

INTRO ETHICS  
SAMPLE PAPER TOPICS

Please choose from one of the following topics OR propose a separate topic to be approved by me.

SPECIFIC PAPER TOPICS –

1. Compare Hobbes' Fifth Law of Nature and Singer's argument in "Famine, Affluence, and Morality." Although Hobbes is an egoist and Singer is a consequentialist, the results of their deliberation about our obligations to provide for famine relief are strikingly similar. Explain how each reaches their conclusion (Hint: Explain the moral motivation for both and the argument leading up to what duties they think we have toward sufferers of famine). Who provides the more compelling argument, and why? (You will have to explain Hobbes' ethical egoism and Singer's consequentialism in your answer).
2. (Harder paper topic): Jeremy Bentham argues that pleasure is the only good. Is he right? Why or why not? If you say he isn't, explain why we ought to recognize something other than pleasure as a good. If you say he is, give the strongest argument you can imagine against Bentham's position, and show why that argument doesn't succeed.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE asks you to compare and contrast two viewpoints. For this style of paper, you must come out in favor of one viewpoint over another. Here are some specific examples but you may propose an example of your own:

3. Both Peter Singer and Onora O'Neill argue that we have an obligation to provide famine relief. Whose argument is more convincing and why?  
Possible thesis statement: In this paper I will examine both Peter Singer's and Onora O'Neill's positions on famine relief. I will argue that O'Neill's position is superior since Singer's scope is too large.
4. Suppose you have fallen out of love with your significant other (yet do not want to end the relationship) and have started a new romantic relationship "on the side." Your current s.o. asks if you are seeing someone else and you lie and tell them you are not. How would a Mill-style utilitarian explain the wrongness of your lie? How would a Kantian? Who gets it most right and why?
5. Aristotle thinks that a truly virtuous person must take pleasure in virtuous action. Kant thinks that pleasure makes no contribution to the moral worth of an action. Why does each of them think what he thinks? And who do you believe is right and why?

## SAMPLE PAPER OUTLINE FOR BENTHAM

*Jeremy Bentham argues that pleasure is the only good. Is he right? Why or why not? If you say he isn't, explain why we ought to recognize something other than pleasure as a good. If you say he is, give the strongest argument you can imagine against Bentham's position, and show why that argument doesn't succeed.*

Below Is a Loose Outline for How You Would Agree with Bentham:

### I. Introduction

- a. Introduce Text
- b. Clear thesis statement: "In this paper I will argue that Bentham's argument that pleasure is the only good is sound."
- c. Road-Map: "I will first present Bentham's argument. I will then present a possible counter-argument to one of Bentham's premises. Finally I will show how this counter-argument is misguided and how Bentham's argument in fact goes through."

### II. Bentham's Argument

- a. Definition of terms (do not use terms of art in a philosophy paper without defining them). For this paper you will AT LEAST have to define pleasure.
- b. Bentham's argument for pleasure being the only good. Tie this section directly to the text. Give me the argument as presented – without using long quotes and without using the exact language of the philosopher (put it in your own words). Your next section (criticism) will be much easier if you put the argument here in terms of premises and a conclusion.  
Premise one is that...A or B  
Premise two is that...We know it's not A  
Therefore we can conclude that it is B.

### III. Criticism of Bentham's Argument (Counter-Argument)

- a. Attack a specific premise. Remember, if one premise of an argument is false, then the whole argument gets knocked down. For example:  
  
Bentham's first premise is mistaken because he neglects to mention the possibility of option C. (Give a discussion of option C). Therefore his first premise should have read: Either A or B or C.

### IV. Rebuttal Against Section III's Criticism (Counter-Counter-Argument)

- a. Show why the above criticism actually does not attack / destroy Bentham's argument. This can be done in a number of ways. For example:  
  
Bentham would counter this attack by stating that option C really is a subset of option B. We might think the two options are different because of x, y, and z but we are misguided.

## V. Conclusion

a. Give a brief statement (echoing your introduction) about what you have shown and the work you have done to show this. For example:

In this paper I have defended Bentham's argument that pleasure is the only good. I have done this by reconstructing Bentham's argument, showing a possible counter-argument and defending Bentham from this counter-argument....(maybe one or two more sentences).