

Final Paper Assignment

Instructions: this assignment is due by **4:15 PM** on **December 18**. You should email your paper to me. It does not count as turned in until you get an email confirming that I have received it. This paper should be at least 1500 words long. If you have any questions about how to complete the assignment, please let me know.

The topic of this paper is your choice and should be on something new. That is, in writing this paper you should focus on something that we have not talked about in class. Part of doing this will involve finding new texts to talk about. In particular, in at least one point in your paper you should discuss a philosophical text not assigned in this class.

That said, if there is some subject we touched on in class that you found interesting, and want to research further, that would be fine. For example, it would be acceptable if you found some new texts by philosophers that talked about famine relief and discussed those. But it would not be ok just to talk about the paper from Singer on famine relief that we talked about in class. The majority (if not all) of your paper should be new things.

Here are several suggestions for picking a topic area:

- If there is some non-philosophical subject area that interests you, there is usually a sub-branch of philosophy devoted to that topic. For example, if you're interested in biology, there's philosophy of biology. If you're interested in business, there's business ethics. And so on. This doesn't just extend to academic interests. There's philosophy of film, philosophy of sports, etc.
- There are a number of areas in applied ethics that are interesting to a number of people, so I suspect you will be interested in at least some of

them. We discussed two (famine relief and our duties to animals) but there are many more, e.g. abortion, the death penalty, assisted suicide, organ donation, stem cell research, etc.

- You could simply play around on a site like the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (see <http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html>) until you find something that looks interesting.
- There are a number of textbooks that collect together classic and influential essays in philosophy. You can usually find the table of contents for them online and see if anything in them looks interesting.
- Perhaps you have some philosophical question you always wondered about. Now would be the perfect time to look into it more.

Here are several suggestions for finding readings, once you have picked a topic area:

- One way is to find anthologies that deal with the topic you're interested in and then go to the library, find them, and see if any of the articles in them look interesting.
- Another way is to search the internet for syllabi on the topic you're interested in. Usually, you'll be able to find some, and they often have readings that are especially important and influential for the topic you're interested in.
- If you can find an article on your topic in an online encyclopedia like the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (see <http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html>), it will often have a bibliography with a bunch of articles on your topic. I would recommend reading through the article; it will probably talk about various arguments in it, so then you can see which arguments you find interesting, and look up the authors of those.
- Another resource is PhilPapers (the website is <http://philpapers.org/>) which is searchable and has a huge collection of philosophy articles.

Once you've found the title of an article that sounds interesting, here's how to get access to it.

- Sometimes the article you're looking for is part of a collection in a book. In that case, you should check and see if the library has the book.
- Often, the article won't be part of a book, but will instead be printed in a journal:
 - If you're on campus, usually you can just do a google search for the article and find and download a copy of it.
 - If you're off campus, or you're having trouble getting access to the article through just googling it, you should go to the library website. The library website offers two ways to search for it. One is by clicking on the tab that says "articles" and entering the article title and information. The other is by clicking the tab that says "eJournals," searching for the journal the article was printed in, and then entering the other bibliographic info about the article (when it was written, etc.) to get the article.

Here are some tips for writing this paper:

- In writing your introduction, you should just get right to the point. In other words, you don't need to start out talking about the dawn of humankind. It would be better to tell me in a concise manner what you will be arguing in your paper.
- Try to use as few quotations as possible, but instead explain things in your own words.
- Write as clearly as possible. Pretend you are tutoring a high school student, and they have asked you this question. You're best off writing as simply and directly as you can; using unnecessary big words or convoluted sentences will only confuse them.
- Philosophers like it when you state things as precisely as possible. Try not to state things vaguely or incorrectly, even if you think I will know what you mean.
- It should always be clear what you are doing at any given moment in your paper. One way to make sure things are clear is to include phrases in your paper like "First, I will ... next I will" or "I have just now I am going to"

- When formulating objections, you want to make them as persuasive as possible. If you feel like your objection is super-easy to get around and that it wouldn't really convince anyone, then you should try to think of an objection that's more persuasive. The same thing holds for the responses.
- When writing these papers, it is always better to examine one set of issues in great detail, considering objections and replies, then to examine a number of issues in not very much detail at all.
- Because this is a philosophy paper I want you to try to defend your view by appealing to reasons. That is your goal is not merely to tell me why you think what you do, but also to convince me that you're right.
- Try to write this paper so that someone with no background could follow along. By someone with no background, I mean someone who has not any of the texts you've read and doesn't know the meaning of technical terms like "utilitarian."
- When you discuss something from the readings, it is usually a good idea to go beyond what they say, introducing some new things into the discussion.