

Ethics 24.231 Paper Topics – Final Paper – **DUE December 9<sup>th</sup> by the BEGINNING of class.**

*Please write a 2000-2500 word paper in response to **one** of the following topics **OR** in response to any of the paper topics from earlier in the term **on which you have not yet written**. (Of course, if you choose to respond to an earlier topic, your paper should still be 2000-2500 words long.) As before, you may choose to answer only **some parts** of a question, but you must be clear about what parts you are addressing.*

1. Explain and evaluate Bernard Williams' argument on pages 239-241 of "The Idea of Equality" for the conclusion that medical care should be distributed on the basis of medical need. Do you think Williams' argument is sound? Does a parallel argument entail that haircuts should be distributed on the basis of haircutting need?
2. In "Famine, Affluence, and Morality", Peter Singer develops an argument for the conclusion that we ought to provide much, much more assistance than we do to needy strangers. His argument appeals to the following principle:

If it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of *comparable* moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it.

Carefully set out Singer's argument. Do you think the principle to which Singer appeals is true? If not, why not? In evaluating Singer's argument, you may want to consider whether a decision not to give to famine relief differs in morally significant ways from a decision not to save a child drowning in a pond, because doing so would ruin your shoes.

3. Under what conditions is a right action also morally worthy, in the sense that it reflects well on the moral character of the agent? Defend your view by appealing to examples, and be sure to consider and address possible counter-examples. Can your view be extended to explain how some wrong actions might nonetheless be partially morally worthy?
4. Susan Wolf argues that we should not strive to be "moral saints". In what respects does Wolf think the life of a moral saint is deficient? Discuss whether you think Wolf's view is persuasive or not, providing argumentative support for your position.
5. What is the principle of alternate possibilities? Relying only on the case of Jones<sup>4</sup> described by Harry Frankfurt on page 835 of "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility", clearly outline Frankfurt's objection to this principle. Give a clear statement of the revised version of the principle of alternate possibilities that Frankfurt accepts (on the bottom of page 838) and explain why, given this revised principle, Frankfurt thinks morally responsible conduct is possible in a deterministic world. Is he right?

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