

Paper Assignment 1

Topics: You have a lot of latitude in your choice of a topic. First, you can choose any one of the following topics:

1. Which view is more plausible, moral realism or expressivism? Of course, give reasons for your claim, and attempt to anticipate and rebut opposing arguments that might be made.
2. According to Smith, anyone who affirms (a) that moral judgments can be true or false and (2) that some moral judgments are true is a moral realist. (Let us call the proposition expressed by the previous sentence, from 'According' through 'realist.', proposition 1.) Blackburn satisfies Smith's two-part criterion. (Let us call the proposition expressed by the previous sentence, from 'Blackburn' through 'criterion.', proposition 2.) Propositions 1 and 2 are both true. Answer the following questions:
 - a. What is the evidence, in the text, that proposition 1 is true?
 - b. What is the evidence, in the text, that proposition 2 is true?
 - c. Is it right to see Smith and Blackburn as essentially agreeing that moral realism is true?
 - d. If so, (i) why? and (ii) how can this be reconciled with the general perception that moral realism and expressivism are opposing views? If not, (i) how can the criterion for being a moral realist be specified more narrowly (than Smith specifies it) so that Blackburn does not meet the criterion? and (ii) would this narrower criterion probably be welcomed or rejected by Smith, as an accurate characterization of moral realism?
3. According to Quinn, an important objection to divine command theory is that one who affirms such a theory of ethics is thereby committed to claiming that he or she can easily prove the existence of God. Answer the following questions:
 - a. What is the basis of this objection? (In other words, explain the objection a little bit.)
 - b. What is Quinn's response to it? Explain Quinn's response in your own words—do not quote Quinn so much that your own grasp of his response is not clearly demonstrated.
 - c. Is Quinn's response convincing? As always, give reasons for your assessment.
4. Rachels anticipates and replies to several interconnected objections having to do with moral disagreement, relativism, and (though he does not use this word) parochialism. Distinguish among these strands of Rachels's thought—the various replies to objections he gives—and explain whether his replies are successful.
5. Both Smith and Rachels anticipate and reply to the Open Question Argument as an objection to their respective positions. Answer the following questions.
 - a. What is the Open Question Argument?
 - b. What do Smith and Rachels have in common that accounts for their both seeing the Open Question Argument as important to refute?
 - c. Are there any substantive differences between the responses of Smith and Rachels?
 - d. Whose response is more successful? As always, give reasons for your assessment.
6. McMahan defends reflective equilibrium as a method of arriving at justified moral beliefs. Is his defense successful, or are there objections to reflective equilibrium that he does not address adequately?

Second, you can choose any one of the following topics:

7. State and argue for one or two significant objections to Smith's view. (Limit yourself to one or two objections that you can pursue thoroughly, rather than stating too many objections and having to handle some or all of them too briefly.)

8. same as topic 7, but for Blackburn
9. same as topic 7, but for Quinn
10. same as topic 7, but for Rachels
11. same as topic 7, but for McMahan

Third, you can propose a topic to me, and if I approve it, you can use it. If you want to do this, send your proposed topic to me by e-mail, and I'll let you know whether it's acceptable.

Length: Your paper should not be more than 2,000 words long.

A note on word counts: How word counts are computed depends on the circumstances. For a journal concerned about the cost of materials (e.g., paper and ink), word counts might include every single word. In contrast, our purposes have to do with establishing a level playing field for everyone in the class to express his or her ideas within the same constraints as everyone else. So, word counts do not have to include identifying text you should put at the beginning of everything you write for this course, or any bibliography which you might have occasion to put at the end of a paper. But they must include every word directly contributing to the content of the paper—including, for example, a paper's title, section titles (if applicable), regular text (of course), and footnote text. You do not have to have a bibliography—you can put citations in footnotes if you want—but if you are pressed for space then you can move the details of citations to a bibliography and not be “charged” for the words that appear there.

More on word counts: Word-count limits will be strictly enforced. If your paper is longer than 2,000 words, its score will be reduced by $100 \times \frac{n - 2,000}{2,000}$ percentage points, or (simplified) $\frac{n}{20} - 100$ percentage points.

Formatting your document: At the beginning of your paper, include at least the following identifying information: your anonymity-preserving random number, the date when you are turning your paper in, the number of the topic on which you are writing (a number between 1 and 11), your paper's version number (1, 2, or 3), and your paper's word count. Note that the date as well as the version number (and probably the word count) will need to be updated as you move from one version to the next.

Stylistic expectations: Every version of your paper should be a finished, polished piece of philosophical writing. Additionally, it should be written as if intended for the general philosophical reader, not just for me or the members of this class.

Formatting your files: If you turn in any version of your paper to me electronically, it should be in a file whose format is .doc—that is, the format associated with Microsoft Word's versions 97 through 2003. If you use Word 2007, please take care to use the .doc format rather than the .docx format (the format associated with Word 2007) for work that you turn in. Note that merely changing a filename extension (from, e.g., .docx or .wpd) will not change the format of the file itself. Versions of Word capable of saving files in the .doc format are available on most, if not all, of the computers in KU's computer labs, and many other word processors than Word are also capable of saving files in the .doc format.

Tasks and deadlines: Here is how the process will work.

Starting on Monday, September 14, I'll bring to class a sign-up sheet on which you can claim an anonymity-preserving random number. Your number, instead of your name, is what you'll put on your paper to identify it. That way, when I grade version 2 of the papers, I won't know who wrote which paper (for the most part, at least).

Starting on Wednesday, September 16, I'll bring to class a sign-up sheet on which you can sign up for an appointment with me during the week of September 28.

Version 1 of your paper will be due in class on Wednesday, September 23. You will bring four hard copies to class—one for each of as many as three of your classmates for peer reviewing, and one to turn in to me. (You can also turn it in to me by e-mailing it to me by 12 noon on that day.)

Version 2 of your paper will be due in class on Friday, September 25. (You can also turn it in by e-mailing it to me by 12 noon on that day.) You just need to bring one hard copy to class. But when you are preparing this hard copy, you should also prepare an identical one for yourself, since you will need it for when we meet.

During the week of September 28, you will meet with me to discuss version 2 of your paper. In anticipation of these meetings, I want to emphasize a few things about them.

1. You must bring to our meeting an exact duplicate of what you turned in on September 25. We'll be going over the text of your paper closely, and it'll be important for you to be able to see the text I'm talking about and to make notations on your own copy of it.
2. It'll be important for you to be clear about the purpose of meeting with me. Some students treat their meetings with me as opportunities to offer further, oral, arguments in support of the claims they make in their papers. But in these meetings, I'm not interested in hearing you supplement, orally, whatever you attempted to accomplish in writing. Instead, I'm interested in helping you make the next (and final) version of your paper as good as possible. Remember, I am the person who's going to be grading that next version of your paper. You should use your meeting with me as an opportunity to find out what changes you can make to make the final version of your paper get as good a grade as possible.
3. If you miss your originally scheduled meeting with me (whether for a good reason or a bad one), it is not necessarily the case that I will have time to schedule another one with you. If we do not have our meeting, the deadline stated below, for version 3, will still apply.

Version 3 of your paper will be due in class on Monday, September 30. (You can also turn it in by e-mailing it to me by 12 noon on that day.)

These deadlines will be strictly enforced: late papers' scores will be reduced by 25 percentage points for each full or partial day of lateness (with each "day" starting at 12 noon).