Paper #2: Topics and Guidelines

1. **Assignment:** Write an essay of 1200-1800 words (~4-6 pages), on some philosophical topic from unit two.

2. **Due Date:** Due Monday, 4/24, at the beginning of class. By that time, please turn in a paper copy in class AND upload a digital copy to Blackboard (click on PHIL 215 → Assignments → Paper #2 → Scroll down to Attach File, and click Browse My Computer).

3. **Late Penalty:** Late papers will be penalized. Turn it in by 11:59pm, 4/24, and receive –10 points (out of 100). Receive –2 points for each additional 24 hour period after that.

4. **Suggested Topics:** In your paper, you will argue for or against some philosophical view presented in unit two. Below are some suggestions.

   Note: You may select your own paper topic based on the material from unit 2, but you must first get instructor approval for any topic NOT listed below.

   1) **Legitimacy of the State:** You will argue either that the government does have a legitimate authority to rule over its people based on some form of consent of the governed (e.g., explicit, implicit, hypothetical), or that it does not.

   2) **Distributive Justice:** You will argue either for or against re-distributive taxation (i.e., the government taking from the well-off in order to improve the lives of the worst off). You may do this in one of two ways:

      a) Discuss this issue in the context of distributive justice. You will write a paper that argues either for or against Rawls’s view of distributive justice, or one that argues either for or against Nozick’s view of distributive justice.

      b) Discuss this issue in the context of a paper that argues for your preferred understanding of the term 'liberty' (e.g., positive, negative, or some combo).

   3) **Parent Licensing:** You will argue either that the government ought to require potential parents to obtain licenses before procreating, or that it should not.

5. **How to Begin:** First, decide which of the above topics you want to discuss. Then decide what stance you will take regarding that issue. Did any particular topic or reading excite you? Do you feel passionate about any of these issues? Write about that.

6. **Structure:** Once you have decided your topic, you will write a paper where you introduce a view or argument, explain it, motivate it (i.e., make it sound plausible to the reader that it might be a sound argument), and then raise two objections against it. You will evaluate the objections by explaining why they are unsuccessful, or successful. Then add a concluding remark, explaining what conclusion the reader should draw from your discussion. You may want to use the following structure for your paper:
1) Arguing in favor of some moral view:
(a) Write a brief introduction explaining what you are about to do.
(b) Briefly describe the view or argument that you are going to defend.
(c) Raise one major objection against this view. Be sure to pick one that is challenging; i.e., do not pick the least plausible, most easily refutable one.
(d) Respond to the objection; that is, explain why you think that the objection fails to successfully refute the view you are defending.
(e) Raise a second major objection against the view (again, a plausible one).
(f) Respond to this second objection.
(g) Write a brief conclusion summarizing what you have just done; i.e., state that the view you have just defended against objections is the correct view.

2) Arguing against some moral view:
(a) Write a brief introduction explaining what you are about to do.
(b) Briefly describe the view or argument that you are going to refute.
(c) Raise one major objection against this view.
(d) State one possible response to this objection on your opponent's behalf. Be sure to pick a response that is challenging; i.e., do not pick the least plausible, most easily refutable possible response.
(e) Reply to this response; that is, explain why you think that this response fails to successfully deal with your objection.
(f) Raise a second major objection to the view.
(g) State a plausible response to this second objection, and evaluate it.
(h) Write a brief conclusion summarizing what you have just done; i.e., state that the view you have just objected to is false.

For more tips, check out these guides by Michael Huemer (sections A & B only) and W&M professor Aaron Griffith.

7. Grading Rubric: Primarily, I will be looking for two things when I assign grades:

(1) Clarity: Do you explain yourself in a way that is clear, concise, persuasive, and well-organized? (Imagine that you are writing for someone who has never taken a philosophy course. Your writing should be clear enough so that they would easily understand you, and possibly be persuaded by you.)

(2) Critical Reasoning: Does your treatment of the view demonstrate your ability to think critically? (It should be apparent that you have thought about the view and the objections carefully, that you understand their implications, and that you have put some thought into your response.)

8. Academic Dishonesty: As per the syllabus, any student caught cheating or plagiarizing will automatically receive an F for the course.

Plagiarism is defined as any case of presenting someone else's work as your own (e.g., by copying an internet source, another student's work or ideas, or any other source at all without citation). So, be sure to cite any and all ideas that are not your own.

Note: I will not require you to cite ideas gained from the assigned readings and/or my lectures. However, do not simply turn in a copy or a re- wording of the readings or my notes. That is still plagiarism.