

PHI 212: CONTEMPORARY MORAL ISSUES

FIRST PAPER TOPICS

The (not so) Fine Print

Due Date for paper: Thursday, 10/1/20 by 10:30 a.m. (class time), submitted in Canvas.

- *I will not accept late papers unless you have an excused absence (arranged in advance).*
- *If you would like to turn in a draft for me to look over, the due date for drafts is Thursday, 9/24/20 by 10:30 a.m. (class time), submitted in Canvas.*
- **Papers should be at least 3 but no more than 4 (double-spaced, size 12 font, 1" margin) pages.**
- *The grading criteria and style requirements are in my "Writing a Philosophy 212 Paper," on my website, and will be used to assess your papers.*

The Topics

Using ONLY the resources you are specifically instructed to use in the topic, and citing page numbers after every sentence quoted or paraphrased to explain the philosophers' view (not including explanations of a quotation), choose ONE (1) of these topics and compose an essay that answers the following questions. If you use Dr. Y's website to explain something or argue in favor or against a philosopher, be sure to give your own examples of the principle(s) involved, and have a works cited page with the link to the precise page, so you avoid plagiarizing.

1. **KANT:** [NOTE: For this topic, you may only use either Kant's actual writing (pp. 85-93) from the textbook or what Kant says about lying (clickable from the link below in this topic) to answer the topic questions. You may not use Vaughn's summaries of Kant's views (pp. 68-69, and 80) or my lecture notes from my website, or any other outside sources.]

First, write an Introduction (see Hints below), then answer these questions in separate paragraphs corresponding to these numbers:

- (1) **good will.**
 - (2) **duties** (explain duties in general, and then mention at least 3 specific duties Kant says we have, explain what **acting from the motive of duty** (or acting for the sake of duty) is, versus **acting in conformity with duty** (or in accord with duty), and **give an example of each**).
 - (3) The **categorical imperative** (the maxim/universal law formulation).
 - (4) The **practical imperative** (the end in itself formulation).
 - (5) **Treating someone simply/only as a means, treating someone only as an end, and treating someone both as an end and as a means.** Be sure to (a) **give an example of each** of these, and (b) **say which are morally permissible and which are not**, according to Kant.
 - (6) Give your view -- is Kant's ethical theory plausible or implausible, and why? [NOTE: When discussing lying, you should incorporate what Kant says about lying in his ["On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives"](#) from Dr. Y's website, under Optional Material; but be sure to cite it and have a works cited.
- WARNING: The blue inked writing in this link is about or by Benjamin Constant, who thinks there should be exceptions to the "no lying" rule, which is NOT Kant's view! Kant thinks one should NEVER lie, even to a murderer at the door asking you if your friend is inside. See the Yellow highlighted portion of this doc to see what Kant's argument is for not lying to such a murderer.]
- (7) Have a Conclusion (see Hints below).

2. **MILL:** [NOTE: For this topic, you may only use the textbook to answer the "explanatory" type questions: For questions 1-3, use Mill's actual writing (pp. 81-84); for questions 4-5, you may use Vaughn's summary (pp. 64 - and not pp. 65-66 or 79-80) or my website as noted in the topic - you may not use any other outside sources.]

First, write an Introduction (see Hints below), then explain these concepts and answer these questions, in separate paragraphs, corresponding to these numbers:

- (1) **Greatest Happiness Principle.**
- (2) **happiness** and **unhappiness**, and why happiness/pleasure should be the standard for morality, according to Mill.

- (3) **quality of pleasure** (including how he argues that **some pleasures are better than others**, and **competent judges**).
- (4) Explain **act utilitarianism** and give an example of the way in which it would answer an ethical question. Note: You may use Dr. Y's "[Act v. Rule Utilitarianism](#)" document (under "Optional Material"), but be sure to cite it and have a works cited; and
- (5) Explain **rule utilitarianism** and give an example of the way in which it would answer an ethical question. Note: You may use Dr. Y's "[Act v. Rule Utilitarianism](#)" document (under "Optional Material"), but be sure to cite it and have a works cited.
- (6) Give your view. You have ONE of three options: (a) Mill's ethical theory (construed as Act Utilitarianism) is plausible, and why; (b) Mill's ethical theory (construed as Rule Utilitarianism) is plausible, and why; or (c) Mill's ethical theory is implausible, and why. [Note: IF you argue that Mill's ethical theory is implausible, you need to give at least one objection against Act Utilitarianism, and one objection against Rule Utilitarianism.]
- (7) Have a Conclusion (see Hints below).

