

## Philosophy 306: Egoism and Altruism

### TAKE-HOME EXAM

**DUE: Tuesday, March 10** [lateness policy: .2 off if you turn the paper in by Thursday, March 12; .3 if Friday, March 13 (must be electronically); .5 off if by the following Tuesday, March 17 [during spring break—again, must be electronic]; .5 more for each subsequent week late.]

Write an essay on **one** of the following 4 topics (750-1000 words).

Please number the pages of your paper!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

1. Is Charles Strickland, the character in The Moon and Sixpence, “egoistic” in the sense we have defined in class as being motivated entirely or almost entirely by the pursuit of his own interest? Explain and back up your answer with reference to the text, handouts, etc. (Your answer can be “both yes and no,” in which case you will need to explain and back up both parts.) In discussing this question, you may but do not have to consider also whether Strickland is egoistic in some *other* sense of the word “egoistic” that seems plausible to you. In answering this question, keep in mind the possibility that Strickland’s motivation changed over time, over the course of the book. Give direct evidence from the novel of your answer to this question, citing particular passages.
2. (a) Discuss the question whether and if so what type of “altruist” Dirk Stroeve, the character in The Moon and Sixpence, could be considered to be. That is, lay out the various possibilities that we did not discuss in class, and examine whether Dirk could be considered to be an altruist in those senses. This question is meant to be as much about your understanding of altruism as it is about your interpretation of the character of Dirk in the novel.  
(b) Also discuss the question whether Dirk is a “second-hander” in Rand’s sense of that word. Keep in mind the difference between the question whether Rand herself would see Dirk as a second-hander and the question whether Dirk does in fact satisfy the conditions that Rand spells out for being a second-hander. (These are two different questions because Rand can be wrong in thinking that a particular person satisfies her own criteria for being a second-hander.) Give direct evidence from the novel of your answer to (a) and (b), citing particular passages (but not necessarily quoting them in full).
3. James Rachels discusses the doctrine of “psychological egoism” in his chapter of that name. We saw in class that Rachels is not entirely consistent in the way he defines that idea, sometimes using the word “selfish” and sometimes not. However, he does discuss “psychological egoism” as we have defined it in class (on your handout), as the view that people are motivated only to seek (what they take to be) their own self-interest or benefit in all of their actions, and that is the definition of “psychological egoism” that I would like you to work with in this essay.  
(a) Discuss whether Freud’s pleasure principle and his theory of aggression are examples of doctrines of psychological egoism. (These two doctrines are distinct, even though Freud does not *always* distinguish them.)  
Rachels discusses two different arguments in favor of psychological egoism thus defined. The *second* of these two arguments (beginning on p. 69) concerns the issue of doing what we believe will make us feel good, or avoid feeling bad. Write an essay in which you do the following:  
(b) Describe that second argument in favor of psychological egoism.  
(c) Explain Rachels’s replies to this argument (b).  
(d) Give your own assessment of any significant element of Rachels’s reply. That is, pick out something Rachels says under “c” and explore whether the advocate of the argument under “a” could successfully reply to it or not. The discussion of Freud can help you here, but does not have to. You do not have to refer to it.
4. There will be one more question, on ethical egoism, which will be posted on the website tonight, in light of today’s discussion.

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#### **Question 4: [the other 3 options are on the other “take home exam” handout, which is also posted on the website]**

(a) What is “ethical egoism?”

(b) Explain two arguments against ethical egoism that you find compelling. *At least one* of them must come from Rachels’s chapter “Ethical Egoism.” The other can come from any source, including Rachels’s chapter.

(c) With regard to *one* of the 2 arguments in (b), construct a plausible counterargument that a proponent of ethical egoism might make.

(d) Finally, do *one* of the following 3 things: (i) Discuss whether the character of Strickland could be interpreted in a reasonably plausible way so as to lend support to ethical egoism; (ii) Speculate intelligently about why someone might find the doctrine of ethical egoism an appealing or attractive philosophical position; or (iii) Articulate and briefly defend a view which differs from ethical egoism but which it is still plausible to refer to as some form of an “egoist” view, and which you regard as a plausible ethical/philosophical view. The view must involve egoism as some type of norm of conduct; it cannot be a version of “psychological egoism” that says we always act egoistically.