

Essay Questions for Final Exam

Exam: April 16, 2018; 7-9:30pm; Buchanan A 101

There will be two parts to the exam:

- (1) Short answer questions: There will be a list of these, and you'll choose questions out of that list to write on. There could be short answer questions from any part of the course (not just the second half). You'll need to discuss in a few sentences the meaning of a term, a phrase, or a quote from one of the texts (you'll need to identify the author as well), and how it relates to one of the author's main points in his/her text. I'm designing this section to take about 45 minutes.
- (2) Essay questions: **Three** essay questions out of the list below will appear on the exam, and you will need to **choose two** on which to write. Each essay should take you about 45 minutes to write.

You cannot bring any books or notes to the exam, and no cell phones or other devices that can connect to wifi will be allowed to be visible to you during the exam

Hints on preparing the essays, and categories on which they'll be marked

Try to prepare your answers for these essays as if you were preparing to write a paper. By that I mean that you should come up with a thesis statement, a conclusion you're trying to support in the essay. Give that at the beginning of the essay, and use the rest of the essay to support that thesis statement. You don't need to have a long introduction (in fact, you could just start with your thesis statement), and you don't need to have a concluding paragraph to these essays at all.

These essays will be marked roughly on the same categories as the out-of-class essays you've done: strength of argument, insight, organization, style & mechanics. The main difference is that the last two won't count as much, because under time pressure it's hard to make sure your essays are organized well and have few grammar or other mistakes (you can't go back and easily move things around, for example!). Still, you should aim to make your essay as clearly organized as possible; if I have to go hunting around the essay for your main points and how they fit together, it's harder for me to grasp your arguments and therefore you may not get as high a mark as if the essay were more clearly organized. As for spelling, grammar, punctuation mistakes, these don't count at all except if they are so prevalent as to make your essay difficult to understand.

Be sure, for all of the essay topics, to discuss the philosophers' views in enough depth to support the claims you make about them and any criticisms you give. You do not need to give a summary of all parts of the texts, but only those relevant to the argument you are making. Consider that I can only recognize how much you understand of the works by what you write, so explaining what terms and concepts mean as much as you have space to do, and insofar as this is relevant to your argument, shows better what you have grasped from the course (and can thus earn more marks than not doing so). To help you think along these lines, **imagine that you are writing your essays for someone who is not in the class, who has not read the texts or attended lecture.** Give as much explanation as would be needed to make the philosophers' views and your claims about them clear to that person.

Breadth vs. depth: Just as on the out-of-class essays, it is best to provide more depth and specifics on the philosophers' views (and your own arguments) than it is to discuss many points superficially and vaguely. You do not need to memorize quotes from the texts, but do consider the views from the philosophers carefully enough to be able to point to specific

arguments in support of what you say in the essays, rather than only talking about the very basic overall aspects of their views.

Focus on the texts assigned in the course: There are texts by the philosophers in the essay questions below that we have not read in the course; focus your answers on the texts we did read (as the final exam is focused on what we have done in the course itself).

On the “insight” marking category for the final exam: The point of these questions is not just to see what you know of the views (though that is part of it), but also to give you a chance to think about them more deeply and try to come up with your own ideas about their connections, their differences, the implications of the views. Some of the questions ask you to give your own views directly, but even when they don’t you can show that you’ve thought about the texts carefully by what sorts of similarities/differences you bring out. If you can, try not to just stick with the most obvious similarities/differences, or the first things that come to mind; spend some time with the texts and your notes and see if you can find deeper things to discuss.

Essay topics

Three of these will appear on the exam; you’ll choose **two** to write on

1. Peter Singer’s arguments about world poverty are, he claims, based on utilitarianism. Discuss how Singer’s arguments about this issue could be said to be utilitarian, based on what we’ve read by Mill (be sure to refer to Mill’s own arguments in this discussion, insofar as they are relevant to what you’re saying). Do you think a utilitarian who agrees with Mill’s arguments would necessarily reach the same conclusions Singer does on what we should do for those in need? Why or why not? (This is a genuine question; I’m not looking for one particular answer here.)
2. Explain similarities and differences between what O’Neill claims would be Kantian approaches to poverty, and Nussbaum’s capabilities approach. Be sure to provide enough details about each view to support your claims. Given what we’ve discussed about Kant, is there anything else that a Kantian might say about helping people in various parts of the world, beyond what O’Neill focuses on?
3. What might Mill or Kant be likely to say about the trolley problem? Choose 2 or 3 versions of the trolley problem to discuss; if you wish, you could include the transplant case as one of your versions. For each of the versions of the problem you choose, argue for what Mill or Kant would likely say ought to be done. Be sure to base your discussion on specific arguments Mill or Kant makes in their texts rather than making general statements not tied to their specific points.
4. Choose 2 or 3 versions of the trolley problem that Thomson discusses and (1) explain her arguments for what it is morally permissible to do in those cases and why, and (2) argue for your view of what you think it is morally permissible to do in these cases and why. [*This essay topic is somewhat difficult to do if you agree with Thomson, because if so it’s easy to end up just repeating her arguments when you’re giving your view. So if you agree, be sure to provide other reasons for why you agree!*].
5. Explain what you take to be the main points of difference between Harman’s and Belshaw’s arguments about whether it’s permissible to painlessly kill animals. Then argue for your view on this issue: is it sometimes permissible to painlessly kill animals? If so, under what circumstances? Explain your arguments, and in the process evaluate at least one argument from each of Harman and Belshaw (say whether you find the arguments strong or whether they have weaknesses, and explain why).