

Final Essay

Choose one of the 5 topics below. Your task is to write a clear argumentative and critical essay in which you discuss a controversial area in ethical theory, and argue for your own position on the issue. In particular, you should aim to do one or more of the following:

- state and defend an argument in favor of a clearly formulated ethical theory or principle
- state and defend an argument against one of the ethical theories discussed in the course
- state and defend a response to a commonly given objection to a certain ethical theory
- state and defend a rejoinder to a response typically given to a commonly given objection to a certain ethical theory

Your paper should be approximately 4-6 pages in length (double-spaced, 12pt. Times New Roman font).

I have uploaded to Moodle the secondary sources mentioned below.

Topics:

1. Would or could morality still exist if God did not exist? What arguments can be given on either side of the debate? Are the arguments good ones? Discuss the Euthyphro* problem and its relevance to answering this question. (If appropriate, discuss the attitudes of Mavrodes and Nielsen.)

*This problem is discussed in detail in Rachels- *Does Morality Depend on Religion?*

2. Are there any basic moral principles that apply to all people, all cultures at all times? What arguments can be given for or against different versions of ethical relativism? Are the arguments good ones? (If appropriate, discuss the attitudes and arguments given by Pojman.)

3. Does doing the morally right thing ever make a person's life worse off than doing the wrong thing? Discuss how this relates to the ethical position of egoism. What arguments can be given in favor of egoism? What arguments can be given against it? Are the arguments good ones? (If appropriate, discuss the attitudes of Hobbes and Rachels.)

4. Does doing the right thing ever lead to worse overall circumstances than doing the wrong thing? Consider this question in light of the ethical positions of utilitarianism and consequentialism. Discuss the arguments that might be given in favor of consequentialism, and discuss the position of Mill. What arguments might be given against consequentialism?

5. For an act to be right, must it be possible to will that everyone act the same way in similar circumstances? Consider Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative, and arguments for and against it as a characterization of moral rightness. Discuss the readings by Kant and Feldman.

Suggestions:

- Give me an introductory paragraph in which you briefly outline the paper and provide your overall thesis. What is the paper going to generally cover and what is your position on the matter going to be?
- Organize your paper into three main sections. In the first section, clearly lay out the issue under discussion and what possible views or positions someone might hold with regard to the issue. In the second section, lay out the argument or arguments that will be your main focus. In the third section, consider possible responses to those argument(s), and possible responses to those responses. Play devil's advocate throughout and try to consider how someone with a contrary position would respond to your position.
- Re-read the appropriate readings from the course, and discuss the positions of those authors.
- Incorporate and discuss the viewpoints of your peers raised in your discussion posts if possible.
- Create your own examples, possibly examples from your own life, but do not get lost in discussing details of the situations that are not relevant to the theoretical issue you're discussing.
- Check your arguments for logical validity. Avoid superfluous introductory and concluding remarks.