encourage it because we might be focused on helping students understand what a given philosopher is saying rather than encouraging them to have something to say. It's true that our subject has subtle and complex arguments at its core. Understanding such arguments takes skill. But if we take the skills of defending one's own thesis and addressing possible objections seriously too, then we ought to make time for developing those skills. The four-sentence paper exercise aims to help with that.

To sum up, I've offered a tool for having efficient exercises built around developing the critical skill of considering objections and replying to them: the four-sentence paper. I framed the presentation against the common idea of developing argumentative writing skills by writing full papers. While many of us also include exercises meant to practice different components of a full paper, the four-sentence paper allows for efficient practice with a global structure ubiquitous in philosophy. It is ubiquitous in philosophy because as Mill and many others have said, considering objections is essential to making the best case for one's views. One type of critic might raise concerns about the prescriptive, simplified form of writing that the four-sentence paper exercise exemplifies. But the tool seems obviously useful for beginners, and if the structure is present in all good philosophy, it's not much of a simplification to have students practice that structure. Another type of critic might worry about the exercise promoting a perniciously adversarial mindset that we would be wise to be careful about promoting. I agree, but only insofar as the exercise might be used in instilling objectionable habits of argument in the larger sense of argument as an important social activity. But one can consider and reply to objections while still being inclusive and respectful. Indeed, considering opposing views is one important *way* of being inclusive and respectful. Finally, one might be concerned that considering objections and replies to one's own views might be too much for some students.

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[23] The empirical evidence cited earlier bears this out too. For while the evidence for the efficacy of any particular tool might be incomplete, the evidence shows that a variety of different types of tools can be quite useful in improving students' skills at considering objections and replies.

Again, I agree. But with proper use of other tools such as scaffolding, varied and repetitive practice, etc., there's no reason to think students can't develop the habit of considering objections. The four-sentence paper, I say, is one important tool for helping students do so.

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