

## Paper #1: Topics and Guidelines

**1. Assignment:** Write an essay of 700-1000 words (~3 pages), which engages with the readings and ideas from unit one.

**2. Due Date:** Due Friday, 3/8, by the beginning of class. By that time, please upload your paper to Blackboard (click on *PHIL 308* → *Written Assignments* → *Paper #1* → Scroll down to *Attach File*, and click *Browse My Computer*).

**3. Late Penalty:** Late papers will be penalized –10 points (out of 100) for the first day, and –2 points for each additional 24 hour period after that. For instance, turn it in by 11:59pm on 3/8, receive –10 points; turn it in on 3/9, receive –12 points; and so on.

**4. Suggested Topics:** Please choose one of the following prompts.

Note: You may design your own paper topic based on the material from Unit One, but **you must first get instructor approval for any topic NOT listed below.**

- 1) **Utilitarianism:** You will argue either that utilitarianism is the *correct* moral view, or that it *is not*.
- 2) **The Ethical Treatment of Animals:** You will present a stance on the ethical treatment of animals, and argue either *for* or *against* it. Your focus should be on one of the following issues:
  - (a) **Factory Farming:** Argue either that purchasing factory-farmed meat is morally *wrong*, or that it *is not*.
  - (b) **Animal Death:** Argue either that animal death *is* morally significant, or that it *is not*. (Your focus should be on happy animals killed quickly and painlessly.)
  - (c) **Speciesism:** Present the concept of 'speciesism', and argue either that speciesism is *true / morally justified*, or that it *is not*.
- 3) **Faking Nature:** You will argue either that something of moral value *is lost* in the process of ecological destruction and perfect restoration, or that it *is not*.
- 4) **Zoos:** You will argue either that keeping animals in zoos is morally *permissible*, or that it *is 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.

Next, **you must read** [The Pink Guide to Taking Philosophy Classes](#), by Professor Helena de Bres (see the two tabs on writing; for a pdf version, go [here](#) and view pgs. 11-17). Also check out Jeffrey Kaplan's video tutorial, [Guide for Writing a Philosophy Paper](#).

**6. Structure:** After completing the preliminaries, you will write a paper where you (i) **introduce** and explain some philosophical thesis, argument, or problem. As you explain it, be sure to **motivate** it; i.e., make it sound plausible to the reader that it might be a sound argument, or that the problem is a legitimate and troubling problem, etc., *even if* you ultimately plan to refute it. Then, (ii) **critically grapple** with what you've presented by way of, e.g., raising an objection to the argument you've presented, or a problem for the view you've presented, or a potential solution to the problem you've presented, etc. You should always choose what you perceive to be the *strongest* response(s) to the view you are discussing. (iii) You will then **evaluate** the objection, or solution, by explaining why it is either successful or unsuccessful. Then, (iv) add a concluding remark, stating what **conclusion** the reader should draw from your discussion.

For instance, if you were writing on topic #2, you *may* want to use something like the following structure. (*Note: this is merely an example; the structure is ultimately up to you*)

### Sample Structure for #2c: In Defense of Moderate Speciesism

- (a) Write a brief **introduction** explaining what you are about to do. Be sure that your paper has a clear **thesis**. That is, make it clear that you are trying to **persuade** the reader to agree with you about something.

(In this example, I'll convey to the reader that I'll be defending Cohen's view against Singer's accusation that speciesism is morally unjustified). [*Roughly 1-2 sentences*]

- (b) **Present the view** that you are defending or refuting, or the problem that you are trying to solve.

(In this example, I'll explain what Cohen's view *is*; i.e., I'll detail *what* his position is, and *why* he endorses it. To this effect, I'll explain what a right is, according to Cohen, and then present his proposal that only members of species who are generally capable of exercising moral claims have rights. Along the way, I'll be sure to explain why Cohen believes that it is morally preferable to focus on species-membership rather than individual abilities—namely, because the latter entails that infants lack rights.) [*Roughly 1 page*]

- (c) Provide the details of your favorite **objection** to the view that you have presented, or **solution** to the problem you have presented.

(Here, I'll present Singer's 'speciesism' objection. Along the way, I'll be sure to explain what speciesism *is*, and *why* Cohen's view is clearly a version of speciesism. I'll also be careful to explain why Singer believes that speciesism is morally unjustified, and akin to sexism or racism.) [*Roughly 1 page*]

- (c) **Critically assess** the objection or solution. Do you agree with it? Why or why not?

(I'll be assessing Singer's accusation. I'll argue that he *has not* successfully refuted Cohen, being careful to provide my reasons for *why* I disagree with him. To achieve this goal, I'll present a case or two in the style of those given by Elizabeth Anderson, and argue that such cases support the conclusion that—unlike instances of racism and sexism—there *is* a morally relevant difference between humans and other species.) [*Roughly 1 page*]

- (e) Write a brief **conclusion** summarizing what you have just done.

(I'll convey to the reader that I have just demonstrated that (at least some moderate form of) speciesism is correct.) [*Roughly 1-2 sentences*]

**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 (a) easily **understand** you, (b) would **learn** something new about a philosophical problem and the ideas of a historical figure, and (c) maybe even 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.

For a more detailed rubric of what I look for when grading, consult the list of do's and don't's on pages 14-17 of *The Pink Guide to Taking Philosophy Classes* ([here](#)). You may also find it helpful to review Questions #10 and #12 of [my FAQ](#). There, I detail some of the most common mistakes that students make in their papers, as well as some suggestions for how to improve on written assignments.

**8. Academic Integrity:** As per the syllabus, any student caught cheating or plagiarizing will immediately be issued an F for the course and a report to [the honor council](#).

Plagiarism is defined as any instance of presenting someone else's work or ideas 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: Even with citation, turning in an exact copy or a slight re-wording of someone else's work is still plagiarism. Do not turn in a copy or a slightly re-worded version of the readings or my lecture notes. The purpose of this assignment is for me to be able to assess \*your\* ability to communicate clearly and persuasively, and \*your\* understanding of the material. So, your work needs to be put into your own words.*

In addition, it should go without saying that the use of Chat-GPT or any other A.I. to generate content for this paper constitutes plagiarism and is not permitted.