

Philosophy as Conversation
Fall 08
Final Exam

Instructions: You may use any resources at your disposal--books, notes, etc.--to answer these questions, but the answers should, of course, be your own. You will be graded on both the quality of the writing and the content of the essay. What you say matters most, but how you say it also matters. Be as clear and precise as possible. I'm looking for demonstrable evidence that you've thought seriously and critically about the issues raised. The easiest way to accomplish this is to actually think seriously and critically about the issues raised. There is no required length. Each essay should be as long as it needs to be to thoroughly answer the question(s).

The final is due no later than 5:00 pm on Wed., Dec. 10. You can submit it online through the D2L dropbox, or you can email it to me (hedden@etsu.edu), or you can put a hard copy in my mailbox in the philosophy department. It will make my life easier if you do not submit the final as a .docx file. Early submissions are fine. Late submissions are not. Good luck, etc...

You must answer three of the first four questions (and only three of the first four questions). Everyone must answer the final question (#5). That means you should have a total of four essays--three of the first four and the last one.

1. Both Wedgewood and Singer appeal to a principle of equality, and such a principle has been an important part of our discussions on same-sex marriage, animal rights and capital punishment. Yet when we discussed welfare programs, the implicit assumption was that we were only discussing programs that distributed wealth to Americans. That is, some Americans are taxed to provide programs for other Americans, or at least people currently living in America. Is it consistent with a principle of equality to exclude the rest of the world from our welfare system? Is being born in a particular country a good reason to be included or excluded from certain benefits or burdens? Is where you are born less arbitrary than your race or gender? etc...To answer the question, you'll need to articulate and argue for some principle of equality, and then explain why such a principle does or does not imply that if redistribution is justified, it's justified on a global scale and not just a national one.

2. Throughout the course, largely by professorial fiat, we have left religious arguments out of our discussions. Are there any issues that we've discussed this semester that you think are better answered/more easily resolved/helpfully clarified by invoking religious arguments? If so, give an example and explain why your preferred religious argument is better than any of the secular arguments we've looked at. What advantages are there to bringing in religious arguments? Are there disadvantages? If you think we rightfully left out religious arguments, explain why they are unhelpful or unnecessary for answering the questions raised in the course.

3. Consider Libby and Connie's attitudes towards abortion and eating meat, then write an essay addressing the questions below.

Libby believes that abortion on demand is morally permissible. She is also a vegetarian who abhors the pain and suffering inflicted on animals in factory farms.

Connie thinks it is morally wrong for a woman to have an abortion even if she discovers through genetic testing that the child will have serious mental disabilities. She is also an unapologetic meat eater.

Are Libby's beliefs consistent? Are Connie's beliefs consistent? Why might it appear that each holds an inconsistent set of beliefs? What are the best responses Libby and Connie might give to convince us that they are in fact being consistent? Are these responses convincing? Why or why not?

4. If you are a Tennessee resident, you pay significantly less for your education than an out-of-state student does. This is because your education is subsidized by the state at taxpayers' expense. And while the subsidy makes it easier for some to afford college who otherwise couldn't, it also reduces rates for students who could easily afford to pay more.

Is this a form of welfare? Can you defend this policy? Is it fair to those who are coerced into subsidizing your education? Are students who can afford the real (unsubsidized) cost of education taking advantage of the system? How does your answer here relate to your views on more traditional forms of welfare? Are your views consistent? Explain...

5. We began the semester by asking whether there is such a thing as progress in philosophy. Now that the semester is over, do you feel you've made any philosophical progress? If so, what is that progress? Explain what you mean by 'progress' and give a particular case in which you've made progress. If you feel like you haven't made progress, explain what you think progress is and why you think you haven't made any.