

PHRE 188: Ethics, Section 3

Assignment 3 – To be done in class, collaboratively, Wednesday, February 25.

How Great is Happiness?

(note: if you can't be in class, then please complete an alternative version of this assignment, as noted below.)

Instructions: I have to be out of town Feb. 25. Please read Voltaire's "The Good Brahmin" and Ursula LeGuin's "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" for that day, and consider the following questions. Be prepared to discuss these questions with a small group (5 or 6 people), and to help draft a collaborative document (as described below) about the results of your discussion. Here are the questions to be considered:

- In both Voltaire and LeGuin's stories, the suggestion seems to be that something matters more than happiness—both at the individual and the societal level. What else matters (according to each author)? How is this illustrated in each story? If these authors are right, does this reveal a deep problem with utilitarianism? (Or are the authors simply wrong in thinking that something matters more than happiness?)

On Feb. 25, you will come to class and break down into about 10-12 groups (of 5-6 people) so that you can discuss your thoughts about the readings and the questions above face to face with some of your peers. (Please make sure you put the room back together at the end of the class period. If groups want to move to other parts of the building (e.g. next to the convenience store or to tables on the first floor), that's ok. Just be sure not to disrupt other classes or people working in their offices.) Someone in each group should assume the role of "secretary" and will be in charge of writing the "collaborative document" that highlights the results of your discussion.

This document should be a record of the group's discussion of the questions above. There needn't be agreement here, but the group should decide which interpretations and responses should be set down (say, as the major alternatives) in the group document. That said, the point of this project is to have a fruitful discussion with your peers, so don't obsess about getting the document just right. Make sure it reflects the important aspects of your discussion, and anything interesting that happened. Also, you are all responsible for making sure that everyone in your group is given a chance to contribute to the discussion.

Everyone's name should appear on the document for a given group, and someone responsible should hold onto it, and to turn it in on Friday, Feb. 27. (If a group decides to use a laptop, then a printed copy is fine, but not required.)

People who can't be in class on Feb. 25: write a regular response paper (2-3 pages, following the usual General Instructions) that addresses the questions above about the stories and how they can be seen as posing a challenge to utilitarianism. (You can also think about whether the utilitarian has a good response to the challenge.) This paper should be turned in on Feb. 27.

General Instructions for Short Assignments:

All assignments should be **2-3 pages, typed, double-spaced**, in a **standard 10 or 12 point font** (e.g. Times New Roman, Arial), with **1" margins, stapled**, and turned in in class on the day they are due. Be sure to address all parts of the assignment, and that your essay is well-organized.

Make sure your introductory and concluding remarks do real work and are not just inessential fluff. Do not provide biographical summaries of authors unless doing so is directly relevant to the assignment. Omit fine phrases such as, "Philosophers have been thinking about X for many millennia..." Please avoid the temptation to use relativism as a way to avoid critical thinking: e.g. "Oh, well, this is too hard and there are so many opinions about it that there's probably no answer, and so it just depends on how you feel." This is what we call "pooping out." There might be issues on which truths are relative, but there are clearer ways to articulate that point. Besides, the truth that some issue is relative would not itself "depend on how you feel."

You are encouraged *not* to use any secondary sources on these papers; however, any material you use should be cited in an appropriate way (following, for example MLA or Chicago Style). Citations for quotations from the Pojman anthology can simply be given at the end of the quotation (or sentence) in parentheses.

In addition, please do your best to use *inclusive language* when writing: we are not just a mankind, but rather a **humankind**, not just *men*, but rather **persons** or **humans**. Instead of always using the male third person singular *he*, try switching (in a way that makes sense) between *he* and **she**, or using the gender-neutral pronoun **one**. Ditto for the third person singular possessive (*his* and **her**). ("One-speak" can be awkward and stylistically clunky, as can always writing "he or she," "him or her"; you don't need to do this to the point of awkwardness; just try to keep in mind that the generic person isn't always or essentially a *he*...)
