SECOND 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, 11/7 in lecture.

1. Critically evaluate the following position:
   Cultures disagree substantially in what they take to be morally permissible and morally required. Surely it would be problematically ethnocentric to assume that our culture is the one that gets morality right and any other that disagrees with us is misguided. Humility and toleration are important if we want to avoid global conflict. So the best account of right and wrong is moral relativism.
   In discussing this position, be sure you explain carefully how you understand the terms ‘ethnocentric,’ ‘toleration,’ and ‘moral relativism’.

2. 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 get news that a long lost uncle has died and has bequeathed you $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, explain what account of right action 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.

3. There are, roughly, two main sources of inequality in human societies: first, differences in social assets (e.g. the class, race, and, wealth of one's parents), and, second, differences in natural assets (e.g. one's physical and psychological health, talents and abilities). How would a democratic egalitarian and a libertarian, respectively, respond to each of these two types of inequality? (In particular, for each position, consider: Is a society which permits inequalities due to social assets unjust? Is a society which permits inequalities due to natural assets unjust? If so, are both types of inequality equally morally objectionable, or is one type more disturbing than another?) In developing your argument consider an inheritance tax that, after payment of funeral costs, allows inter-generational transfers worth no more than $10,000 to each surviving child (or split between any grandchildren of a deceased child) or, if there are no children, to a charity designated in the will of the deceased. What stand would each view take on such a tax, and why? Where do you stand?

4. Is equality itself something of value? Are there specifically egalitarian reasons for objecting to inequalities? Or is the problem with inequalities that they result in unhappiness, or inefficiency, or some other disvalue? In answering this question consider Scanlon’s suggestion that egalitarian objections to inequalities are comparative and unspecific (what does he mean by this?). Develop (at least) two examples in which it would appear that there are egalitarian reasons to object to an inequality and discuss (a) whether we should in fact object to the inequality, and (b) if the basis for the objection is genuinely egalitarian. (You may draw on Scanlon, Young, or others for examples.)

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