

**PHIL08  
ETHICS**

**First Paper Assignment**

Provide a clear and concise response to **one** of the following questions in a 2-3 page paper (500-750 words):

1. We have discussed the Divine Command Theory as a possible method for explaining and understanding moral obligations. Explain how the theory is supposed to work, and discuss its plausibility. Your discussion should address the following considerations:
  - Why might a view like this be appealing in the first place?
  - How does Plato's discussion of piety in the *Euthyphro* raise problems for the Divine Command Theory? What is the dilemma that he raises for the Divine Command Theorist?
  
2. Emotivism enjoyed considerable popularity as a metaethical position in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Explain how this theory threatens the objectivity of our moral judgments, as well as how it poses a more formidable challenge than simple subjectivism. Finally, discuss the plausibility of emotivism. Your discussion should address the following considerations:
  - How is emotivism distinct from simple subjectivism?
  - Why is moral objectivity impossible, according to emotivists?
  - What are some of the theoretical difficulties that emotivism faces?
  
3. Psychological egoism has been a traditional source of concern for ethicists, because it seems to threaten the significance of most of our moral claims. Explain why this is so, as well as why psychological egoism ultimately fails to overturn the possibility of moral discourse. Your discussion should address the following considerations:
  - What *exactly* does psychological egoism assert about human nature?
  - Why does psychological egoism threaten moral discourse?
  - What are the key arguments against psychological egoism?

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**ASSIGNMENT AIM:** The aim of this paper is to develop your ability to find arguments in the text and reconstruct them in a clear and concise manner. You should devote your discussion exclusively to these ends—critical analysis of the arguments you describe is *not* a component of this assignment, and will not be considered in the evaluation of your paper.

**FORMAT:** The paper must be typed, double spaced, stapled, and submitted to me by the beginning of class on Thursday, July 15. 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:

### Spelling and Grammar (10%):

It is expected that your paper will be free from all spelling and grammatical errors. You should absolutely use the spell-check and grammar-check of your word processing program, but this may not guarantee that your paper is free of spell and grammar problems. Proofreading is *strongly* recommended.

### Organization, Clarity and Concision (30%):

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 (60%):

Your discussion should *accurately* describe the views relevant to the topic you choose. Do not attribute claims to Socrates, for example, that Socrates does not make. As this is a short paper, you should avoid using lengthy textual citations into your discussion. The important thing to focus on here is communicating the relevant arguments *in your own words*. You may cite the text, but should do so sparingly. If you choose to include citations they *must* be accompanied by information indicating their location in the text.

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