

### Third (and final!) Paper Topics

Write a short (5-7 page) paper on ONE of the following topics; follow the "Guidelines for Papers" handed out in class and available on the course website. Be sure that your paper has a clear and comprehensible *thesis*; that it contains *arguments* for that thesis; and that it anticipates and responds to likely *criticisms*. Remember that part of your job is to be a good interpreter: in considering the readings we have covered, it is your responsibility to show the author's ideas in their strongest and most plausible form, while remaining true to the text.

#### **PAPERS ARE DUE IN SECTION: Thursday/Friday, December 6/7**

Papers turned in late without an extension will be penalized 1/3 of a grade per day. To receive an extension you must speak to your teaching assistant.

1. Incompatibilists (i.e., both hard determinists and libertarians) believe that free will is not compatible with determinism. Walter Stace, a compatibilist, disagrees. In defending compatibilism, Stace claims that,

...it cannot be the case that what distinguishes actions freely chosen from those which are not is that the latter are determined by causes while the former are not. Therefore, being uncaused or being undetermined by causes, must be an incorrect definition of freewill. (*RR*, p. 489)

Using some examples of your own (i.e., different from the ones Stace uses) explain the considerations Stace offers for thinking it is incorrect to define freewill in terms of being uncaused. What does Stace offer as the correct definition of freewill? Demonstrate how his view is supposed to avoid the conflict between freewill and determinism. Does it succeed--can you think of any cases it doesn't handle? Does his view handle your examples? Why or why not? What do you think is the correct definition of freewill? According to your definition, do we ever act freely?

2. Consider two students, Lucky and Ohno, who are eager to get home for the holidays. Both have been staying up late studying for exams for a whole week, and need sleep, but both decide to drive home as soon as possible after their last exam. Although they live in different towns, the trips they have to make are very similar: they start out on the interstate and then take back roads through several small towns to reach their destinations. Towards the end of their trips, each of them--simply out of the inattention that comes from exhaustion--runs a red light. Lucky doesn't even notice it and drives on. Ohno, however, hits and kills a pedestrian. How should we morally evaluate their actions? Has Ohno done something worse than Lucky? Is Ohno more blameworthy than Lucky? Explain and justify your answers.

3. Suppose you are visiting a culture very different from ours. In this culture, there is a widespread and firmly held belief that when any member of the group dies--where membership is determined by being a descendent of the original members--they must be buried in a particular holy ground, or great harm will come to the group as a whole. Suppose, however, that one of the members rejects this belief and requests in his will that he be cremated and his ashes be thrown into the ocean. The body is being held in the hospital where the man died until the issue is settled, and there is no law covering the situation. You are asked for advice about what, morally speaking, should be done. What do you advise? And more importantly, what considerations do you think should determine your answer, e.g., what the culture as a whole takes to be right? What the man wanted? What your culture deems appropriate? Or some objective moral standard, e.g., egoism, the "Greatest Happiness Principle", the categorical imperative, etc.? Explain and justify your response.

4. Every year there are draughts, wars, and natural disasters, that leave millions without adequate food, shelter, and

medical care. Peter Singer argues that most of us aren't fulfilling our duties to those desperately in need, for our actions fall short of the apparently plausible "Prevent Suffering Principle." Imagine that you win the lottery and receive \$10,000. Is it your moral duty to contribute some (or all?) of the money to assist those desperately in need? (Note that the question is not asking what you *would* do, but what you *ought* to do.) What would your moral obligation be if you received \$10,000,000, instead? In justifying your answer, state what principle or principles you think should govern what you do with the money. If you disagree with Singer, explain what's wrong with the argument (e.g., what's wrong with the "Prevent Suffering Principle"?); if you agree with Singer, defend his view against one possible objection.

5. In his essay on the virtues, Alasdair MacIntyre argues against a particular form of individualism. As he characterizes it, this individualism holds that an individual is only responsible for the particular actions he or she performs intentionally, or takes implicit or explicit responsibility for. On the individualistic view:

I may legally be a citizen of a certain country; but I cannot be held responsible for what my country does or has done unless I choose implicitly or explicitly to assume such responsibility." (p. 246)

MacIntyre maintains, however, that

What I am is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition. (p. 247)

Explain MacIntyre's "narrative view of the self" and the reasoning that leads to his conclusion that we are responsible for the traditions and practices in which our lives are embedded. Is his argument effective against the individualism he is aiming at? Why or why not?

Remember: you may write on a topic of your own design if it is submitted to your TA and approved *in advance*. For details, e.g., about how far in advance, consult your TA.