

# The North Park University Writing Center

NOTE: You should see colored comment boxes on the side of the essay. If these do not appear, go to the **toolbar**, click **view** and then **comment**.

The best way to read commentary on essays is to begin at the end, because the last comment seeks to sum up the most important strengths and weaknesses of the paper. It gives you a perspective from which to read the more specific comments in the margins.



## The Good Life at a Great Price. Guaranteed.

Department store Sears claims to have the key to it. Benjamin Franklin declares that if one behaves like him, one will have it. Socrates states that if one follows his example and the advice of a divine priestess, one can obtain it. It would seem an easy thing to obtain if a department store can readily offer it to you for “a great price,” but few people truly have what all these sources claim to offer readily—“the good life.” If most people did have “the good life,” Benjamin Franklin would have no advice to offer in his autobiography, nor would Socrates have had anything to say in the *Symposium*. Franklin and Socrates, in slightly varying ways, offer their readers an opportunity to seize “the good life.” Franklin’s method consists of an adherence to a self-designed set of thirteen principals that brings about a comfortable lifestyle, whereas Socrates’ method consists of a thirst for wisdom and beauty which comes to fruition in the reproduction of this wisdom and beauty.

In Franklin’s method, his list of thirteen virtues clearly portrays a specific design for obtaining “the good life.” Among these thirteen, Franklin lists the values of temperance. He defines the maintaining of temperance as “Eat not to Dulness. Drink not to Elevation (sic)” (“Autobiography”, 149). In Franklin’s autobiography, he proves his faithfulness to this tenet while working at Watt’s Printing House and abstaining from

rekstrand 9/16/05 4:47 PM

**Comment:** How does your title hint at or announce the rest of your paper?

rekstrand 10/11/05 5:11 PM

**Comment:** This seems a random, abrupt way to start the paper, though I can see that you’re making a deliberate move to “grab attention” by a creative association. You return to the department store idea shortly, but it’s not easy to see what you’re actually working at with the metaphor. You make a good point when you observe that, if people had the good life, BF and S would have been speechless—but I’m not sure how that ties in to the department store—that seems rather a distraction than an integrated idea. (Even though you return to Sears in your conclusion.)

Administrator 10/11/05 4:06 PM

**Comment:** Interesting contrast: “lifestyle” vs. “reproduction.” Very suggestive of contemporary American/Western society and the way it has departed from an earlier view of the good life. Can you advance an argument (i.e., thesis) which puts these two methods into a relationship with each other? At the moment, your thesis looks like a report on two separate theories rather than an assessment or judgment call.

drink in spite of his coworkers, who were “great Guzzlers of Beer” (99). By not drinking, Franklin claims to be “*stronger* than themselves who drank *strong* Beer (sic),” thus said being more productive, efficient, and valuable (“Autobiography” 100). In this way, Franklin’s value of temperance ties in with his value of industry. Franklin says in order to be industrious one must “Lose no Time. Be always employ’d in something useful. Cut off all unnecessary Actions (sic)” (“Autobiography” 149). He tries to follow through with this plan by drawing out a schedule of his day that leaves no time wasted. This also plays on Franklin’s virtues of frugality and order, in which Franklin encourages his readers to “waste nothing” and to “let each Part of your Business have its Time (sic)” (“Autobiography” 149). These values in particular display Franklin’s desire for efficient work, resulting in less energy spent and more money generated.

cmartin 10/11/05 4:19 PM

**Comment:** This is an interesting idea. Since this is where your voice seems to become more confident and your ideas seem to concentrate, perhaps you could find a more focused way to open this paragraph? Maybe something like “While Franklin lists thirteen virtues in his design for “the good life,” his chief focus seems to be on industry. Even when he writes about a virtue as seemingly unrelated as temperance, his real concern . . . .” Then you could use the rest of the paragraph’s information to demonstrate that this first example isn’t just a single case. By cutting down on the more general details, you would give readers less opportunity to get distracted.

