

## Last Essay Topics

Write a six or seven page essay on one of the following topics. The questions I pose are intended to fix a topic: you may alter them somewhat if you think the same topic might be approached in a somewhat different way. It is also legitimate to compose a question of your own, but you should run it by me first at mthompso@pitt.edu . The papers will be due in my mailbox in the Philosophy Department (Cathedral of Learning 1001) by 3 pm on the Friday of exam week, or they should respond to this email message. If you have difficulty meeting this deadline, I can probably extend until say Monday morning; requests for an extension should probably best be sent as text messages to 412 445 7433

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0. Outline a principal claim of one of the papers on our reading list since Thomson's "Self-Defense". Attack the claim, taking account of the author's own attempts to defend it.
  1. Describe how Judith Thomson distinguishes 'Yes cases' from 'No cases' in her essay "Self-Defense". What is the principle she thinks is at the bottom of the distinction? Criticize this theory.
  2. How does Michael Otsuka's position in "Killing the Innocent in Self-defense" differ from Judith Thomson's position? Who has the stronger argument?
  3. Ordinary moral judgment suggests that it is wrong to kill one person to save several others. In "Utilitarianism and the Virtues", Foot suggests that the difficulty we feel about this is that *it can't be right to prefer the worse to the better.* Why is this difficulty an illusion, on her view. Appraise her position.
  4. Expound enough of Foot's "Utilitarianism and the Virtues" to explain Scheffler's objection to it. Defend one or the other writer.
  5. What is Foot arguing about *pride* in the first part of "Moral Beliefs"? How does she use a parallel claim to argue against a completely non-cognitivist account of moral appraisal? Is her argument convincing?
  6. Philippa Foot, in "Moral Beliefs," begins her concluding paragraphs with the words:

We will be asked how, on our theory, justice can be a virtue and injustice a vice since it will surely be difficult to show that any man whatsoever must need to be just as he needs the use of his hands and eyes, or needs prudence courage and temperance?

Before answering this question I shall argue that if it cannot be answered, then justice can no longer be recommended as a virtue.

Does the constraint in the second line here seem right? Expound and criticize Foot's thinking in this passage.

7. Reversing her opinion, Foot argues in "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives" (1972) that philosophers should not bother trying to show that *Immoral people are necessarily irrational*, or that *People with immoral desires, passions and inclinations must all nevertheless have reason to be moral*, or, in the fancy language of Kantian philosophers, that *Moral requirements are "categorical imperatives."*

All such attempts, she thinks, are fraudulent. It is enough, she thinks, if philosophers can show that "moral people" are rational or can be rational.

How do these philosophical aims differ? Her thought may also be expressed by saying: we are not conscripts in the army of duty, but volunteers (as she puts it elsewhere, echoing the last paragraph here). – Just as the citizens of Leningrad were volunteers in the defense of their city against the Nazis during "the terrible years of the siege" (315). Is she right? Are we volunteers in the army of duty? Foot says "This conclusion may, as I said, appear dangerous and subversive of morality" (315). Is it?