

paper assignment

The paper assignment is to write a paper on some topic relevant to this course. Below are some suggested topics, but you are welcome to propose another topic for my approval. (Do not write a paper on any topic that is not listed below without getting my approval first.)

Your paper should be limited to 3,000 words, and will be due (in hard copy or electronically) at the beginning of class on Wednesday, December 8. You are welcome to turn in your paper early. Late papers will be penalized 10 percentage points per day (or fraction thereof) of lateness.

decision theory topics:

1. One of the most vigorously debated problems in rational choice theory in the past few decades has been Newcomb's problem. Explain Newcomb's problem, critically comment on at least two scholarly discussions of it (with one of those two being the 1969 paper in which Robert Nozick introduced the problem to academic philosophy), and state and defend your view of the appropriate reaction (or, perhaps, solution) to the problem.
2. The maximin rule for choice under uncertainty came to the attention of many political philosophers with the publication of Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* in 1971. Explain the role of this rule in Rawls's work, critically comment on at least two scholarly discussions of it, and state and defend your view of the proper role (if any) of this rule in theories such as Rawls's.
3. In this course, we have treated risk aversion and diminishing marginal utility as two sides of the same coin (pardon the monetary pun). Some years ago, however, there appeared a notable paper with the intriguing title "Diminishing Marginal Utility of Wealth Cannot Explain Risk Aversion" (Matthew Rabin, 2000). Explain the main argument of this paper, critically comment on at least one scholarly discussion of it, and state and defend your opinion as to the correct view of this issue.

game theory topics:

Pick one of the following texts and give a brief overview of the author's purpose and main point(s), explaining particularly important points in more detail and drawing connections between what the author discusses and topics covered in our course. (You can learn more about these options online, or elsewhere. When you have made your decision, if you cannot conveniently get the text to read, let me know by email, and within a few days I'll send you a PDF file containing that material.)

1. Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, part III: “Cooperation without Friendship or Foresight”
2. Douglas C. Baird, Robert H. Gertner, and Randal Picker, *Game Theory and the Law*, chapter 1: “Simultaneous Decisionmaking and the Normal Form Game”
3. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, chapter 5: “Aggression: stability and the selfish machine”

social choice theory topics:

Pick one of the following conditions and present an argument for a claim to the effect that it is, or is not, an appropriate constraint to impose on social welfare functions. In addition to arguing for your view, describe and rebut one or more opposing considerations.

1. the independence-of-irrelevant-alternatives condition
2. the unrestricted-domain condition
3. the monotonicity condition
4. the Pareto condition
5. the non-imposition condition
6. the non-dictatorship condition
7. the liberty condition

one final note:

The paper assignment is optional. If you do not write a paper, the component of your overall course average that would have been determined by your paper grade will be determined by the highest of your three test grades. If you do write a paper, your paper grade will count in the computation of your overall average, even if it is lower than the test grade that could have counted in place of it.