**Suggested paper topics: Assignment 1**

**PHIL 112 Ethics – L. Shanner**

**DUE: Thursday February 20 by 5 pm.**

**Length:** 700-1000 words (about 3-4 pages).

**Format:** Be sure your name is on it! Double spaced, standard font and margins (I know all the tricks to fit words onto a page!). Lengthy quotes or bullet-point lists should be single spaced and indented. Printing on both sides of pages is fine. Cover pages are not required. Please do not use binders or folders – plain paper is easiest.

**Goals:** Focus on a specific, limited aspect of course material covered so far, and work with it until you can decide whether you agree with it (partly or strongly), or find fault with it. Why are some ideas or authors making more sense to you than others? What good reasons can you offer for me to agree with your assessment? (It does not matter whether I actually do agree with you or not! I’m looking for clarity in your reasoning). You will not *solve* these difficult, venerable questions. Making progress on understanding them and fitting pieces together is excellent work.

**Resources:** Our textbook and class notes are all that you need, and all that I expect. Your time is better used by reviewing and interpreting our material rather than seeking additional interesting resources. However, if you happen to have found something directly relevant, other sources may be included. Be sure to give full credit where it is due.

**Textbook:** Jonathan Zeyl and Nathan Radke Ethical Perspectives (Don Mills ON: Oxford, 2018) – Relevant chapter attached as a pdf

**Citations:** Any standard citation format is acceptable (APA, MLA, Chicago Manual, etc). My personal preference is footnotes or endnotes rather than in-text parenthetical (like this) references for readability, but APA style is fine.

* PAGE NUMBERS ARE ESSENTIAL. Each citation should give the specific page number where the quote is found.
* Citing my lecture slides: Shanner, lecture slides “Title” Jan. 21, 2020. (Slide # also helpful, but I often forget to include these on the slides)
* Be very clear about whether you are quoting an original author quoted in our text (or on my slides), or another author quoted by an author in our text, or the textbook authors (or me, as slides author) commenting on one or more authors. That is, Zeyl and Radke (text authors) summarize and also include quotes from Mill, who builds upon Bentham. Zeyl and Radke summarize and quote Existentialist authors, who are interpreted differently by Shanner. Who exactly said what?
* Page numbers refer to the textbook, not the original publication date of any original work. That is, I need to know to turn to page 107 of Zeyl and Radke to find a quote by Mill; they drew the quote from a 2004 reprint of an original work first published in 1863, neither of which you or I happen to have.
* Note that APA simplified a few things last fall: No need for “Running Head:” headers. First author’s name only, instead of a list of names, even in first parenthetical reference.

**Turning it in:** In class, or in the Assignment Drop Box, 3rd Floor B 356. Emailed assignments can only be accepted with prior permission.

**Essay Topics: Choose ONE of the following topics. If you want to write on a topic other than one of these, please discuss it with me first.**

1. A principle of non-interference (such as Star Trek’s “Prime Directive”) is a common feature of science fiction stories involving contact with alien cultures. However, it is very hard to follow a principle of non-interference, especially when one (human or alien) group is clearly damaging the interests of others. Do you think that a principle of non-interference should be absolute, without any exceptions? If not, what kinds of criteria or considerations should guide when to interfere? How would you respond to a challenge that your criteria are merely your own cultural biases?
2. **Imagine that you have discovered a Ring of Gyges, or Harry Potter’s invisibility cloak. Now think like an Existentialist. If nobody would know that you were the person who did something, what sorts of things would you choose to do? What do you WISH you would likely do? Why? Do it for Harry Potter’s invisibility cloak.**
3. Consider the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental goods. What (if anything) do you think is intrinsically valuable? Explain why.
4. Existentialism declares that we have radical freedom; evolutionary theory claims that various behaviors are wired into our DNA, and other theories note how we are shaped by cultural norms. Using what we have read and discussed so far *– and NOT getting into the complicated metaphysics of free will and determinism (whew!) –* how much freedom of choice do you think we humans actually have? Put another way, which of the theoretical accounts of freedom/choosing that we have studied makes the most sense to you? Why?
5. Hobbes and Locke give different accounts of the state of nature, which lead to different ethical conclusions. Which author do you think offers the better account? Explain why.
6. Assess the list of rights granted in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (in our slide set). Is this list reasonable and/or realistic? How does the distinction between positive and negative rights affect your assessment? Is there anything you would add? Are there any identified rights that you think are not justified?
7. Consider case #7.1 in our text on page 120, about research on non-human animals. Do you think that (at least some) non-humans should be granted rights like those in the UN Declaration of Human Rights? If so, what kinds of rights might apply to what kinds of creatures? If not, why not? Focus on ETHICAL rights claims, not legal rights.
8. Compare the notion of ethical detachment as described in Buddhism &/or Hinduism (pp. 70-74), with Existentialism’s insistence on authenticity and actively embracing our freedom. Do you think these ideas are completely incompatible, or are there some overlapping insights?