

Term Paper Assignment

40 points (20% of your grade for the course)

Due on Tuesday, December 9, at the beginning of class

Write a 2-4 page (600-1200 word) paper related to one of the topics that we studied this semester.

Regarding **format**, your paper must:

- be typewritten and double-spaced, with normal fonts and margins.
- be printed out and handed in at the beginning of class on Wednesday, April 30. Do not submit your paper by email.
- contain your name *on each page*.
- contain page numbers on each page.
- be stapled together.

Failure to conform to these rules will hurt your grade.

Regarding **content**, your paper must:

- have a clearly stated thesis. Your paper cannot be a mere “book report” of the views of others. You must have a view on the topic on which you are writing. You must make it blatantly obvious to the reader what that view is. Here are a bunch of examples of some theses that a paper in this class might defend:
 - “Abortion is wrong even in cases of rape.”
 - “Paske’s cat-person example undermines Marquis’ position on abortion.”
 - “The responsibility objection to Thomson’s argument by analogy is successful.”
 - “Beckwith’s point involving the responsibility of fathers undermines Thomson’s view on abortion.”
 - “Norcross’ argument against eating meat is unsuccessful.”
 - “Animal suffering doesn’t matter.”
 - “People who are in favor of animal rights should be against abortion.”
 - “LaFollette’s account of when it is ok for the state to require a license is mistaken because _____.”

- LaFollette's objection to the claim that our biological children are our property fails."
- "It is morally wrong to hire a prostitute."
- "Ericsson's treatment of the feminist charge against prostitution is confused in several places."
- "Affirmative action isn't just permissible (as Boonin argued), it is obligatory."
- "Geography-based affirmative action is a poor analogy for race-based affirmative action."
- "Haslett's reply to the objection that inheritance should not be abolished because inheritance rights are entailed by property rights is mistaken."
- "There is a morally relevant difference between Singer's shallow pond case and donation to famine relief."
- "The objections we gave in class to Chadwick's argument against organ selling were weak objections."
- "Cloning is wrong because it is 'playing God'."

As these examples illustrate, your thesis can be directly about the views of someone we've read this semester, or it can just be your own view on one of the topics we've studied. If it's the latter, it would still be a good idea to incorporate some of the views or arguments of one or more of the philosophers we read this semester. E.g., if some philosopher has an argument against your thesis, it would be a good idea to show how you can answer that argument.

- lay out the background necessary for understanding your thesis. E.g., if your thesis is that Paske's cat-person example undermines Marquis' position on abortion, you'll need to explain Marquis' position on abortion as well as Paske's cat-person example. You'll also need to imagine what Marquis might say to this objection and explain why this isn't a satisfactory response.
- defend its thesis. The main purpose of your paper will be to defend its thesis - to persuade the reader, through rational argument, that the thesis is correct. There are several ways to defend a thesis. One of the most straightforward ways is to come up with a positive argument for it (this is what Marquis did to defend the main thesis of his paper). Another way is to rebut what you take to be the main argument(s) against your thesis (this was basically Ericsson's strategy). Obviously, this would require first explaining the argument(s) you will be rebutting. If you have the space, you should consider and reply to objections to your position. In some

cases, doing this is mandatory. E.g., if your thesis is that animal suffering doesn't matter, you must address the "argument from marginal cases."

If you are having a hard time coming up with a thesis, you might begin by reflecting on what *seems* to you to be the correct view on one our topics. Then try to think of what you would say if you wanted to persuade a friend that this view is correct. When you do this, you will be laying out an argument for your view, an argument that could form the centerpiece of your paper.

You may find that when you subject your own thesis and the reasons you hold it to scrutiny, you actually convince yourself that your thesis is mistaken. If that happens to you, you might be able to turn all of this into a paper arguing *against* your original thesis.

Regarding **style**, you should:

- aim for clarity, precision, succinctness, and directness.
- avoid flowery language, polysyllabic words, and long, winding sentences.
- try not to sound "deep" – instead, just make it completely clear exactly what you are trying to say.
- make no spelling and grammatical mistakes – use a spell checker and get a good style manual.

General Guidance. Here are two helpful guides on writing a philosophy paper. Please look them over.

- A Guide to Writing, by Michael Huemer:
<http://home.earthlink.net/~owl233/writing.htm>
- Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper, by James Pryor:
<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

These are designed more for longer philosophy papers, but they should still be of some use to you.

Cheating: You are encouraged to discuss your paper with others in the class; however, the paper you turn in must be your own work. Students turning in duplicate or near-duplicate papers will receive an F for the entire course and may be subject to expulsion from the university. I take cheating very seriously.

Do not quote much or at all in your papers. I want to hear the ideas *in your own words*. But if you must use the words of others, put them in quotation marks and cite the source. Otherwise, you are plagiarizing. Plagiarism will earn you an F for the whole course and possible expulsion from the university.

Late Paper Policy: Your score will go down two points for every day your paper is late. Late papers may be submitted to me by email at heathwood@colorado.edu. In any such email, ask me to reply back to you to confirm that I got your paper and could open the attachment. If you forget to attach the paper, your paper won't count as having been turned in. If the email system malfunctions and your message is never delivered, your paper won't count as having been turned in.

Extra Assistance: I am more than happy to provide assistance to you as you work on your paper. Feel free to come to office hours with questions or just to run a rough outline by me.