

WRITING ASSIGNMENT**PHILOSOPHY 162**

WINTER, 2008

INSTRUCTOR: RICHARD ARNESON

This assignment is due in class on Monday, March 3. Late papers will be subject to grade penalty.

Write an essay of about five to seven pages on one of the following topics. Please indicate which topic you have selected on the title page of your essay. Your essays will be evaluated according to the cogency of your arguments, the soundness of the understanding of course materials that you display, and the clarity of your pose.

1. In his essay “Outsiders,” Peter Singer takes up the question, what sorts of partiality (favoring the members of one’s own group over others), if any, might be morally defensible, and if so, on what grounds. Thomas Hurka takes up this question in his essay, “The Justification of National Partiality.” Write an essay that addresses this question. Your essay should include a consideration of relevant arguments advanced by Singer, Hurka, and (at your discretion) any other course authors that advance arguments that bear on your arguments and conclusions.
2. “Ordinary moral thinking about aid to needy strangers discriminates in favor of the political closeness of compatriots and the literal closeness of people in peril who are close at hand,” writes Richard Miller. Peter Singer disputes ordinary moral thinking on both of these points. When the issue is (a) whether we morally ought to provide assistance to others or (b) whether it is morally permissible to cause harm to others, do we owe more to fellow countrymen than to outsiders and more to those close at hand who are vulnerable than to distant vulnerable persons? Why or why not? Your essay should consider relevant arguments by R. Miller, T. Pogge, and P. Singer.
3. In “Assisting’ the Global Poor,” Thomas Pogge argues that even if there is no duty of charity to help distant needy strangers as such, members of affluent societies in the contemporary world are still bound by strict obligations to the global poor. His rationale for this claim is that “we are imposing a global order whose unfairness benefits us while exacerbating severe poverty abroad.” Objection: If we don’t in the absence of interaction owe any aid to people in distress, merely engaging in voluntary mutually beneficial trade does not by itself trigger additional duties to improve the condition of people in distress. State Pogge’s main arguments for his claims and defend or attack his position.
4. Consider this position: “Each human person has a moral right to belong to some national community that is self-determining. One aspect of the right of a national community to self-determination is its right to control entry onto its territory—to decide who shall be allowed to become a member and who shall be allowed to visit on what terms.” Is the quoted position coherent and defensible? Why or why not? Your answer should include consideration of arguments by Michael Walzer in his essay on “Membership” and by Mathias Risse and Michael Blake in their essay on free movement and immigration.
5. Liam Murphy urges that morality requires us only to do our fair share to improve the world, not more. What according to Murphy is our fair share? Peter Singer opposes Murphy’s position from one side, Richard Miller from another. Defend either Murphy’s position against some significant criticisms or one or more of the critics against Murphy’s position.

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In writing your essay you must comply with University rules and policies and moral norms forbidding cheating and plagiarism.