

PHIL02
Introduction to Philosophy: Morals and Politics

First Paper Assignment

Provide a clear and concise response to **one** of the following questions in a 2-4 page paper (500-1000 words):

1. Suppose I have a friend who comes from the distant sovereign state of Selfishstan, where it is believed by most people that there is nothing wrong with putting one's own interests before the interests of others. My own community's standards, however, suggest that one ought (at least *some* of the time) to put others before herself. Now imagine that I see my friend behaving selfishly, and feel inclined to criticize her. Two of the theories that we have discussed—cultural relativism and psychological egoism—will likely maintain that my friend is doing nothing wrong. Explain and evaluate the way in which these two theories attempt to show that my friend's behavior is morally acceptable. Your discussion should address the following considerations:
 - How would a cultural relativist argue that my friend's behavior is morally permissible?
 - How would a psychological egoist argue that my friend's behavior is morally permissible?
 - What sorts of theoretical difficulties might these approaches face?

2. While Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau disagree about several aspects of the state of nature, they agree in their rejection of the account given by philosophical anarchism. Compare and evaluate these views, focusing on the following:
 - How do Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau describe the nature? What specific similarities and differences characterize their views?
 - How *exactly* do philosophical anarchists differ from Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau? What claim do the latter philosophers all make that the anarchist rejects?
 - How do anarchists explain the emergence of antisocial behavior, and how do they argue that we can address it without leaving the state of nature?
 - Wolff argues that "nothing genuinely worthy of being called a state of nature will, at least in the long term, be a condition in which human beings can flourish" (p. 33). Why?

ASSIGNMENT AIM: This paper is assigned as an exercise in bringing competing philosophical views together in a critical discussion. You should maintain a high level of expository rigor while developing your discussion in such a way as to allow your reader to clearly see the areas in which the two philosophers you discuss agree and/or disagree. *You need not develop your own arguments here, though you may. Your original views will not factor into the evaluation*—only the extent to which you effectively develop a discourse between your selected philosophers will be considered. I will, however, offer comments on original arguments that you include.

FORMAT: The paper must be typed, double spaced, stapled, and submitted to me by the beginning of class on the date specified on course syllabus. Late papers will be subject to the policy stated in the course syllabus. E-mailed papers will only be accepted with prior approval.

EVALUATIVE CRITERIA:

Organization, Clarity and Concision (33%):

When reconstructing a complex philosophical position, effective *organization* is essential. Your paper should begin with a brief introduction that includes a clear, easily identifiable thesis statement. 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.

Your prose should be *clear*, such that your reader has no difficulty understanding you. One effective strategy for ensuring this involves giving your paper to a friend to read. If they can follow your discussion from start to finish, even without knowing anything about your topic, then your paper is likely clear and well-organized.

Finally, your discussion should be *concise*. One of the key skills involved in this paper is determining what is necessary to convey the argument, and what is not. As much as possible, limit the scope of your discussion to what is necessary to answer the question asked. That being said, it is entirely possible to include *too little* in your discussion—make sure that you have completely answered the question. You might feel like you are repeating yourself somewhat—this is not necessarily a problem for philosophical writing.

Substantive Accuracy (34%):

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 (33%):

This paper requires you to demonstrate how two or more philosophical positions relate to one another. The best papers will be those that effectively and explicitly show how the views are similar or different with respect to the chosen topic. This involves more than merely giving expositions of each view—it involves explicitly comparing and contrasting them.

It is expected that all questions and concerns regarding this assignment will be brought to my attention BEFORE the due date.

*****A note on spelling and grammar:** It is expected that your paper will be free from all spelling and grammatical errors. Stylistic errors will not carry a penalty, but they may affect your grade to the extent that they compromise the clarity of your prose.

It's a good idea to use the spell-check and grammar-check of your word processing program, but this may not guarantee that your paper is free of stylistic problems. Proofreading is *strongly* recommended.