

Philosophy 0300, Introduction to Ethics, Fall 1996

Professor: David Gauthier

Recitation Leader: Ben Eggleston

First Essay Assignment

Write an essay of approximately 6 pages on one of the following topics or on a topic that you propose and that your recitation leader approves. Your essay should conform to the instructions provided in "Guidelines for Writing a Philosophy Essay," and will be due in the mailbox marked "EGGLESTON" in CL 1001 at 12 noon on Friday, October 4, if your section meets on Tuesdays, or at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, October 8, if your section meets on Thursdays.

1. Socrates says, "I do not believe that injustice is more profitable than justice, not even if one gives it full scope and does not put obstacles in its way" (345a), but Thrasymachus dismisses being just as "high-minded foolishness" (348c). What are Socrates's and Thrasymachus's strongest arguments in support of their respective views? Whose arguments are stronger? Whose view do you think is right, and are there better arguments in favor of it than Socrates or Thrasymachus presents?
2. Although he admits Socrates's claim that being just usually has good consequences (that is, that justice is good in its consequences), Glaucon (with Adeimantus) presents arguments against Socrates's claim that it is best for each person to be just even when he or she could profit from injustice (that is, that justice is good in itself). Briefly summarize *one* of these arguments and Socrates's reply to it with a view to answering the following questions: Is Socrates's reply effective? If so, how? If not, are there other, more effective, replies that Socrates should have used, or is the argument from Glaucon that you are discussing so effective that no reply can refute it?
3. Socrates presents an account of what he thinks would make a city perfectly just. If there were a city that were arranged and governed as Socrates describes, would it really be just? What makes a city (or state, or country) just or unjust, in your view? Aspects of Socrates's "perfectly just" city you may want to consider in order to argue that it is just or unjust are the strict division of the people into the three classes that Socrates describes, the method Socrates proposes for assigning each person to one of the three classes, and the sort of "civic education" that Socrates proposes that each person be given.
4. Hobbes and Thrasymachus seem to have some views in common, but they reach rather different conclusions about how the rational person—the person who pursues his or her self-interest—should decide to live. In particular, they disagree on whether it is to an individual's advantage to be just. Who is right, and why? In formulating your answer, consider both each thinker's conception of justice and each thinker's conception of what is to an individual's advantage.
5. Hobbes writes that "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no such thing as justice" (ch. 15). Explain this view and Hobbes's reply to it. Is his reply adequate? If so, why? If not, are there better replies available, or is Hobbes's "fool" right?
6. According to Hobbes, "whatsoever [the sovereign] doth, it can be no injury to any of his subjects; nor ought he to be by any of them accused of injustice" (ch. 18). How does Hobbes arrive at this view? Is his reasoning sound?

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Assignment for Second Essay

Write an essay of approximately 6 pages on one of the following topics or on a topic that you propose and that your recitation leader approves. Your essay should conform to the instructions provided in “Guidelines for Writing a Philosophy Essay,” and will be due in the mailbox marked “EGGLESTON” in CL 1001 at 12 noon on Friday, November 22, if your section meets on Tuesdays, or at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, November 26, if your section meets on Thursdays.

1. Kant purports to show how to use the categorical imperative to evaluate four acts: committing suicide, making a false promise, neglecting one’s talents, and ignoring the needs of others (422–23). Analyze Kant’s discussion of one or more of these four examples, explaining how Kant applies the categorical imperative to the example(s) you are discussing, with a view to answering the following question: Does the categorical imperative yield the verdict(s) that Kant claims it yields, or is Mill correct in his claim that Kant implicitly appeals to consequentialist considerations in order to apply the categorical imperative?
2. Kant and Mill differ deeply on moral significance of happiness. Discuss each thinker’s position on this issue and his reasons for taking the position he takes. Whose arguments are stronger?
3. A distinctive feature of Mill’s version of utilitarianism is his theory that pleasures can differ in quality as well as in quantity. Why does Mill think that utilitarianism is made more defensible when this theory is included? What are the main difficulties, if there are any, with this theory? Do these difficulties doom this theory to failure? If so, is utilitarianism doomed as well, or can utilitarianism be defended without this theory?
4. Rawls criticizes utilitarianism in order to motivate the development of a different approach to ethics. What are Rawls’s criticisms of utilitarianism? Are they fair criticisms of the version of utilitarianism defended by Mill? If so, ought we to reject Mill’s theory?
5. What is Rawls’s conception of justice? What theory does he provide to support it? To what objections is his theory most vulnerable? Are these objections strong enough to defeat Rawls’s theory, or does Rawls’s theory withstand them?
6. For Gauthier, being moral essentially amounts to being what he calls a “constrained maximizer” instead of being what he calls a “straightforward maximizer.” What is straightforward maximization, and what is constrained maximization? How does Gauthier argue in favor of the latter over the former? To what objections are Gauthier’s arguments most vulnerable? Are they decisive, or are adequate replies to them available?
7. Rawls and Gauthier, though both contract theorists, approach ethics in very different ways. Indicate the differences in their approaches by contrasting the sorts of considerations that they appeal to in support of their views—in particular (but certainly not only) by contrasting the ways in which they characterize the initial choice situation.