

PHIL 260: Ethics
Winter 2006; David O. Brink
Persons & Values
Paper #2

Remember, students taking the seminar for credit are to write two papers for the course: one short paper, approximately 6-8 pages, and one longer paper in two drafts, with the revision being approximately 14-16 pages. Most of you have already written your short paper and now need to begin a draft of a longer paper (at least one of you has already submitted a draft of the long paper and will need to think about a topic for the shorter paper). Many of the paper topics already posted (Paper #1) could serve as the basis for a long paper. Here are some more possible topics. As before, you are welcome to devise your own topic provided you consult with me and get approval of your topic in advance. Please submit your drafts in class on Thursday, March 9. I should be able to return your draft with comments by Monday, March 13. The revision would be due by Monday, March 20. (If necessary, we could perhaps push these dates back 2-3 days, but no more. Let me know in advance if you are unable to keep to the preferred timetable.)

1. How, if at all, should the truth of reductionism affect our views about personal responsibility and punishment? Should it lead us to expand or contract our conception of the scope of responsibility and justified punishment? Why? How revisionary should the affect of reductionism on issues of responsibility be?
2. How, if at all, might acceptance of psychological reductionism affect our views about the nature of promissory obligation and other personal commitments? Discuss in the context of Parfit's Russian Nobleman example.
3. Does the prudential demand of temporal neutrality make sense for intrapersonal conflicts of value? Should our answer be affected by the truth of psychological reductionism? Discuss the views of Nagel and Parfit.
4. What bearing, if any, would the truth of psychological reductionism have on our understanding of the nature, scope, and significance of corporate agency? In this context, you might want to discuss the claims of Carol Rovane in The Bounds of Agency.
5. In Nicomachean Ethics bk. i, ch. 7 Aristotle appeals to the human function to argue that eudaimonia must be a life of activity expressing reason. How does he determine what the human function is, and how, if at all, is his metaphysical biology relevant here? Is it good for humans to perform the human function?
6. Many commentators see a conflict between the strict intellectualist conception of eudaimonia in NE x, 7-8 and the comprehensive conception in the rest of NE and, especially, NE i. Explain these two conceptions and their apparent incompatibility. What are Aristotle's reasons for his apparently intellectualist claims? Do you see any way of reconciling his various claims about eudaimonia?

7. Some of Aristotle's virtues -- in particular, justice -- are other-regarding moral virtues. But he also believes that the virtues are part of, and so contribute to, the agent's own happiness or eudaimonia. How can Aristotle maintain both claims? Are moral virtues eudaimonic virtues? How, if at all, does his discussion of friendship help here?

8. Aristotle believes that in the most complete form of friendship – virtue-friendship – one friend is a second self to the other and cares for the friend as he cares for himself (NE 1168b2-6, 1170b6-9). How are we to understand this analogy between self-concern and other-concern? Does Aristotle assimilate other-concern to self-concern or vice versa? Irwin and Brink interpret Aristotle as justifying concern from-the-inside-out, whereas Whiting interprets him as justifying concern from-the-outside-in. What are the comparative attractions of these two different strategies, as interpretive and/or substantive proposals?

9. Following Bernard Williams, Sam Scheffler argues that utilitarianism does not incorporate the natural independence of the personal point of view and that only a moderate moral theory, incorporating agent-centered prerogatives, can do so. How does Scheffler understand the demands of moderation and prerogatives? Is a moderate theory the best response to the personal point of view?