

PHIL02
Introduction to Philosophy: Morals and Politics

First Paper Assignment

Provide a clear and concise response to **one** of the following questions in a 2-4 page paper (500-1000 words):

1. In “Happiness and Morality”, Steven Cahn describes the case of Kate, a candidate for a teaching job who presented with an offer that “require(s) her to act unethically.” Cahn contends that Kate “acted immorally but lived happily ever after.” In the same article, however, Jeffrie Murphy argues that such an action is incompatible with true happiness. Explain how Cahn and Murphy defend their respective views. Your discussion should address the following considerations:
 - Why does Cahn think that a person like Kate is happy?
 - Why does Murphy think that a person like Kate cannot be happy?
 - What is the “philosophical sleight-of-hand” that each philosopher discusses, and how is it relevant to their disagreement about cases like Kate’s?
 2. At the end of the film *Gone Baby Gone*, Patrick makes a difficult decision that causes his girlfriend to “hate” him, presumably because she believes that he has done something morally wrong. Evaluate Patrick’s decisions from the perspectives of utilitarianism and Kantian ethics. Your discussion should address the following considerations:
 - Would utilitarians think that Patrick made the morally right decision? Why/why not?
 - Would Kantians think that Patrick made the morally right decision? Why/why not?
 - What are the key differences between these two approaches to moral decision-making?
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ASSIGNMENT AIM: This paper is assigned as an exercise in bringing competing philosophical views together in a critical discussion. You should maintain a high level of expository rigor while developing your discussion in such a way as to allow your reader to clearly see the areas in which the two philosophers you discuss agree and/or disagree. *You need not develop your own arguments here, though you may. Your original views will not factor into the evaluation*—only the extent to which you effectively develop a discourse between your selected philosophers will be considered. I may, however, offer comments on original arguments that you include.

FORMAT and DEADLINE: The paper must be typed, double spaced, stapled, and submitted to me by the beginning of class on the date specified on course syllabus. Papers submitted on time will be returned within a week with comments. I will accept late papers up to **one week beyond the due date** for full credit, but I make **no guarantees** for a prompt return. I will not accept **any** paper that is more than a week late. E-mailed papers will only be accepted with prior approval.

EVALUATIVE CRITERIA:

Organization, Clarity and Concision (33%):

When reconstructing a complex philosophical position, effective *organization* is essential. Your paper should begin with a brief introduction that includes a clear, easily identifiable thesis statement. When reading your paper, it should be clear at all times how your claims address your thesis. You should conclude with a brief restatement of the key points from your discussion.

Your prose should be *clear*, such that your reader has no difficulty understanding you. One effective strategy for ensuring this involves giving your paper to a friend to read. If they can follow your discussion from start to finish, even without knowing anything about your topic, then your paper is likely clear and well-organized.

Finally, your discussion should be *concise*. One of the key skills involved in this paper is determining what is necessary to convey the argument, and what is not. As much as possible, limit the scope of your discussion to what is necessary to answer the question asked. That being said, it is entirely possible to include *too little* in your discussion—make sure that you have completely answered the question. You might feel like you are repeating yourself somewhat—this is not necessarily a problem for philosophical writing.

Substantive Accuracy (34%):

Your discussion should *accurately* describe the views relevant to the topic you choose. This is particularly important when placing two or more views into critical opposition.

Critical Comparison (33%):

This paper requires you to demonstrate how two or more philosophical positions relate to one another. The best papers will be those that effectively and explicitly show how the views are similar or different with respect to the chosen topic. This involves more than merely giving expositions of each view—it involves explicitly comparing and contrasting them.

It is expected that all questions and concerns regarding this assignment will be brought to my attention BEFORE the due date.

*****A note on spelling and grammar:** It is expected that your paper will be free from all spelling and grammatical errors. Stylistic errors will not carry a penalty, but they may affect your grade to the extent that they compromise the clarity of your prose. It's a good idea to use the spell-check and grammar-check of your word processing program, but this may not guarantee that your paper is free of stylistic problems. Proofreading is *strongly* recommended.