

## **Instructions for Moral Issue Journal**

*Revised Nov. 6, 2014*

### **Due Dates**

First entry: Friday, Sept. 19 by 5pm

Second entry (Mill/consequentialism): Friday, Oct. 3, by 5pm

Third entry (Kant): Friday, Oct. 31, by 5pm

Last entry (Aristotle/virtue ethics): Friday, Nov. 28, by 5pm—**this one is optional (see below)**

***New on Nov. 6, 2014:*** The last journal assignment is optional in the following sense. You can choose one of the following options:

- (1) You can decide not to do it, and I will just average the marks from the first three to get a score for the 10% of your course mark that the journal counts for; or
- (2) You can do the last journal entry, and I will count the score if it is higher than your lowest score on the three other journal assignments. If that's the case, I will average all four scores for the 10% for the journal. If the score on the fourth journal assignment *is* lower than any of your other scores, the fourth journal score is dropped and your overall journal grade will just be the average of the first three scores.

### **Purposes**

1. One reason for this assignment is to provide an opportunity and incentive to connect what we are studying in the course to your life outside of it. My hope is that, in addition to thinking critically about what the philosophers are saying about morality, you will also reflect on and possibly alter how you approach moral issues. This need not mean that you take on one or more of the theories and use it as your personal moral approach (though this may happen); it could just mean that thinking philosophically about morality could change your own moral thinking in even small and subtle ways. The journal is a chance for you to spend time thinking about whether and how that might be the case.
2. Another reason is to find out if and how the moral theories we're discussing in class can be applied to everyday life or social, political, economic or other issues.
3. Finally, the moral issue journal provides a space for you to test out, think through, some ideas about these theories that you can use in your term paper and possibly in the final exam as well.

**What should be in the entries?** See the list below for each entry. You'll pick one moral issue/dilemma to focus on for all entries, but you'll be doing different things with it in each entry.

**Length:** Each entry should be a minimum of 350 words, maximum 800. It is not necessarily the case that longer = better. See the marking criteria for what I'll look for in these entries.

### **How to submit your entries**

All journal entries will be on the blog space of the class website. This site is open to the public, but you have the option to either blog under a pseudonym, password-protect your posts so that only other people in the class can read them, or make the posts private so that only Christina and the TA can see them. See the separate sheet with instructions on how to do each of those things, posted on the course website under "Assignments": <http://blogs.ubc.ca/phil230>

How to make posts on the course website is explained in a video that will be posted as soon as possible to the course website. See the “journal instructions” page under the “Assignments” menu at the top of the course website.

### Marking criteria

Each entry can earn up to 10 marks so the journal is worth a total of 40 marks (and counts as 10% of your final course mark). Entries will be marked according to the following criteria. Note that the *content* of what you say, with the exception of whether or not you’re making mistakes in the philosophers’ views, does not count as part of your mark.

9-10 marks = exceptional, outstanding; 8 marks = very good; 7 marks = good; 6 marks = adequate; 1-5 marks = inadequate; 0 marks = not turned in.

- *Clarity*: is it easy to tell what you are saying, or hard to understand your point?
- *Depth*: do you seem to have barely scratched the surface of what you are discussing, or have you gone into some depth in thinking and writing about it? This need not mean you must write *more*, since you can bring up interesting and subtle points without lots of words.
- *Accuracy*: when you are discussing the theories we are studying in the class, are you making important mistakes in what the philosophers are saying?
- *Completeness*: have you addressed all the parts of what you are to do for each entry?

**Late entries:** All entries that are turned in after the due dates above will be given a one mark penalty per weekday late (and one for a weekend as a whole), unless you have a valid excuse. Excuses for late work may require documentation. You must turn in a **Late Work Form** with any late entries (see course web site, under “assignments”); send it via email to Christina: [c.hendricks@ubc.ca](mailto:c.hendricks@ubc.ca)

