

Envir/Phil 416: Ethics and Climate Change – Paper Assignment

Topic Statement Due **November 2nd** – 5% of Final Grade

First Version Due **November 14th** – 20% of Final Grade

Final Version Due **December 3rd** – 20% of Final Grade

Each student will write a paper of either at least 2,000 words (≈6.5 pages) or at least 3,200 words (≈10 pages) if s/he wants writing credit for this course. This paper should focus on a single argument or issue and develop that material. Its main aim should be to push forward the debate in the area it considers. In doing so, it should contain only limited exegesis and consider 1-2 serious objections to its main line of argument. This paper should be a highly polished piece, reflecting a strong understanding of the relevant material, of the sort that is appropriate for the culmination of a 400-level class.

Suggested Topic: Are individuals morally responsible for their climate-affecting behaviors?

*You encouraged to write your paper on the above topic, which may be explored in many different ways (see below). If you would like to write on a different topic you must get approval from the instructor either in person (i.e., during office hours or an appointment) or via email by **October 31st**.*

We will explicitly address this question in class Days 8-12, reading about many different perspectives on whether or to what extent individuals are morally responsible for their climate-affecting behaviors. While you likely will not be able to address *all* of the authors that we'll read in your paper, you may either focus on one author or discuss several different authors in your paper. You could, for example, offer an in-depth discussion of a particular argument. Alternatively, you could compare and contrast two different views in your paper, offering a take on which argument is stronger and why or on what the strengths and weaknesses are of each of the views you examine. I will try to point out more specific possible paper topics in class over the next few weeks.

One way to make this assignment more personal (and possibly more relevant to you) would be to use an example from your own life to drive your discussion. You could either discuss something that you already do (e.g., taking the bus to school rather than driving or eating meat) or you could discuss the action you are taking for the personal action project. If you choose this option, you could focus your paper around the question: Am I morally responsible for engaging in this activity/behavior? Do I have a moral obligation to continue (or to cease) engaging in this activity/behavior? Why or why not? Service-learning students are especially encouraged, though not required, to incorporate a discussion of their service-learning work into their paper.

Topic Statement: You must submit a topic statement, including an underlined thesis statement, which clearly articulates the specific topic you will address in your paper. The purpose of this exercise is to enable me to make sure you're tackling a topic of appropriate scope and content.

Paper Evaluation Parameters: (Note that both versions of your paper will be evaluated on the same parameters, with the expectation that you will receive a higher grade on the final version. A rubric that reflects these parameters will be uploaded into Canvas soon.)

Exposition: You should discuss at least one of the required readings for this course in your paper. You are welcome draw on additional sources, though this is not required. All of your sources

should be clearly cited (though you can use whatever format – footnotes, MLA, etc. – you prefer). Your exposition should clearly and accurately report on the relevant ideas/arguments in the paper(s) that you discuss. Your paper should not contain any extraneous exegesis that does not directly contribute to the development of your main line of argument. You should focus on trying to explain the ideas/arguments you draw on in your own words. Use quotations sparingly and only when there is no appropriate substitute for the author's words.

Argument(s): Your paper should contain one main line of argument in which you weigh in on a philosophical (ideally ethical) topic in an interesting way. You should clearly summarize your argument in a *thesis statement* somewhere on the first page of your paper (usually in the first paragraph). Every paragraph of your paper should somehow contribute to the development of your main line of argument. Your argument may weigh in on a debate between two authors (e.g., between Nolt and one of the authors who replied to his paper), may extend another author's line of argument (e.g., identify and explain the significance of an implication of Hourdequin's argument), may refute or offer a key objection to an author's argument (e.g., reject Sinnott-Armstrong's conclusion), or otherwise offer a novel discussion of one of the topics we cover in class. You should aim to make a substantive and novel contribution in your paper. Try to avoid superficial or inappropriate lines of argument (e.g., making an inconsequential addition to an author's argument or criticizing an author as a person rather than their work).

It is often helpful to consider (i.e., present and then respond to) one or two objections to your main line of argument as a way of further developing your main argument. Such objections should address the most significant challenges to your position. Posing and then responding to superficial objections (e.g., irrelevant or inconsequential objections) will detract from your paper. Addressing too many objections superficially (rather than in depth) will also detract from your paper. Try to focus your discussion of objections in a way that will help further convince your readers of your primary thesis.

Writing: Your paper should be clearly and thoughtfully written. Expressing philosophical ideas requires excelling in all of the following areas: The first is simply **mechanics**. Philosophical thoughts are often complex and subtle. Clearly presenting such thoughts requires skillfully managing the grammaticality of sentences. The second is **diction**. Word choice is very important to expressing philosophical thought. It is also important that terminology is clearly defined so that it is clear how words are supposed to be interpreted. The third is **clarity**. Philosophical writing demands clarity. Your readers must be able to fully understand what you are saying on their own; what matters is not what you *meant* to say but what you actually write. Clear philosophical writing enables readers to quickly understand the content of all claims. There are many ways to write clearly, yet this is a surprisingly difficult task. Finally, good philosophical prose is **subtle and well developed**. While this feature is hard to qualify, prose that lacks this feature is "thin" and "sketchy." Your writing should not merely gesture towards an idea but should fully and clearly articulate each of your ideas. "Thin" prose may contain good ideas, but it is often hard to tell exactly what these are because they are not adequately developed.

Please keep in mind that it takes time to develop philosophical ideas. I suggest you start working on your paper as soon as you can. A good way to start would be to get ahead on the reading so that you can decide what you want to write on. Please also ask for help if you need or want it!