

American Philosophy
Essay Question 1
Spring 2017

Part I: 1-2 Pages

Do you have a moral philosophy? Do you have a set of principles you assume when judging the actions of family, friends and public figures? Do you try to live by these principles? Try to articulate at least 3 such rules. Give one example in which you blamed someone for “transgressing” one of these rules (by lying, cheating, hurting someone or whatever). And give another example in which you wanted to do something but didn’t do it precisely because it violated one of “your rules.”

Do you have a justification for this moral philosophy? Do you think it is self-evident or do feel as though it needs defense when challenged by those who don't accept your moral view? Is it uniquely well supported by “the facts” or do you think of it as one of several moral codes or outlooks you might adopt, each one of which is equally well supported by what you take to be “the facts.”

Does American have a moral philosophy? Is there a philosophy, morality or (to speak in full generality) *ideology* that the citizens of the United States largely share, and largely regard as characteristically American? (What about residents who are not recognized as citizens but still think of themselves as American? What does this shared self-conception involve?) Is there a set of principles or some general outlook over which Americans “bond” in an intellectual sense of this expression? Or is there nothing beyond their shared citizenry and/or long-term residency that unites those who think of themselves as Americans?

Part II: 1-2 Pages

Explain Locke’s theory of natural rights in broad outline. Make sure to discuss how Locke uses the idea of natural rights to argue for five requirements a legislature must meet for the men who compose it to properly exercise the power to articulate, ratify and enforce rules with violence. These are:

(1) Uniform rules for governed and government; (2) Rules must be set for [utilitarian](#) ends; (3) No Taxation without representation; (4) No legislative transference of legislative power to an unrepresentative person or body; (5) Separation of Legislative from Executive into distinct persons or bodies of people.

§2.11.142-3. “These are the bounds which the trust that is put in them by the society and the law of God and Nature have set to the legislative power of every commonwealth, in all forms of government. First: They are to govern by promulgated established laws, not to be varied in particular cases, but to have one rule for rich and poor, for the favourite at Court, and the countryman at plough. Secondly: These laws also ought to be designed for no other end ultimately but the good of the people. Thirdly: They must not raise taxes on the property of the people without the consent of the people given by themselves or their

deputies. Fourthly: Legislative neither must nor can transfer the power of making laws to anybody else, or place it anywhere but where the people have. because it may be too great temptation to human frailty, apt to grasp at power, for the same persons who have the power of making laws to have also in their hands the power to execute them, whereby they may exempt themselves from obedience to the laws they make, and suit the law, both in its making and execution, to their own private advantage, and thereby come to have a distinct interest from the rest of the community, contrary to the end of society and government. Therefore in well-ordered commonwealths, where the good of the whole is so considered as it ought, the legislative power is put into the hands of divers persons who, duly assembled, have by themselves, or jointly with others, a power to make laws, which when they have done, being separated again, they are themselves subject to the laws they have made; which is a new and near tie upon them to take care that they make them for the public good.”

Part III: 1-2 pages

Suppose X steals something from you for an “unworthy” end. (It’s not like she needs your car to get to the hospital, or anything remotely like that.) You say X wronged you. She took something that wasn’t hers. She had no right to it, whereas you did. You have a right to do with the thing what you want and she violates these rights when she takes it without permission. And so on... How does the idea of rights enter into your own moral thinking more generally? How does this idea relate to Locke’s conception as you’ve articulated it in Part II? How does Locke’s theory of natural rights relate to America’s philosophy as you understand it? How does America’s philosophy relate to your own? What role does the idea of rights play throughout?

Obviously, you can’t answer all these questions with the depth they deserve in 6 pages, but try your best to write a unified essay on the matter they define. To receive full credit, you must show that you’ve read and understood Locke’s theory of natural rights.

**5-6 Pages Double Spaced
Due: 5/8/17**