

## POSSIBLE PAPER TOPICS

The final paper must be 8-10 pages (2200-3000 words), double-spaced, reasonable margins.

You must come up with a paper topic of your own. **A 1-2 page (250-500 word) paper “prospectus,” with a bibliography of the readings you intend to use, is due Thursday April 12.** The prospectus should (a) state very clearly the issue you plan to examine in your paper; (b) some of the sub-topics or sub-questions under your topic as you envision them at this point; (c) and how you see particular readings as contributing to your paper. The point of the prospectus is to help you to formulate and clarify your ideas as a stage on the way to producing the final version of the paper—and also for me to give you feedback on your topic. You are encouraged to communicate with me before the prospectus due date, but this is not required.

The paper itself is due **Monday, May 14** (during exam week).

The requirements of the topic are that it be:

- (1) philosophical, or at least have a strong philosophical dimension even if parts of it are empirical.
- (2) involve research, that is, at least one scholarly source—an articles or book chapters, or a book—*other than* what is assigned in the course.
- (3) I strongly prefer that your paper make use of one reading from the course, partly as a way to keep it grounded in the issues of the course. (However, this is not strictly necessary and you may try to convince me that you want to write on a topic for which all the reading is outside the course).
- (4) Your paper cannot substantially overlap with any of your answers on the take-home exams. The safest way to ensure this result is to pick a different topic than one you write on for the exam. Since you will have to choose your topic before you see the final exam, your topic may result in your having fewer options to choose from. However, you will still have more than one option on that exam, no matter what your paper topic. Also, you may choose to write on a similar topic to an exam one, as long as the paper ends up being substantially different from your answer on the exam. (If you write on a topic from the first exam that you answered, you must turn in your exam with the paper so I can check whether this non-overlap condition has been satisfied.)

Here are some **suggested topics or topic areas**. But you can come up with a topic of your own, as long as it is substantially related to the issues of the course. The course is divided up into different topic segments, and most of the segments could be easily turned into paper topics. For example:

1. There is a fairly extensive philosophical (and sometimes psychological or evolutionary) literature on both psychological and ethical egoism. Either would make a fine topic.
2. Evolution and altruism is a fascinating and huge area, if you have some background in it from the course. One possible topic that does *not* require much understanding of the science itself is the one that Kitcher and Singer’s articles take De Waal up on, and that is how to think about the findings about animals in relation to morality itself. That

is, accepting that there is some sort of non-egoistic behavior on the part of the animals, how is this related to morality? The other essays in Primates and Philosophers, especially the one by Korsgaard, would be good further sources for this sort of topic.

3. Love as an ethical emotion. Compare Freud's view of love with Kierkegaard's, or more generally Christian views of love. This could be combined with a discussion of the relative merits of universal vs. particularistic forms of love, an issue we will deal with later in the course, but one that Freud deals with.

4. Both Anna Freud and Spelman open up questions about the complex interplay of self and other in thinking about altruism. The unconscious dimension of this (seen more in AF than Spelman) is a particularly interesting issue, one that is an implicit part of many discussions of psychological egoism. That is PE-ists often assume or argue that even if we think we are acting altruistically, we are really acting egoistically, unconsciously perhaps. It's a great area to dig into. A very good secondary source for this is Max Scheler's *The Nature of Sympathy*. (I can show you or point you to particularly relevant sections.)

5. Later in the course we will deal with Christian and other non-Jewish rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust. This area has recently been pretty thoroughly studied; there are some very interesting books about it. None of them are by philosophers, but some are by political theorists, and they look at the motivations of these rescuers. You could look at whether these motivations count as altruistic, and also whether there are interestingly or importantly different kinds of altruism at play. For example, some of this literature (and the film we will see on this topic) deals with religious and non-religious motives for rescue. That is an interesting and important subject and you could draw on the film "Weapons of the Spirit" as one resource.

6. Following on the suggestion at the end of #5, you could write on religious vs. non-religious forms or motivations of altruism, love, compassion, etc. How do they differ? Do they really differ in a significant way?

7. We deal briefly with some social psychological findings about altruism (in the reading by Doris). There is a lot of work done in this area. You would have to pull the philosophy out of it (as Doris does) but you could do it.

8. The nature of empathy. Using Shaun Nichols and pieces of other readings, you could supplement this with a fairly large literature on this topic. There is also an interesting literature on the development of empathy in children, touched on in Nichols.

Again, these are just suggestions to get your mind working. There are many possible