

Some Basic Structures for Historical Papers

The following is a (non-exhaustive) list of some basic argumentative structures for papers in historical philosophy. Note that there are many variations on the following structures. If nothing else, each one could be expanded by considering objections to your substantive premises, and responding to those objections.

Simple Exegesis:

1. Philosopher says “S1”, “S2”, and “S3”.
2. Saying “S1”, “S2”, and “S3” show/suggest that Philosopher endorsed P.

Theory External Objection:

1. Philosopher endorsed position P.
2. Q is true, and Q entails \sim P.
3. So, Philosopher was wrong about P.

Theory Internal Objection:

1. Philosopher endorsed position P.
2. Philosopher was committed to Q, and Q entails \sim P.
3. So, Philosopher was wrong to endorse P.

Interpretive Puzzle (missing premise):

1. Philosopher seems to argue for P on the basis of Q.
2. P does not follow from Q unless R.
3. So, Philosopher is committed to R.

Interpretive Puzzle (apparent contradiction):

1. Philosopher seems to endorse P, Q, and R.
2. P, Q, and R are not jointly compatible.
3. So, Philosopher endorsed P, Q, and R*.

Reconstructive Argument:

1. Philosopher based endorsement of P on R.
2. R is false, but R* is true.
3. R* supports P*, rather than P.
4. So, given R*, Philosopher would have endorsed P*.

Challenge to Interpretation (qua interpretation):

1. Scholar gave argument A for interpreting Philosopher as endorsing P.
2. Argument A is problematic because of Q.
3. So, Scholar’s interpretation is incorrect.

Challenge to Interpretation (qua philosophical position):

1. Scholar gave argument A for interpreting Philosopher as endorsing P.
2. Position P is problematic because of Q.
3. So, Philosopher was incorrect to endorse P.