

Topics for Paper #4

- Write a paper on *one* of the following topics.
- Length: 5-7 pages (12-point font, double-spaced, and no fiddling with margins.)
- **Revised Deadline:** Due in my Eliot mailbox by 5pm on Monday, December 11. As a matter of official college policy, *no work can be submitted after 5PM on Thursday, December 15.*¹
- **Note:** Please identify the topic you are addressing in your paper.

1. What is the defining doctrine of utilitarianism? What in your view is the strongest rationale for utilitarianism? Present what you take to be the most compelling objection (or pair of objections) to utilitarianism and assess its (or their) force. If you like, you may also consider whether the objection or objections at issue have force against consequentialism.²
2. Williams objects to consequentialism on the grounds that it undermines an individual's integrity. What does Williams' objection amount to? Does it show that the consequentialist criterion for morally right action is incorrect? If not, what problem or problems does Williams raise for the consequentialist? Do you find Williams's objection cogent? Why or why not?
3. Arguing from the perspective of virtue ethics, Foot attempts to dissolve the apparent paradox surrounding agent-centered restrictions (i.e., prohibitions on conduct) and thus dissolve the "spellbinding force" of consequentialism? Why might one think that honoring agent-centered restrictions is irrational? What is Foot's argument for the conclusion that no irrationality is involved in honoring agent-centered restrictions? Is Foot's argument successful? Why or why not?
4. Under what conditions does Kant think that an act has moral worth? Explain the reasons for Kant's view and describe how his view contrasts with Hume's. Whose view do you find more persuasive, and why?
5. Briefly outline the conditions under which, according to Kant, an act has moral worth. Carefully reconstruct Hume's argument for the conclusion that all reasons for action are dependent on the presence of sentiment or desire. If the Humean action theory is correct, yet Kant is right about the conditions under which an act has moral worth, does it follow that morality is an illusion? If so, how should we respond: (1) By accepting that morality is an illusion; (2) By rejecting the Humean action theory; or (3) By rejection Kant's conception of morally worthy conduct? Be sure to explain the reasoning behind your choice.
6. In *Utilitarianism* Mill asserts that "when [Kant] begins to deduce from [the formula of universal law] any of the actual duties of morality, he fails, almost grotesquely, to show that there would be any contradiction, any logical (not to say physical) impossibility, in the adoption by all rational beings of the most outrageously immoral rules of conduct. All he shows is that the consequences of their universal adoption would be such as no one would choose to incur." What problem does Mill see in Kant's moral philosophy? How might Kant respond to this charge? How effective is Mill's objection to Kant?
7. What does Kant mean by the terms 'hypothetical imperative' and 'categorical imperative'? What are Kant's first two formulations of the categorical imperative (the Formula of Universal Law and the Formula of Humanity)? What are the respective advantages and disadvantages of these two formulations? Which formulation do you find more plausible, and why?

¹ For my lateness and extension policy, please see the syllabus for Philosophy 200.

² In writing this paper, remain sensitive to the different varieties of utilitarianism and consequentialism. One nice strategy for this paper would be to raise an objection that has force against a certain variety of utilitarianism (e.g., crude hedonistic utilitarianism), but which does not have force against a more sophisticated variety of utilitarianism (e.g., welfarism) or a sophisticated variety of consequentialism.

8. In “Moral Luck,” Nagel argues that a certain dilemma is embedded in our common moral thought. On the one hand, there seems to be some deep form of incoherence in the thought that moral evaluations can apply to an individual as a result of good or bad luck. On the other hand, if we deny that moral evaluations can apply to an individual on the basis of good or bad fortune, then morality evaporates: we are never suitable objects of moral evaluation. In this paper, you should carefully develop Nagel’s dilemma. In doing so, be sure to characterize what Nagel mean by ‘moral luck’, as well as the four species of moral luck that he identifies? Is Nagel’s dilemma robust, or are there important types of moral evaluation that escape both horns of his dilemma?³

9. In “The Subjectivity of Values,” Mackie states that “[i]f there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the world” (pg. 111). What does Mackie mean by this claim? Why does he believe it to be true? Most importantly, why does he think it has the consequence that there are no moral facts and that, as a consequence, all moral claims are false? Clearly outline what you take to be the strongest response to Mackie’s argument against the existence of moral facts and assess this response for cogency.

10. Harman argues that moral facts do not seem relevant to the explanation of any of our observations and beliefs. Sturgeon disagrees. Describe the reasons that Harman and Sturgeon offer for their differing positions. Whose position do you find more persuasive, and why?

11. Provided that your topic is based on readings that have been assigned for the ethics portion Philosophy 200, you are permitted to formulate a topic of your own or revise one of the above. To avail yourself of this option, you must formulate your prompt in writing and receive explicit permission from me to pursue it.⁴

³ If you like, you can explore how Kant might respond to Nagel’s dilemma.

⁴ I am quite happy to work with you in revising potential topics. If you want to explore this option, I strongly recommend that you contact me soon.