17.20 Assignment: Idea for Long Paper

In the long paper for this course, you will take and defend a normative[1] argument on one of the substantive debates covered in the readings in Part V of the syllabus.

Last week, you were asked to select one of the lectures in Part V that particularly interested you and to skim the readings for that week. To prompt you to begin thinking more deeply about your paper, **your next assignment (due April 18)** is to identify and summarize a **normative point of disagreement** between different works assigned for the same lecture. That is, your task is to describe a question of right and wrong (or credit and blame) on which different authors take divergent positions. (You may choose a different week from the one you skimmed for last week.) **Write 200–300 words describing the issue and the positions different authors take on it.** For some debates, the normative disagreements between works will be clear, whereas for others the disagreement will be subtler. Even if the authors do not explicitly "take sides" in a particular normative controversy, their "positive" argument may nonetheless implicitly support or presume a normative stance. Part of the skill of writing a good paper will be identifying a point of disagreement that is interesting and perhaps not immediately obvious, so keep this in mind when choosing an issue.

In the paper itself, you will be asked to take a position on the normative debate you identify and present theoretical and empirical evidence in favor of your position, drawing on the course readings in Parts I–IV. As you think about the Part V debate you chose, try to make connections with the readings earlier in the course. You will soon be provided with more guidance on how to structure your argument and what course readings to use for evidence. In the short term, however, use the present assignment as an opportunity to begin thinking of a good debate around which to organize your paper.

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[1] A *normative* argument relates to how things *should* be, according to some ideal standard of right and wrong. By contrast, a *positive* argument attempts do describe or explain reality—how things actually *are*.

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