Through a system of obtaining these aforementioned virtues and Franklin’s use of this system on himself, he is encouraging the reader to be like him. He intentionally chose to include in his autobiography a letter written by his friend Benjamin Vaughn which urges Franklin to “invite all wise men to become like yourself; and other men to become wise” (136). Clearly Franklin believes that his set of virtues and his system for making these virtues habitual is the way to “the good life.”

cmartin 10/11/05 4:20 PM

**Comment:** It sounds as though you’ve been reading a lot of 18<sup>th</sup>-century prose lately . . . do you talk like this?

“The good life” that Franklin portrays is one of comfortable condition and intellectual growth. This comfortable condition represents a middle-class life where one has enough money due to the virtues of frugality, order, temperance, industry, and the like. Intellectual growth refers to a hunger for wisdom and knowledge that Franklin, as a scientist, claims to have. Since Franklin has these things and believe that everyone else wishes to have them, all should emulate him in order to obtain “the good life.”

Administrator 10/11/05 4:21 PM

**Comment:** V’s letter functions as a product endorsement, doesn’t it.

rekstrand 9/16/05 4:47 PM

**Comment:** Perhaps mold your argument around this, rather than inserting it in the middle of your discussion about Franklin’s “good life.”

rekstrand 9/16/05 4:47 PM

**Comment:** Unclear – does Franklin have intellectual growth, or does he have wisdom and knowledge?

In Socrates' method, the constant craving of beauty and love leads to the good life. In the *Symposium*, Plato uses a series of speeches about Love by rather clueless guests at a party to contrast with the more intelligent speech of Socrates. However, Socrates does not claim the speech as his own, but declares it was a speech he learned from a priestess named Diotima, "a woman who was wise about many things" (Plato 45). Her status as a priestess, her wisdom, and her name, which translates to "God blessed," give this speech a divine aspect and provides it with a higher authority than any of the previous speeches. Diotima, through Socrates, says that Love itself is neither wise nor ignorant and neither beautiful or ugly, but somewhere in between each as it is always chasing after wisdom and beautiful things. This description of Love as seeking wisdom and loving wisdom relates directly to Socrates, as Socrates is consider a philosopher, a word which comes from the Greek *philosophia*, or lover of wisdom. Also, as Paul Shorey states, "In the *Symposium* love is not a god, but a demon" or in Greek *daimonion* (11). A form of *daimonion*, *daimonios*, is later used in the *Symposium* by Alcibiades to describe Socrates. Consequently, Socrates is seen as the most like Love of any mortal, and, having this likeness, he is the most desirable for one to imitate.

rekstrand 10/11/05 4:23 PM

**Comment:** Good, clear statement of Socrates' position, which contrasts with Franklin's. Could you bridge between the two positions a little less abruptly?

rekstrand 10/11/05 4:25 PM

**Comment:** Where does she say that? Because it's so important to your argument, you'd be wise to support your paraphrase with a citation. Then your readers can go look it up for themselves.

According to Socrates through Diotima's speech, "the good life" consists of one "giving birth in beauty," or creating beautiful ideas and wisdom due to on' ascension from simply craving beautiful things to loving Beauty itself (53). When one has ascended to loving Beauty, then one will therefore desire to have Beauty forever. In order to have this Beauty forever, one must perpetuate Beauty by this process of "giving birth in beauty." Shorey describes this process as an instinct in each human to perpetuate oneself and to make oneself immortal (11). Diotima echoes this idea, claiming that

cmartin 10/11/05 4:38 PM

**Comment:** I'm with you when you relate this description of Love to Socrates, though I think that that sentence is a bit awkwardly phrased and maybe runs on a bit long. The idea you bring in from Shorey is an interesting idea, but I don't quite follow how being a daimonion relates to love. And I don't understand quite how Socrates is most like love. I think you've got a really interesting idea buried in here; can we tease it out and get it formulated more clearly? Maybe it deserves its own paragraph? The daimonion-related reflections seem to have their own point, beyond the topic sentence you began with. Or do they just interrupt between the first half of this paragraph the next paragraph, which returns to the idea of loving beauty?

rekstrand 10/11/05 4:38 PM

**Comment:** A bit awkward in phrasing—might alter to something like, "Through/In Diotima's speech, we see that Socrates believes..."

