

Final Paper: Operation Gander Sauce

The Scenario

Suppose that you work for a Texas-based NGO, Texans for Texas (**TT**), that supports Texas Democratic political candidates, and that you, personally, support Democratic candidates. Suppose, also, that the next election is approaching. Your boss, Alicia Briggs, has sent you an email soliciting your ethical advice on an issue of immediate importance.

Ms. Briggs writes that a document drafted by the Texas Republican Party—leaked to the press—states that it plans “to use a disinformation campaign to help them win back a dozen state House races in the next election, buying up website domains that look like they belong to Democratic candidates and loading the sites with negative information.”¹ She refers to this tactic as “**Website Spoofing.**”

Ms. Briggs is worried that the Texas Republican Party’s Website Spoofing could significantly hurt Texas Democratic candidates in the next election. She believes that Website Spoofing is *dishonest and deceptive* (and, for purposes of this assignment, you believe that she is correct in this regard). Because of these concerns, Ms. Briggs has gotten advice on this issue from a political consultant named Charles Dominguez. Mr. Dominguez told Ms. Briggs that Texas Democratic candidates will suffer a significant electoral disadvantage if they do not adopt the same unsavory tactics as Republicans. Sensing Ms. Briggs’ discomfort with the idea of engaging in Website Spoofing, Mr. Dominguez went on to say that “*when it comes to political candidates and political parties using these kinds of dirty tactics, the situation is going to have to get worse before it gets better. This is because, in our gridlocked political system, you won’t get laws against these practices until both political parties, the Democrats and the Republicans, are tired of being targeted by these tactics.*”² (We will call what Mr. Dominguez has said, i.e., the quoted language that appears in italics, the “**Pessimistic Conclusion.**”)

¹ This is an actual quote from a newspaper story—except that I have modified the original quote by replacing “2020” with “the next election.” See Zelinski, Andrea, “Texas Republican Party plans to build phony campaign websites loaded with negative information about Democrats.” *Houston Chronicle*, 26 November, 2019 Updated: 27 November 27, 2019 10:01 a.m.

² This quote is based on something from a real-life news story. It is the view of an actual individual who has used ethically questionable tactics, on behalf of Democratic candidates, against Republicans. I say this only so that you understand that this has been put forward as a serious view in real life. I am not providing the source of the statement that I paraphrase in the fictitiously quoted statement as I do not want students to be distracted by irrelevant materials. However, if you are interested—as a personal matter not related to this paper—I can provide the source upon request after the semester is over.

Ms. Briggs is now convinced that, at least when it comes to Website Spoofing, the Pessimistic Conclusion is true.

As a result of all of these considerations, Ms. Briggs is considering using TT funds and staff to implement exactly the same kind of Website Spoofing strategy against Texas Republican candidates in the next election. To do so, she would hire Mr. Dominguez as a consultant. He would develop and supervise the project with the assistance of TT staff and funds. The proposed project is called "**Gander Sauce**."

Ms. Briggs wants you write a paper that advises her as to whether, ethically speaking, TT should deploy Gander Sauce. Ultimately, *you must conclude one of the following*:

- (i) *Implementing* Gander Sauce is, ethically speaking, the best thing to do; OR
- (ii) *Not implementing* Gander sauce is, ethically speaking, the best thing to do.

Ms. Briggs tells you that, in making your analysis, you are to assume that the Pessimistic Conclusion is true.

Paper Requirements

1. You must submit your work in .doc or .docx format.
2. Your paper should be type-written, double-spaced and in Verdana 11-point font. In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, type your full name, "Final Paper," "Philosophy 2305," and the course CRN number. Make sure that your name and the page number appear in a footer on every page. Do not make a separate cover page.
3. Your paper should follow the traditional essay format consisting of the following.
 - a. An opening paragraph wherein you briefly explain what you will do in the body of the paper. (Do not load this with a lot of fluff.)
 - b. The body of the paper wherein you carry out the substance of your analysis (i.e. address the assigned topic).
 - c. A concluding paragraph wherein you review and draw together what you have done in the body of the paper. (Do not load this with a lot of fluff.)
4. Frame your analysis of the issues in terms of the relevant duties involved—both Positive Duties and Negative Duties. If two or more duties clash, explain which duty (or duties) should prevail, and why they should prevail. You must also consider

whether there might be Consequentialist considerations that override a duty (or duties) that would otherwise prevail in this decision.³

5. You should write as if you are addressing your paper to a reasonably intelligent adult who has no prior familiarity with the relevant ethical and philosophical concepts. Thus, you should explain any technical or philosophical term that you use in your paper. At the point in the paper where you define or explain such a term, put that term in **bold font**. I should be able to immediately locate your explanation or definition of each such term in your paper—i.e. because it is in bold font. *I will not be obliged to find each of these items in your paper and give you credit for it if you have not followed this instruction.*

6. Use only the materials from this course and the following article in writing this paper.

- Zelinski, Andrea, "Texas Republican Party plans to build phony campaign websites loaded with negative information about Democrats." *Houston Chronicle*, 26 November, 2019 Updated: 27 November 27, 2019 10:01 a.m.

I will provide you with a copy of this article.

7. Assume that the facts that I have stipulated in this assignment are true. Assume that Zelinski's article accurately reports what her sources have said and what the relevant documents say (though you may find that some of people she quotes describe things rather differently from one another). In other words, within these parameters, do not try to argue that the facts are wrong. That is not what this assignment is about.

