

**PHIL08
ETHICS**

First Paper Assignment

Provide a clear and concise response to **one** of the following questions in a 3-5 page paper (750-1250 words):

1. In Chapter 1 of *The Elements of Morality* (text available [here](#)), James Rachels describes the case of “Baby Teresa”, an anencephalic infant whose organs could be removed and given “to other children who could benefit from them.” Evaluate the prospect of transplanting her organs via the respective positions of the divine command theory and utilitarianism. Your discussion should address the following considerations:
 - How would a divine command theorist evaluate Baby Teresa’s case (i.e. what would their *argument* look like?)
 - How would a utilitarian evaluate the case?
 - What potential flaws are found in these respective approaches?

 2. Suppose I have a friend who consistently refuses to put the interests of others before his own, and believes that there is nothing morally wrong with this. Common sense morality suggests that he ought (at least *some* of the time) to put others before himself. Certain theories, however, suggest otherwise. Emotivism and psychological egoism are two such theories. Explain and evaluate the way in which these two theories attempt to show that my friend is correct in his belief. Your discussion should address the following considerations:
 - How would emotivists argue that my friend’s belief about his behavior is accurate?
 - How would psychological egoists argue that my friend’s belief about his behavior is accurate?
 - What sorts of theoretical difficulties might these approaches face?

 3. Suppose that Thomas is at the grocery store, and realizes that after paying for his food and other necessities he will have about \$5 left over. As he approaches the checkout line, he sees a large box of cat-shaped chocolate truffles (which he would *very* much enjoy, but does *not* need) that costs exactly \$5. He also sees that the grocery store is collecting donations for a reputable and well-vetted charity specializing in local hunger relief. Thomas decides to buy the candy, and forgo making a donation. Evaluate his decision via the respective views of Peter Singer and ethical egoists. Your discussion should address the following considerations:
 - How would Singer support his approval/disapproval of Thomas’ decision? What would his *argument* look like, and how might he defend the *premises* of this argument?
 - How would an ethical egoist support his/her approval of Thomas’ decision? What would his/her *argument* look like, and how might he/she defend the *premises* of this argument?
 - On what key points might these two theorists *disagree*, and how might they attack one another’s views?
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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 **on the following Monday** 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 (10%):

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.

Clarity (10%):

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.

Concision (10%):

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 (35%):

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 (35%):

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.