rekstrand 9/16/05 4:47 PM

**Comment:** I got lost again -- simplify this topic sentence to focus on the main idea (loving Beauty itself = the good life).

rekstrand 10/11/05 4:36 PM

**Comment:** Hm—a fine point of style—Then and therefore: these two words are redundant taken together and either one alone weakens the sentence.

reproduction “is an immortal thing for a mortal animal to do” (Plato 53). This, Socrates claims, is the highest goal in life and therefore the thing for which all must strive—“the good life,” the fulfilling existence all mankind desires.

rekstrand 9/16/05 4:47 PM

**Comment:** Expand on that idea more – bring it to the forefront, since that is what your thesis says is Socrates’ stance on the good life.

Clearly there are similarities and difference in the methods employed by Benjamin Franklin and Socrates to obtain “the good life.” Benjamin Franklin’s “Thirst for Knowledge” is roughly equivalent to Socrates’ *philosophia* (“Autobiography” 58). Both believe that seeking knowledge and wisdom is a worthy goal resulting in fulfillment or “the good life.” However, the comfortable condition Franklin sees as necessary is nowhere outlined in Socrates’ speeches. Socrates does not discuss a need for money or any other material item. Accordingly, Socrates’ theory is seen as much more nebulous and spiritual than Franklin’s, which focuses more on physical than social needs.

rekstrand 9/16/05 4:47 PM

**Comment:** Actually, I think you can clear it up a lot more – tighten up your topic sentences above and don’t get lost in using quotes.

cmartin 10/11/05 4:43 PM

**Comment:** This sentence is rather thin, nearly empty in content, especially as compared to the 3<sup>rd</sup> sentence of this paragraph. If it were taken out, nobody would miss it.

However, Franklin adds a tiny spiritual element to his theory as almost an afterthought, placing a final virtue of humility on his list and defining it as “Imitate Jesus and Socrates” (“Autobiography” 150). Although this makes reference to the deeper spiritual issues dealt with by Socrates in Plato’s *Symposium*, Franklin reduces Socrates’ entire lifestyle and way to “the good life” into a single point. Imitating Socrates, according to Franklin, is consequently not the complete way to attain contentment in life. Franklin adds twelve of his own virtues to Socrates’ way to fulfillment as outlined by the godlike Diotima.

rekstrand 10/11/05 4:40 PM

**Comment:** Great comparison language!! You might use this idea in your topic sentence because it is very clear.

rekstrand 9/16/05 4:47 PM

**Comment:** Good contrast – you can bring this out more too in the topic sentences. The more you can tie each paragraph into your intro and thesis, the better!

Socrates’ adherence to the values given by the wise and almost divine Diotima elevates him to such a level that Paul W. Gooch believes “Plato’s Socrates is *less human* than the Jesus of the Gospels” (272). This perception is probably based on Socrates’ given state as a *daimonios*, which is a spirit that exists between mortal and immortal,

Administrator 10/11/05 4:45 PM

**Comment:** Good, but perhaps it belongs in a different paragraph? The idea doesn’t seem to go here—and the paragraph is getting very long. I have to look back to see what your line of thinking is, because I’m forgetting it.

Administrator 9/16/05 4:47 PM

**Comment:** This suggests that F. is conscious of a contest between the way of life he prescribes and a way associated with these two others.

because Jesus Christ was believed to be both mortal and immortal, fully man and fully God at once. Franklin's character is not given any such divine or exalted status.

Furthermore, where Socrates insists that the highest level of satisfaction stems from the perpetuation of beauty and wisdom, Franklin makes no such claim. In Franklin's terms, it appears that wisdom only exists to benefit its current holder. In some of his famous Poor Richard sayings, Franklin mainly extols the virtue of being comfortably wealthy. For example, Franklin as Poor Richard claims that "a light purse is a heavy curse" ("Wit and Wisdom"). Although Franklin's theory encompasses more of the everyday actions one must take toward fulfillment, most of what Franklin teaches is unnecessary in light of Socrates' words in Plato's *Symposium*. For example, if one seeks wisdom wholeheartedly, one will automatically make an attempt to fulfill Franklin's virtues because the virtues Franklin suggests are wise and good themselves. Similarly, if one seeks beauty and "gives birth in beauty," one will instinctively do the things Franklin believed were righteous and pass good things on to future generations (Plato 53).

