

Instructions for your Second Paper

As in your first paper, your second paper should contain a critical discussion and evaluation of some argument. You are free to choose any argument that appeared in any paper we have read or was discussed in class. You should follow the by now familiar guidelines for presenting, explaining, and evaluating arguments. Below are some suggested topics. If you choose to write on a topic not listed below, you must email me (bskow@mit.edu) with a description of your topic. You also may wish to re-read the instructions for the first paper for reminders about how to budget your space and how to gauge your audience.

1. Does Feldman succeed in showing that Velleman's conclusions in "Well-Being and Time" are false? (You will need to explain Velleman's view and Feldman's response, and present reasons of your own for thinking that Feldman is right or wrong.)
2. In Section IV of his paper, Norcross discusses an attempt to argue that "better than" is intransitive. Norcross claims that the argument fails. Is he right? (You will need to reconstruct the argument and Norcross's response to it. Norcross says a lot about the argument; focus on what you think is his best objection to the argument.)
3. Feldman proposed a version of consequentialism that he claims avoids the repugnant conclusion. Consider the following response to Feldman's proposal:

"That's just crazy. If Feldman is right, then an outcome in which a bunch of people live lives worth living could be WORSE than a world with no people at all!"

Develop this response into a detailed argument against Feldman's version of consequentialism. How might Feldman respond to this argument?
4. (Legend attributes the following example to Adam Elga.) Consider the following two outcomes. In both there are infinitely many people; all of them begin to exist at the same time, $t=0$. all of them live infinitely long. (For ease of visualization assume that space is one-dimensional. See the diagram below.)

Outcome 1: The expanding sphere of misery. At time $t=0$ everyone is happy. The value of each person's life at that time is, say, +100. But just after that time at a point in space P a "sphere of misery" expands outward at a fixed rate for the rest of time. Everyone who is inside the sphere is miserable; the value of someone's life for him at any time he is inside the sphere is -20.

Outcome 2: The expanding sphere of happiness. At time $t=0$ everyone is miserable. The value of each person's life at that time is, say, -20. But just after that time at a point in space P a "sphere of happiness" expands outward at a fixed rate for the rest of time. Everyone who is inside the sphere is happy; the value of someone's life for him at any time he is inside the sphere is +100.

Surely Outcome 1 is better, because it starts out (infinitely) better than outcome 2, and always stays better. (That is, in outcome 1, at any time, an infinite number of people are happy while a finite number of people are miserable, while in outcome 2, the opposite is true.)

But surely Outcome 2 is better: in that outcome, each person lives through only a finite span of misery before enjoying an infinite amount of happiness. Wouldn't you prefer to be in outcome 2?

What, if anything, does Kagan and Vallentyne's favored principle say about these two outcomes? Do you agree with them? At least one of the arguments in the previous two paragraphs is bad. Which one, and why?