Further, do not invent new facts that are not in these materials. Similarly, you should not raise hypothetical "possibilities" of a kind that have no rational weight. For example, in a life or death decision, saying that it is OK if so-and-so dies because "Who knows? Maybe he was a mass murderer!" is obviously a bogus move. I could just as well reply, "Who knows? Maybe he was about to invent the cure for cancer!" Clearly, this is pointless.

On the other hand, it is appropriate to make well-grounded, reasonable, conservative inferences from the facts you are given. However, relying upon unsupported or poorly supported inferences from the facts as a part of your analysis is, of course, improper.

³ When applying Consequentialism, you will have to specify which sorts of things you take to be Intrinsically Valuable. Just do your best to pick plausible things. I am not expecting you to specify some deep theory of what is Intrinsically Valuable. Nor am I expecting that you can rigorously quantify what is at stake.

Suppose, for example, we have a scenario involving someone named Jane. If Jane says she loves dogs, and we have a reasonable basis for taking Jane at her word, then we could reasonably infer that Jane is, in fact, very fond of dogs. Moving on from there (with no further information) to say that Jane might well be a radical animal liberation activist ... well, that is taking things a step too far. Going on from there to cite the “possibility” that Jane might be a radical animal liberation activist as support for the conclusion (or a sub-conclusion) of one’s “analysis” is, of course, completely out of court.

- 8.** Carry out the assigned task clearly, precisely, concisely, and completely. Do not write: fluff; BS; clichés; platitudes; empty generalizations; irrelevant expressions of feeling; unsupported fact claims; off-point digressions; self-aggrandizing statements—including affirmations as to how deeply moral one is; self-congratulatory statements; flattery aimed at the instructor; empty rhetoric; purple prose; one’s general views about life, religion, ethics ... or whatever; and so on.
- 9.** Do NOT put any questions in your paper. This includes a prohibition against any rhetorical questions. Write in declarative sentences. Note that one cannot get past this requirement by grafting a question onto the end of what starts out as a declarative sentence and then ending this string of words with a period. For example, “John is wrong about what Bill said because how could he know.”
- 10.** There may be more important issues than can be handled within the compass of a paper of this length. Just use your judgment in selecting the most important things to talk about.
- 11.** Your job is to show mastery of the relevant concepts and the ability to apply them in a thoughtful and insightful analysis. Your grade depends on the quality of your analysis, not which of the two stipulated possible conclusions you reach. In other words, I am interested in how you make your case, not which side of the issue you come down on. However, you must ultimately come down on one side or the other.

Further Instructions

The “Method Guidelines” and “Style Guidelines” provided below are official departmental guidelines for all “Signature Assignments” for the Core Curriculum (which is what this paper is). I am required to adopt those parts of the instructions verbatim in

assigning this paper. In what follows, I explain how to fit the topic that I have given you into those guidelines.

With respect to Method Guideline #1, the “different possible answers” that you are considering are (i) are (ii), i.e. the two possible conclusions that have already been specified in these instructions. (Don’t assume that if you refer to them as (i) or (ii) your reader will know what you are talking about. You will need to set out the substance of the options in your paper.) One of them is the answer you think best and the other is not. This gives you what you need to construct your paper in accord with Method Guidelines #1 and #2. Method Guideline #3 asks you to bring in philosophical concepts referenced in the prompt. These are specified in item 4 in the foregoing instructions.

As for Style Guideline #3, remember, when citing sources, that I am the author of a lot of the handouts that we used. This should be clear from the individual documents.

Method Guidelines

Your answer to the question must not only present your own considered opinion on the matter, but must have a basis in the readings for the course, and be formulated so as to include at least:

1. a comparative examination of two or three different possible answers to the question;
2. a critical analysis of your own position which identifies potential weaknesses in the position and explains what makes that position nevertheless superior in some way to the others considered; and
3. specific reference to ideas, insights, and/or arguments presented by the philosophers assigned in the prompt.

Style Guidelines

1. The paper must be 5 pages long, typed, double-spaced, in an 11- or 12-point font with reasonable margins.
2. The paper must be written in accord with the conventions of Standard Written English. Your paper will be evaluated in part in terms of spelling, grammar, and overall structure.

3. You must use direct quotations from the readings assigned in class to support your claims about what the philosophers say and/or believe. Citations should be in either the MLA or Chicago Manual of Style formats (information on both of which is available on the UHD Library website, under the heading, "Citing Sources"), and as such must give full bibliographical information for your sources in either a "works cited" (MLA) or bibliographical footnotes (Chicago). Quotations should be set off from the rest of the paper (typically by quotation marks), and you must cite the page numbers in the relevant text where the quoted passage appears.
4. Do not assume that the reader of your paper is familiar with what has been read or discussed in this class. Think of your reader as an educated person who, although they may be familiar with philosophy in general, is not necessarily knowledgeable of the texts (or topics) you are discussing in the paper. As such, you should make every effort to explain the ideas you discuss and the quotations you use in straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to your reader.
5. You are responsible for ensuring that your paper is free of plagiarism. If you do not know what constitutes plagiarism, please consult the syllabus for this class, the UHD Student Handbook, the Academic Honesty Policy of the University of Houston-Downtown, and/or the UHD Library website ("Plagiarism: Understand and Avoid It!" in the section, "Citing Sources") . If you are still uncertain, please contact the instructor with any specific questions you might have.
6. The paper must be submitted online (via Blackboard).