

First Paper Topics

Write a 5-page (1250 word) argumentative essay on one of the following topics. Guidelines and tips for papers are available on the Stellar site. Please submit your papers on Stellar. Note that your paper must articulate a thesis in response to the topic and defend the thesis with argument(s). **At the top of the first page of your paper – above your title (if you have one) and your first paragraph – please state your thesis in bold.** This is the claim that you are arguing for in the rest of your paper. (You should also state the thesis in the body of your text.)

Papers will be judged by (i) demonstrated understanding of the assigned texts and lectures, (ii) clarity of ideas and strength of arguments, and (iii) contribution to the debate. Enjoy!

1. Banerjee and Duflo found that people who are very poor and hungry, if they come to have marginally more resources, do not always choose simply to increase the number of calories consumed; instead, they often choose tastier (but more expensive) foods. And people who do not have enough to eat often go even hungrier in order to save up for things like televisions and cell phones. This suggests that for many people, merely having enough to eat is not better than remaining somewhat hungry but having a life that includes other goods as well. It may be that a life worth living necessarily includes some amount of pleasure (from food or entertainment, for example) and hope for a better future (which a phone, serving as a bridge to information and economic possibilities, might also provide). This suggests that doing without tasty food, entertainment, etc is a very bad thing. Singer argues that if we can prevent something very bad from happening, without sacrificing anything morally significant, we ought to do it, and that therefore we should all be doing much more to relieve famine. Does his argument also entail, given how many people do not have access to cell phones, televisions, and tasty food, that we should all be making similar sacrifices to ensure that everyone has those things, in addition to nutrition and medical care sufficient for survival? Why or why not?

2. Norman Borlaug, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and biologist who led the advances in food science that enabled a massive increase in global food production, is credited with having saved a billion lives through his work. His career began in 1942, and he continued working until his death in 2009. If we amortize the billion lives saved across that time, he saved a little more than 28 lives per minute, every minute, for 67 years. (This figure is not ideal for our purposes, because it does not include deductions for any time off, even for sleep. The number of lives he saved for every *working* hour will be noticeably higher. But you get the idea.) If stopping to save a drowning child would take him 2 minutes, but he would have saved (well over) 56 lives by working during those two minutes instead, should Borlaug ignore the drowning child? Why or why not? What would Singer say? Why might someone think that even Norman Borlaug is doing something wrong if he ignores the child? What does this tell you about POND?

3. What is the “Singer Solution to World Poverty”? And why does Kuper think it is committed to “a dangerously individualist ‘practical ethics’”? Explain, in your own words, Kuper's criticism of the “Singer Solution” and the corresponding ‘individualist’ ethics. Is Kuper's criticism correct?

[Note that just saying that more and different things could also be done to prevent hunger is not sufficient to criticize Singer's view.] Explain why or why not.

4. Marilyn Frye claims, in her essay "Oppression," that:

The experience of oppressed people is that the living of one's life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction. It is the experience of being caged in: all avenues, in every direction, are blocked or booby trapped. (See handout for class 2/27 and for Frye's whole essay, see recommended readings.)

Drawing on Young's essay, critically evaluate her analogy: (i) What about oppression is supposed to be similar to a birdcage? (ii) What is this similarity supposed to reveal to us about oppression? (iii) How well does the analogy work? Are there ways in which the analogy is misleading or incorrect? Can you suggest a different characterization of oppression (either an analogy, or definition, or general description)?

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24.03 Good Food: The Ethics and Politics of Food Choices
Spring 2017

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