

TOPICS FOR THE THIRD (and final!) PAPER

Write a short essay of 3-4 pages (2100-2700) words) on *one* of the following topics.

Papers are due on Session 26 (last class)

In writing your papers, please attend to the paper guidelines for the class.

1. Kant wants to ground morality in the following principle: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law." Explain the meaning of this principle and how and why Kant thinks this principle can ground morality. Then critically assess the principle. In your assessment, consider some (but perhaps not all) of the following questions: are there maxims that can be universalized yet are not morally permissible? Are there moral actions that are not universalizable? Does this principle permit special obligations (obligations to friends and family, etc.)?
2. In his essay, *The Subjection of Women*, Mill argues that neither custom nor nature support the social and political subjection of women to men. (e.g., para 12/25, p. 272 hp. 17) What would it mean for men and women to have what he calls "perfect equality." Explicate and critically evaluate his arguments for the conclusion in support of equality. What role does his utilitarianism play in his argument? Do his arguments rely on utilitarian premises? (If so, please explain how, if not, what normative premises do they rely on?) Are they consistent with utilitarian premises?
3. Suppose you have made a promise to your Uncle Bert that when he dies you will make sure that his will is followed exactly as written and all requests are honored. Uncle Bert dies. It turns out that he is a millionaire and he leaves all his money to you, but also asks that you make sure it is donated to the pet cemetery up the street so that pets can be buried in glorious splendor. You are not legally bound to this request, however, so you have a choice. For example, you can keep your promise and give all of his money to the pet cemetery; you can keep all the money for yourself; or you can distribute the money to various causes, etc. *What should you do, and why?* (Note that this is not asking what you *would* do, but what you *morally ought* to do.) Recall that Aristotle maintains that the source of moral value lies in a person's character; Kant maintains that it lies in the will of the agent in acting; Mill claims that it lies in the consequences of the action. In giving your own answer, compare and contrast two of these authors on the questions.
4. In Ch. 1 of *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois answers (in part) the question "How does it feel to be a problem?" with the observation that:

...the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (DuBois *The Souls of Black Folk*, 4/114)

What does Du Bois mean by "double-consciousness"? Explain his idea using concrete examples. How is this experience of "double consciousness," connected, in Du Bois's discussion, with racial injustice? Does Du Bois offer a vision of true racial emancipation? What does it look like? Is "double consciousness" removed? How?

Kant, Immanuel. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals: K ith On a Supposed Right to Lie because of Philanthropic Concerns*. 3rd Edition. Translated by James W. Ellington. Hackett Publishing, 1993. © Hackett Publishing. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

Du Bois, W. E. B., David W. Blight, and Robert Gooding-Williams. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Bedford Books, 1997. © Bedford Books. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

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