

Philosophy 306: Egoism and Altruism

TAKE-HOME EXAM

DUE: Tuesday, March 6 [lateness policy: .3 off if you turn the paper in by Thursday, March 8; .5 if Friday, March 9 (must be electronically); 1.0 off if before or on the following Tuesday, March 13 [during spring break—again, must be electronic]; 2.0 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. Discuss the question whether Charles Strickland, the character in The Moon and Sixpence, is “egoistic.” Explain and back up your answer with reference to the text, handouts, and class discussion. (Your answer can be “both yes and no,” in which case you will need to explain and back up both parts.) Take account of the fact that “egoistic” can be defined in more than one way. Following Rachels, I defined it (on a handout) as one’s only intrinsic motive being (what they take to be) their own self-interest. (For the definition of “intrinsic” see handout on Hobbes and Butler.) However, you can and should recognize other plausible definitions of egoism as applied to motives.

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 (with page #). Summarize long quotes in your own words.

In your answer, make some reference to Rand, and possibly also to Freud (Freud is optional but might be helpful).

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 or 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 both Dirk and Amy Strickland are “second-handers,” in Rand’s sense of that word. You should find Rand’s explicit definition(s) of “second hander” and give that and use it in your paper. But keep in mind that Rand does not always stick consistently to her official definition. Hers is not a work of systematic philosophy. So she may call someone a 2nd hander even if that person does not actually fit her official definition of one. So in a sense I am asking you two questions about Rand: (i) Do Dirk and Amy fit her official definition of “second hander” and (ii) would she call them a second hander even if they do not fit her official definition?

Give direct evidence from the novel of your answer to (a) and (b), citing particular passages.

3. (a) Compare and contrast Hobbes and Freud’s view of human nature, that is, of the fundamental motives of human nature. How are they similar and how are they different? (b) Discuss the question whether either or both of their views can be considered to be examples of “psychological egoism” as Rachels defines that expression. You may find Maugham’s Moon and Sixpence useful for this exercise, but it is not necessary to use it.

4. James Rachels discusses the doctrine of “psychological egoism” in his chapter of that name. He defines that doctrine 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.

Write an essay in which you do the following:

(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. You should treat them separately.)

++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. (I called this the “feel good” argument in class; at least I think that is what I called it.)

(b) Describe that second argument in favor of psychological egoism.

(c) Explain Rachels’s replies to this second argument in favor of psychological egoism—that is, his criticism of psychological egoism (of this particular argument for it).

(d) Give your own assessment or evaluation of any significant element of Rachels’s reply. That is, pick out something Rachels says under “c” and explore whether the advocate of psychological egoism as Rachels has defined it could successfully reply to it or not. (The discussion of Freud may help you here, but does not have to. You do not have to refer to it.)

Do not give long quotes from the text. The only exception to this is that if you think a long passage is important to quote, then give your own commentary on the meaning and significance of the quote.