

Final Essay Questions

Write a ~7 page essay on one of the following topics. Estimate what topic will incline you to an appropriate amount of material for a paper of that size. Papers will be due at the official end of term Saturday, 5 December 2020.

Please be sure to write the number of the essay question you are answering on your paper.

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1. Explain the passage on the good will and the motive of duty in *Groundwork* sec. I. What are the different possible relations of action to 'duty' that are distinguished? What is Kant's thesis – that is, what is his claim about actions that fall into the different categories he distinguishes? Explain it in connection with one or two of Kant's illustrations. Is this thesis objectionable? Why or why not? Defend your answer carefully.
 2. Explain as best you can why Kant thinks that the formula of humanity (Ak 4:428-9) is derived. Note the remark that each of us must think of himself as an 'end in itself' Do these considerations suggest he has a good argument for thinking that justice – the disposition to 'take account' of others – is a part of rationality, or a demand of reason?
 3. Kant repeatedly claims that the "moral law", if there is one, applies to all rational beings – and not just to us human beings (members of *Homo sapiens*), much less just to all people brought up in Western Civilization or in Prussia. See e.g. p. 24 or 44. What is he saying? Why do you suppose he thinks that 'morality' entails such a thing? Does this seem to be a credible idea?
 4. Explain the "formula of universal law", as it appears on e.g. Ak 4:421. Carefully explain how it is applied in the case of the lying promise (case 2) and the uncharitable man (case 4). Think the matter through and express it clearly in your own terms. We all believe that lying promisers and uncharitable people are scum. Does Kant's account of the badness of these people seem to give a legitimate expression of our objection to them? That is, is it reasonable to think that he is merely making articulate our common-sense objection to these things?
 5. Kant and Hume have radically different moral theories, and the differences emerge in many different ways. Isolate a particular proposition on which they differ and articulate it clearly. Explain why each author thinks what he does. Defend one position against the other.
 6. Kant draws a distinction (Ak 4:397-8) between
 1. A "friend of humanity who helps others from sympathy and with inner pleasure and delight"and, on the other hand"

2. A friend of man (perhaps the same person but now in a depressive condition) who does the same *from the motive of duty*.

Hume (in *Treatise* Book III, Part II, Section I) makes an (partly implicit) parallel distinction between

- 1a. A father who cares for his children from “natural affection” or paternal love and

- 1b. An (implied) person who does grateful things from the feeling of gratitude

“and, on the other hand,”

- 2a. An (implied) father who finds no natural affection in his breast, but cares for the children from a sense of duty

- 2b. A person who does grateful things on account of “duty”

(See the first several paragraphs of the Justice chapter in Hume’s *Treatise*.)

The distinctions seem to be exactly parallel, but the writers appear to have diametrically opposed views of the relative moral merits of (1)-type cases and (2)-type cases. Explain the conflict clearly. Take a position on the issue and defend it. Is the motive of duty as great as Kant thinks? Is action from “virtuous” inclination and ordinary feeling as great as Hume thinks?

7. Briefly characterize the role that happiness plays in Aristotle’s account of “the good we are looking for” (e.g. 1097a15) in moral philosophy in Book I. How does his view differ from that of Kant as expressed e.g. on 948-5 (Ak 395-6)? Does the difference seem to make Aristotle’s doctrine ‘egoistic’ in some sense? Does it seem like a reasonable claim, or one that is, for example, in conflict with a proper understanding of morality, as Kant seems to think?

8. Aristotle’s formal account of “the human good” – a sketch or outline, with the details to be filled in later, as he says (1098a21) – is given in the famous function argument of Book I, chapter 7 (1097b20-1098a20). Characterize this argument as briefly and clearly as possible. Take a position on the merits of the argument and its conclusion – Does it seem false, nonsense, trivial, true, a menace to true morals, or what? – defending your position carefully.