Socrates is concerned with the immortal and the perpetuation of beauty, but Franklin is concerned only with the temporal and the perpetuation of financial security. This discrepancy in values leads me to believe that Franklin's teachings are superfluous and shallow.

Therefore, Socrates' simplistic but all-encompassing message is comparable to Jesus' condensing the numerous and often nonessential commandment of the Jewish Torah into two simple commands, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength," and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (The Student Bible Mark 12:30-31). When one adheres to these basic

rekstrand 10/11/05 4:48 PM

**Comment:** Unclear – are you saying that Socrates is perceived as being "daimonios" because Jesus was believed to be? Your argument seems to be wandering around a bit. Once again, the "daimonios" material seems an interruption rather than a support to the argument you're making about the superior character of Socrates' vision.

rekstrand 9/16/05 4:47 PM

**Comment:** Good contrast

Administrator 10/11/05 4:51 PM

**Comment:** How fair is this assessment? His schemes for human betterment—from street lights and fire departments, to laws for the just ordering of society (the Albany Plan, his advocacy of the people against the proprietors)—would seem to suggest that he looked to the well-being of future generations as well as his own.

rekstrand 10/11/05 4:52 PM

**Comment:** Are you saying that Franklin believes wealth is more important to "the good life" than the perpetuation of beauty or wisdom? One example isn't really enough support for your claim that he "mainly extols" wealth.

rekstrand 10/11/05 4:53 PM

**Comment:** Ah! Now there's an idea that needs to be expanded on – perhaps you could use *this* idea to shape your argument, rather than letting the *facts* about Franklin and Socrates shape it.

rekstrand 10/11/05 4:55 PM

**Comment:** You use that phrase often, but never really explain what it means...please do that! Can you get more specific about what you've got in mind in this sentence? It's a provocative and rich suggestion, but I'm not able to take it beyond the level of suggestion without your help.

rekstrand 9/16/05 4:47 PM

**Comment:** Amazing statement of contrast – bring this out more too!

rekstrand 9/16/05 4:47 PM

**Comment:** Good analysis.

rekstrand 10/11/05 4:58 PM

**Comment:** I know that closing with a Bible verse may seem like the "right thing" to do, but it only fits if you include Jesus' message in the thesis and body of your paper. You're actually starting a whole new argument here, and it's not very well integrated into the rest. How am I supposed to relate loving God and my neighbor to Socrates' love of beauty and wisdom?

commands, the rest of the law falls into place in much the same way that following Socrates' example allows Franklin's virtues to fall into place. Socrates, then, is the true model for "the good life." He understands that true fulfillment only comes from the desire for beauty and wisdom, not from a desire for Franklin's comfortable life or Sears' Kenmore dishwashers.

rekstrand 9/16/05 4:47 PM

**Comment:** Sounds like your analysis of who is right is founded on what the Bible says – if that is true, please bring the fact that the Bible is your standard into the rest of your paper.

rekstrand 10/11/05 4:57 PM

**Comment:** Good, firm summation of what you discussed in the paper. How does this tie in to your title?

Administrator 10/11/05 5:12 PM

**Comment: Closing Thoughts:** Your thesis when fully developed is more complex than its initial statement—but what a great thesis to wind up with! You're really arguing that the Socratic way to the good life is superior to Franklin's because all the virtues Franklin recommends are implicit in it and, in addition, it looks to immortal goods, right? This argument is subtle, observant, and provocative—nice going.

Now—you'd have a clearer argument if you *began* with this thesis, and related all of what you include in the paper to it. As it stands, you're working through what you understand, working your way towards a thesis; readers don't always know where you're headed, and we sometimes feel like the road you're taking us is a bit overgrown and hard to see. That's how the daimonion materials feel—they might actually fit into your thinking better than I realize, but I need clearer explanation to perceive what you do.

**Suggestion:** You might go through your paper, bearing in mind what your thesis is and making a brief outline of what your main points are. Then you can reorganize them and trim your intro and conclusion to make them clearer—which will make your insights shine!