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24.120 Moral Psychology
Spring 2009

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First Assignment

Due: Friday 20th February

Answer all three questions. Answers should be around 6 pages. You can distribute the pages as you like, but a good answer to any of the questions is likely to take at least a page. You need to read Joel Feinberg's 'Psychological Egoism'; a pdf of the article is available on the class webpage.

1. Feinberg argues (pp. 496–7) that in certain cases the result of pleasure from an action 'provides rather conclusive proof that the action was *unselfish*'. Spell out the details of his argument here as clearly as you can, and provide an assessment of it.
2. On pp. 503–5 Feinberg accuses certain psychological egoists of committing 'the Fallacy of the Suppressed Correlative'. What is this fallacy supposed to be? Is it a genuine fallacy? If not, why not? If it is, is the psychological egoist guilty of committing it?
3. How much light can be shed on the truth of psychological egoism by recent empirical work? Does the work demonstratively show that it is false? Could any empirical work show that? Does it provide grounds for something weaker?