

PHIL08
Ethics

Final Paper Assignment

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

1. “Virtue ethics” and the “ethics of care” purport to show that traditional moral theories such as utilitarianism and deontology are inadequate. *Critically assess* the criticisms that proponents of virtue ethics and the ethics of care raise against traditional moral theories. *Discuss and defend* your own position on the legitimacy of the alternatives that the former views offer. Your discussion should address the following considerations:
 - Why exactly do advocates of the ethics of care (i.e. Gilligan, Noddings) reject deontology and utilitarianism?
 - How do virtue ethicists approach moral thinking differently from utilitarians and deontologists?
 - Are there any significant theoretical problems facing virtue ethics or the ethics of care? If so, what are they?
 - Can these problems be adequately addressed by either theory?
 2. The film *Gattaca* raises ethical concerns pertaining to the implications of pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD). The film appears to take a strongly negative position toward PGD. This position is criticized by bioethicist Colin Gavaghan, who argues that PGD should be freely available. *Critically assess* the position taken by the film *in the light* of Gavaghan’s argument. *Discuss* whether or not *you* think that PGD should be freely available, and defend your position. Your discussion should address the following considerations:
 - Which aspects of the film present reasons for opposing the availability of PGD?
 - Are these reasons supported by any of the moral theories that we have discussed?
 - Do Gavaghan’s arguments address all of these reasons?
 - How might one object to Gavaghan’s central argument?
 - Can Gavaghan’s argument survive such an objection?
 3. Susan Wolf argues that we should not strive to be “moral saints”. *Explain* why she thinks this, *comparing* her idea of an ideal person to the ideas espoused by Kant and Mill. *Discuss* whether you think Wolf’s view is persuasive or not, providing *argumentative support* for your position. Your discussion should address the following considerations:
 - What role should morality play in the way we live our lives?
 - How should we weigh our private projects and interests against our moral obligations?
 - Is the best life the one in which a person consistently acts in accordance with morality?
 - How might one object to your position? Can you respond to this objection?
 4. In the short story “The Other Two Sides”, Felicia Nimue Ackerman describes a difficult (but not uncommon) scenario facing the owners of pets with serious illnesses. Is euthanizing an animal like Gabriella (the cat in the story) morally forbidden? Permissible? Required? Consider this question from the perspective of at least two of the moral theories (utilitarianism, Kantianism, virtue theory, etc.) that we have considered in this course, and then defend *your* own view. Your discussion should address the following considerations:
 - Do we have moral obligations toward non-human animals?
 - If these obligations are different from our obligations to humans, then how are they different?
 - Julia Tanner contends that “[s]omeone who has their cat put to sleep rather than pay expensive vet’s bills is actively indifferently cruel.” (p. 113 in course reader). Is this correct? (In addressing this question, you may want to consider Tanner’s argument explicitly).
-

ASSIGNMENT AIM: This paper is assigned as an exercise in developing an original philosophical response to a problem from our readings. You should maintain a high level of expository rigor (the emphasis of the first paper) as well as a clear critical comparison of all relevant views. This paper differs from the first essay, in that you are *required to construct an original argument for your own view*.

FORMAT: In order to receive comments on your paper, the final version of your paper must be typed, double spaced, stapled, and submitted to me no later than the date of our final exam (8/5). Because this date marks the end of our course, late papers will not be accepted for comments. Comments will be provided by mail—if you want comments, attach a self-addressed envelope with sufficient postage.

HOWEVER: I will accept papers via email until **9:00 a.m.** on Sunday, 8/8 for full credit. These papers will not receive comments of any kind, but they will be thoroughly read and graded. **THIS IS A FIRM DEADLINE—I WILL NOT ACCEPT ANY PAPERS AFTER THIS TIME.**

EVALUATIVE CRITERIA:

Spelling and Grammar (10%):

It is expected that your paper will be free from all spelling and grammatical errors. You should absolutely use the spell-check and grammar-check of your word processing program, but this may not guarantee that your paper is free of spell and grammar problems. Proofreading is *strongly* recommended.

Organization, Clarity and Concision (20%):

Your paper should begin with a brief introduction that includes a clear, easily identifiable thesis statement. It may be a good idea to briefly describe the structure of your paper in your introduction (i.e. “In the following I will discuss...”) 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.

Substantive Accuracy (25%):

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 (20%):

Your discussion will require you to bring multiple philosophical views together in a coherent manner. This involves more than merely giving expositions of each view—it involves explicitly comparing and contrasting them.

Original Philosophical Response (25%):

Each of the above topic options requires you to provide an *argument* for an original view. It will not suffice to simply state your *opinion* about the question asked. You must support your view by providing *reasons* why your reader should accept it. The best papers will anticipate possible objections, and address them. You will not be evaluated according to the particular view that you endorse, but rather according to how well you argue for the view that you choose.