

Ethics 24.231 Paper Topics – Second Short Paper – **DUE OCT. 26TH by the BEGINNING of class.**

Please write a short (~1200 word) paper addressing **one** of the following topics. As before, you may choose to answer only **some parts** of a question, but you must be clear about what parts you are addressing.

- (1) Reconstruct and assess Gilbert Harman’s argument for a version of normative moral relativism in section 8 of “What Is Moral Relativism?” (pp. 152-156). Is the argument sound? Does the version of normative moral relativism Harman defends avoid the objection he considers in section 5 (as Harman argues it does)? Do you find his view plausible?
- (2) In “Moral Relativism,” Philippa Foot argues for a *limited* moral relativism. She argues that the model provided by relativism about judgments concerning *taste* shows that relativism isn’t threatened by some of the objections most frequently leveled against it: in particular, it doesn’t commit one to the view that the very same act might be right if it were performed in one culture or time and wrong if performed in another; and it doesn’t entail that we can’t hold onto our moral judgments or “put our weight behind them.” Why does Foot think moral relativism avoids these conclusions? And what, according to Foot, sets limits on what could count as a true moral judgment, even if some degree of moral relativism must be acknowledged? What do *you* think we can learn from the comparison between moral relativism to relativism about judgments of taste, to which Foot appeals?
- (3) In the selection from *Utilitarianism* that we read, Mill attempts to defend his theory against the objection that a moral view that supposes life to have no higher end than pleasure is “a doctrine worthy only of swine.”

Mill argues, “[I]t is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides.” (p. 301)

Examine Mill’s argument in response to the objection. Do you agree with his conclusions? Are they justified by or compatible with his utilitarianism?
- (4) Is the best account of what makes someone’s life go well provided by a *hedonist*, *desire-satisfaction*, or *objective list theory* of well-being? Why? What version of the theory is most plausible? In addition to describing the strengths of the account of well-being you defend, be sure to consider the strongest objections to it, and to explain why you think the account can survive those objections.
- (5) Reconstruct and assess Norcross’ preliminary argument against ‘Less’, the claim that no amount of minor headaches is worse than a premature, innocent death. (Look at section II, in particular.)

If you have not already done so, please read Jim Pryor’s “Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper,” before you begin work on your paper.

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