

24.02: Moral Problems and the Good Life
Prof. Sally Haslanger
November 26, 2006

THIRD PAPER TOPICS

Write a short (5-7 page) paper on ONE of the following topics. Be sure to follow the “Guidelines for Papers” that appears as page 2 of this assignment. Remember you are required to submit an electronic copy of your paper to your TA.

Papers are due Tuesday, 12/8 in recitation.

1. According to the US Census Bureau¹, in 2005, roughly 36,950,000 Americans (12.6%) lived in poverty; 33.5% of these were children. What, if anything, should a just society do to address the problem of poverty? Is the state morally required to provide its citizens what’s necessary for survival if they are unable to obtain these by other legal means? Given the differences in the accepted roles of mothers and fathers caring for infants and preschool children, should the state treat men and women differently in distributing poor relief? Explain in detail and defend your view (keeping in mind the utilitarian, libertarian and liberal egalitarian frameworks we’ve considered).
2. Is the death penalty ever morally justified? Critically evaluate the arguments for and against the legitimacy of the death penalty, developing the position you take to be the strongest.
3. It is generally agreed upon in the contemporary United States that punishment according to the principle “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” is unacceptable and barbaric. Are there good reasons, however, to reject this principle, or is our attitude towards it culturally biased and not rationally grounded? Explain and defend your view.
4. What is, to your mind, the strongest case, i.e., set of arguments, for the claim that homosexuality is immoral? Does it follow from this case that homosexuality, or homosexual marriage, should be illegal? (Why or why not?) Critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the case against homosexuality, indicating where you stand and why.

You may also write on a topic of your own design if it is approved in advance by your TA.

¹See <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/histpov/perindex.html>

GUIDELINES FOR PAPERS

1. All papers should be neatly typed, double-spaced, in an easily readable font. Be sure to include *your* name and *your TA's name* on your paper. For safety, keep copies of your papers. *Please number your pages.* Papers should be turned in at the time and date indicated on the syllabus and on the paper topics.
2. All papers should be within the length guidelines specified. If you have more to say than you can fit within the page limits, pare down your discussion: make sure you have stayed on topic, focus your discussion on the most important points for your argument. However, note that because this is a HASS-D course, you must submit a total of **20 pages** during the term.
3. Essay topics must be taken from the list distributed in class, and your paper should be on *one* topic only. Stick closely to the topic; *be sure you address the question asked.* All papers should be clearly organized around a *thesis*, and should provide *arguments* for it. On some occasions your TA *may* approve an alternative paper topic. If you are interested in writing on a topic of your own design, speak to your TA well in advance of the paper deadline.
4. If you wish to attribute a position to a philosopher we have discussed, be sure to check that the text supports your attribution. On controversial points you should cite textual evidence, e.g., by quotation, or by giving the line numbers of relevant texts in parentheses. It is *imperative* that you indicate when you are quoting or paraphrasing an author, and when you do you *must* cite references to the original text. Failure to do so counts as plagiarism and will be handled accordingly. However, points made in lecture or in class handouts are “common property” for students in this class and may be relied upon in your papers without citation. (More on plagiarism, see syllabus.)
5. Although quotes are helpful, please keep quotation to a minimum. The paper should be, by in large, *in your own words.*
6. You do not need to consult additional secondary sources. If you do, this *must* be acknowledged in the paper. If you quote or paraphrase a secondary source, this must be attributed to the author; if you relied on texts in your preparation which were not assigned in class, include reference to them in a bibliography at the end of the paper (even if you don't quote from them). (More on plagiarism, see syllabus.)
7. Papers are due at the date and time specified. After that time papers will be considered late and will be penalized one third of a grade per day, i.e., from a B+ to a B. If you foresee special difficulties with the deadline, speak to your TA well in advance.