

Paper Assignment

General Guidelines

1. Your paper is **due on April 27**. Late papers will be penalized.
2. All papers must be typed or computer-printed, double spaced, **four to six pages** in a reasonable font (12 point Times, for example). This means approximately 1000 to 1500 words.
3. Do not right-justify your paper; I am absurdly, but strictly, opposed to this strange practice.
4. I expect you to observe basic rules of grammar and spelling. Proofread your paper. Asking a good writer to read and comment on your paper can be helpful. (See below.)
5. You may use quotes from the reading(s) in our book by merely noting the author and page number. For example: "He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that." (Mill, 419) **I strongly discourage you from using other sources**. If you do use another source, you must include a proper bibliographical reference, including author, title, and publishing information. You may quote your class notes. Cite them thus: "Blah blah blah." (Marcus, class notes, 2/3/04)
6. If you plagiarize, you fail. I am interested in what you have to say, but I do not expect you to generate 1500 words of original scholarship. Your main task here is to be clear about what others have said, and to present it in your own way. Sometimes, for brief passages, some one else will just say it better than you can. Quote it. Cite any ideas that are not your own. (E.g. "MacIntyre argues that..." "Mill asserts that...")

How to Write Your Paper

1. Pick a topic from the list below.
2. Introduce your paper by taking a position and briefly stating it. This is your thesis, the conclusion you will defend. Be specific. Your paper should be an extended argument supporting your thesis. (Often, it's easiest to write the introduction after you have finished writing the body of the paper.)
3. Argue for your thesis. Each paragraph should directly relate to your specific thesis.
4. Consider possible objections. Don't accept what the philosophers say if it doesn't make sense to you. Argue your own point of view, but through the writings of the philosophers.
5. Conclude your essay by summarizing exactly what you think you said in the paper. If you didn't say it well, at least I'll know what you were trying to say.
6. Above all, make sure to cover each point in the topic you choose.

Some Comments on Spelling and Grammar

1. Do not rely on spell-checking or grammar-checking programs, alone.
2. *Its* is a possessive pronoun, as in "The cat cleaned its paws." *It's* is a contraction meaning 'it is'. Normally, we use apostrophes to indicate possession, but not in this case.
3. *There* indicates location; *their* indicates possession; *they're* means 'they are'. (E.g. They're crying because Bobby left their milk out on the table over there.)
4. Use one space after a comma, and two spaces after a period. Use one after a semicolon; better yet, avoid semi-colons. Using semicolons is like tinkering with the insides of the TV. Don't do it unless you know what you're doing.
5. When quoting a source for more than five lines, indent the quotation, single-space it, and don't use quotation marks. Be sure to cite any quote, of course.
6. Spell out numbers less than and including one hundred, or, at least, ten.
7. *Then* indicates a conclusion or a change in time. *Than* indicates a comparison. If the Knicks have a better record than the Nets, then I will eat my hat.
8. Avoid biography. Mill's birthplace is unlikely to be relevant to your thesis.
9. Omit needless words. (See: Strunk and White. *Elements of Style*. §13. <http://www.bartleby.com/141/>)
10. *E.g.* means 'for example'. *I.e.* means 'that is'. If you want to use either of these, make sure you understand the difference.

Paper Topics

1. Consider that A) there is no morality; or B) there is one morality; or C) there are many moralities. Which of these is correct? Explain each of the positions, using examples. Provide arguments for the position you choose. What is the strongest criticism, in your opinion, against your position? Respond to this criticism.
2. Is utilitarianism the right moral theory? Explain the theory, and how it is used. Provide examples. Why should one accept this moral theory? What is the most severe problem with the theory? How can a utilitarian defend against this problem?
3. Is Kantian deontology the correct moral theory? Explain the theory, and how it is used. Provide examples. Why should one accept this moral theory? What is the most severe problem with the theory? How might a Kantian defend against this problem?
4. Is virtue ethics more appealing than the liberal theories of Mill and Kant? How does it differ? Connect MacIntyre's work with that of Aristotle. What makes a person virtuous? Provide examples. What is the strongest criticism of virtue ethics?
5. Is the rule of law justified? Compare and contrast Hobbes' account of the formation of society with Locke's account. Is there a social contract? How does Hume justify governmental rule? Who is right?
6. The following is a paraphrase of a tape-recorded conversation between serial murderer Ted Bundy and one of his victims.

“Then I learned that all moral judgments are ‘value judgments’, that all value judgments are subjective, and that none can be proved to be either ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. I even read somewhere that the Chief Justice of the United States had written that the American Constitution expressed nothing more than collective value judgments. Believe it or not, I figured out for myself - what apparently the Chief Justice couldn't figure out for himself - that if the rationality of one value judgment was zero, multiplying it by millions would not make it one whit more rational. Nor is there any ‘reason’ to obey the law for anyone, like myself, who has the boldness and daring - the strength of character to throw off its shackles.

“I discovered that to become truly free, truly unfettered, I had to become truly uninhibited. And I quickly discovered that the greatest obstacle to my freedom, the greatest block and limitation to it, consisted in the insupportable ‘value judgment’ that I was bound to respect the rights of others. I asked myself, who were these ‘others’? Other human beings, with human rights? ... Surely, you would not, in this age of scientific enlightenment, declare that God or nature has marked some pleasures as ‘moral’ or good’ and others as ‘immoral’ or ‘bad’. In any case, let me assure you, my dear young lady, that there is absolutely no comparison between the pleasure I might take in eating ham, and the pleasure I anticipate in raping and murdering you. That is the honest conclusion to which my education has led me - after the most conscientious examination of my spontaneous and uninhibited self.”

Analyze, and criticize or defend Bundy's statement. There are many ways to approach this essay. You might discuss the plausibility of moral relativism or nihilism. You might apply one or more moral theory to defend or criticize Bundy's statement. You might discuss the rule of law and its justification. Use material we have studied so far this term. A good essay will argue for or against a position, using defended reasons; a poor essay will merely assert.

Any other topics must be cleared with me *in advance*.