### Instructions for first entry (due: Friday, Sept. 19, by 5pm)

- 1a. Choose a moral issue to focus your journal on as a whole, and describe it here. It should be something that needs an answer as to what should be done, not just a general topic. This could be a dilemma that someone might encounter in his/her personal life (perhaps it’s something you are facing, or have faced, but it need not be). Or, it could be an issue that is in the public realm at the moment, such as a moral issue related to politics, to conflict or war, to health and medicine, or anything else you find in the news or care about. It could be something that isn’t happening now, but has in the past. Or, it could be something that might happen in the future (it should be somewhat realistic, though).
- 1b. Pick one possible answer to the dilemma, even if it’s not the one you yourself are certain you’d choose (though it could be, of course). Imagine that you’re deciding that that is the correct course of action, and explain the answer you’ve chosen.
- 1c. Reflect on and discuss the reasons one might have for giving the answer in 1b, above. In particular, explain what values or rules might underlie that decision. For example, a rule such as “help others when it doesn’t cost you much to do so” might be relevant, or the value of human life, or of interpersonal relationships, or any of a number of possible values.
- 1d. Make an attempt to justify one or more of the rules or values discussed in 1c. What reason(s) could be given why this is a good rule to have, or why the value stated is actually something we should value? This is not an easy task! Just do your best to come up with something one might say someone else objected that the rule or value you state is not actually a good one to have.
- 1e. Discuss briefly if there are any questions or potential problems that come up for you after doing the earlier parts of this entry. If not, leave this section empty.

**Instructions for second entry (due: Friday Oct. 3, by 5pm)**

- 2a. Consider and discuss whether anything has changed in the view you discussed in 1b or 1c, above. If so, explain what, and whether anything in the course so far has influenced this change. If not, state that nothing has changed and move on to the next part.
- 2b. Explain what a utilitarian who agrees with Mill's view might say about
- how to address the dilemma you're discussing
  - the rules or values listed in 1c, above (or revised in 2a)—how (if at all) could a utilitarian justify these rules or values using Mill's theory?
- 2c. Are there any rules or values in 1c, above (or revised in 2a), that a utilitarian may not be able to justify, using Mill's theory? If so, pick one and make an initial attempt to justify it in some other way. How can you argue for the validity of this value or rule? Why is this rule or value a good one to hold?
- Even if there are no rules or values that a utilitarian could not justify using Mill's theory, pick one and attempt to justify it in another way anyway, to see how else one might ground the rule or value.
- 2d. Discuss briefly if there are any questions or potential problems that come up for you after doing the earlier parts of this entry. If not, leave this section empty.

**Instructions for third entry (due: Friday, Oct. 31, by 5pm)**

- 3a. Consider and discuss whether anything in your view of how to address this issue has changed since your second entry (anything in 1c, 1d, or 2a, above). If so, explain what, and whether anything in the course so far has influenced this change. If not, state that nothing has changed and move on to the next part.
- 3b. Explain what a Kantian (following Kant's view) might say about
- how to address the dilemma you're discussing
  - the rules or values listed in 1c, above (or revised in 2a or 3a)--how (if at all) could a Kantian justify these rules or values using Kant's theory?
- 3c. Discuss similarities (if any) and differences between what a utilitarian who agrees with Mill might say in regard to this dilemma (2b, above), and a Kantian who agrees with Kant might say (3b, above). Do you find one or the other approach to this dilemma to be better in some way? If so, explain. If not, say why not.
- 3d. Discuss briefly if there are any questions or potential problems that come up for you after doing the earlier parts of this entry. If not, leave this section empty.

**Instructions for fourth and final entry (due: Friday, Nov. 28, by 5pm)—this is OPTIONAL (see above)**

*The instructions for this entry have been revised from the first version of the assignment; since it's now optional, I think it is acceptable to do so at this late date. I just took something out of 4b.*

- 4a. Consider and discuss whether anything in your view of how to address this issue has changed since your third entry (anything in 1c, 1d, 2a, or 3a, above). If so, explain what, and whether anything in the course so far has influenced this change. If not, state that nothing has changed and move on to the next part.
- 4b. Explain what a virtue ethicist (who follows any of the views we studied since Kant) might say about how to address the dilemma you're discussing.
- 4c. **THIS SECTION IS OPTIONAL!** Discuss similarities (if any) and differences between what a virtue ethicist might say in regards to your moral issue (4b, above) and what a utilitarian or Kantian might say (2b or 3b, above). Do you find the virtue ethics approach to this dilemma to be better in some way than either utilitarianism or Kantianism? If so, explain. If not, say why not.

- 4d. Discuss briefly if there are any questions or potential problems that come up for you after doing the earlier parts of this entry. If not, leave this section empty.
- 4e. **[If you do this entry, this part is not optional]** Reflect on and discuss what you now think of the relationship between moral theory and moral practice, after having written all these journal entries. Is studying moral theory helpful to approaching moral questions you face in your own life? If so, how? If not, why not? (Remember that *what* you say in your answers doesn't matter to your mark—I really want to hear your honest opinion!)