



Objection

Objections are probably one of the hardest parts of writing philosophy papers, as well as the part that distinguishes it the most from other types of writing. They ask you to critique the argument that you've just painstakingly developed and no one wants to do that! It's important to keep in mind that objections come in a variety of forms and don't need to completely destroy your argument. It could be something like a request to further explain a premise or a move that was made earlier in the argument or it could be a thought experiment that presents a situation that's problematic for your argument.

E.g. "Utilitarianism might initially seem like a promising ethical theory, but it encounters problems when we consider situations in which many people are getting pleasure out of an individual being in pain. For example, our intuitions tell us that gladiator fighting was an unethical practice, but seeing as an entire coliseum of people derived pleasure from this activity (and presumably more pleasure than the pain that the gladiators were experiencing), utilitarianism tells us that this practice is 'good.'"

To write an objection, it's necessary to adopt the perspective of someone reasonable who disagrees with your view or the view of the author you are summarizing and then ask "what would he or she have to say about this argument?" (see the PDF on charity). The aim of the objection is to strengthen your own argument. It's essentially telling your reader that you're aware of a problem in your argument and that you can deal with it. Sometimes you're already aware of weaknesses in your argument but other times it helps to have a friend, classmate or tutor at the writing center give it a second look.

That being said, there are also a whole bunch of bad ways to object to an argument. You can offer up a weak objection, such as one that purposefully misinterprets your argument, that you can easily knock down in your response. Another way to go about this is by using an "ad hominem" attack, which is to attack the source of an argument instead of the argument itself.

E.g. "While it may initially appear as if Peter Singer gives us good reason to adopt a vegan lifestyle (perhaps with the exception of truly free-range eggs), we shouldn't take his argument seriously because he once put butter on his bread at a conference. What a hypocrite."

In this sort of situation, even if Peter Singer decided that he wanted buttered bread that one evening, or even if he was a raging carnivore, his argument for veganism could still be a really good one. You've got to engage with the argument and not blame Peter Singer for wanting to eat butter, especially since it's delicious and he's just human.