HINTS: You should have your paper organized in general by paragraphs, as follows:

- **INTRODUCTION** – List every term or argument you will explain, exactly, and in order [e.g., "In this paper, I will explain X, Y, and Z (concepts) or A, B, C arguments"], be sure to mention what stance you'll be arguing -- in favor or against the philosopher.
- **ANSWER EVERY EXPLANATORY-TYPE QUESTION** (in separate paragraphs, as instructed in the topic). **BE SURE TO USE PAGE NUMBERS TO SHOW WHERE THE PHILOSOPHER SAYS WHAT YOU SAY THAT THEY SAY.** For instance, "Kant states that intelligence, wit and other talents of the mind can be used to do bad things (85c1)." Or: "Kant states, "X, Y, Z" (85c1)." You should not **ONLY** paraphrase the philosopher, since you will not be giving an exact account in the philosopher's words. On the other hand, you should not **ONLY** give direct quotations, since you need to also explain the quotation, so I can know that you understand what the philosopher is saying. **Do both.** And when you explain a philosopher's quotation you just quoted, you do not need to have a page number at the end of the sentence. Lastly, quote the philosopher **FIRST**, and then **EXPLAIN** it.
- **GIVE YOUR VIEW** – Is the argument/view a sound/good one? Give your opinion in the form of an argument here. If you are arguing **IN FAVOR** of the philosopher you're covering, you should address whatever objections you had against the philosopher (at least briefly), or your paper will be incomplete or inconsistent, both of which are not good! **IF** you defend the philosopher's view, you must defend the whole view on the subject topic (you should at least **BRIEFLY** mention why the points you explained above are plausible - don't just focus on one main point and say why you like it); do **NOT** state that you like certain parts of the person's view, but not the whole view. **IF** you are against the view, you need to mention at least one major reason why the view is implausible. [NOTES: (1) *In these topics, for this part of the paper ("Your View"), I am not asking if you agree with the philosopher's conclusion (because you have to agree with basically every premise or point they argue to reach that conclusion); I am not asking if you disagree with their opponent as your main motivation for defending this view (you may be unsure about whether each side is right); I am not asking if this view appeals to you in some way, or if you are psychologically fond of it, or if you would LIKE for it to be true; I AM asking if this view is philosophically defensible against ALL major OBJs, to your knowledge. (2) IF you have more than one objection above, make sure you answer all of them, and arrange the paragraphs in this way: OBJ1, REPLY1, OBJ2, REP2, etc. Only have one objection per paragraph.]*
- **CONCLUSION** – List EVERY issue or argument you explained, exactly, and in order ("In conclusion, I explained X, Y, Z, etc."), the view(s) you defended, and summarize briefly your objections and replies (or at least mention that you raised and responded to two objections), and perhaps say something about future implications of your view (or the issue). **NOTES:** DO not introduce any **NEW** objections or concepts you never raised in the paper thus far. Also, do not re-explain any of the things you've already explained. Just list what you have explained.

OTHER HINTS:

NOTE 1: There is possible source of confusion in the book about Kant's view, by Vaughn: He states on p. 69c2 that Kant believes that there is an "absolute moral prohibition" for "failing to help others when feasible." What "feasible" means or entails to Kant, at least in part, is that we

cannot lie, break a promise, commit suicide (i.e., violate perfect duties) in order to help someone. Note also that you are not supposed to use any Vaughn quotations (or paraphrases them) to describe Kant's view.

NOTE 2: Regarding Rule Utilitarianism: Vaughn states that rule utilitarianism, "says that the right action is one that conforms to a rule that, if followed consistently, would create for everyone involved the most beneficial balance of good over bad" (64; my underlining). Just to be clear, "for everyone involved" does NOT imply that you ask how happy individuals in an individual action would be if you followed the rule in *this* situation, because that would be using the Act Utilitarianism theory, where you should ask how (un)happy each individual is, and calculate which action creates the most happiness. What that phrase ("for everyone involved") means here is, for everyone involved in this KIND of situation, would that create the most happiness ("most beneficial balance of good over bad").

NOTE 3: For the definition of happiness, read this: Mill states, "By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain ..." (82c1; my underlining). This does NOT mean that happiness is intended pleasure. He's trying to convey this, in other words: "By the word happiness, I intend to define it as pleasure." Why? Because he doesn't think that intentions matter in morality, and notice that he did not define unhappiness as "intended pain."

NOTE 4: Utilitarianism is the theory, so you can write, for instance, "Using Act (or Rule) Utilitarianism, we should assess the happiness" A utilitarian is a person who believes in or follows Utilitarianism, so you can write, "An Act Utilitarian would assess this case in this way". Also, do not use these phrases: "The Act of Utilitarianism," "The Rule of Utilitarianism," "The Act Utilitarianism," "The Rule Utilitarianism"; just refer to the theories as Act Utilitarianism or Rule Utilitarianism. Good luck!