

FIRST ETHICS PAPER PROMPT

DEADLINE: SEPTEMBER 30

This is a slightly unusual assignment, so please, read the prompt carefully. There are two parts of this assignment: the “live” part and the written part.

- (1) **The “live” part:** Choose two consecutive days of a week (weekend may be the easiest), when you consciously make your ethical choices — all choices of your everyday life — according to utilitarianism (act utilitarianism).
 - Decide the days early, and mark it on your calendar. Living like a utilitarian will make life seem pretty complicated at times, but please make an effort. You can let your friends know in advance if you wish, so that they aren’t surprised you act strangely.
 - Please do not do anything that can put you in jail.
 - Make at least one major ethical choice in those two days, which possibly has effects later.
 - Make your choices according to utilitarianism even if you think that the utilitarian choice is not the right one. You only need to do this for two days, so don’t be afraid that it will corrupt you.
 - **Important:** keep a journal, a small notebook with you (possibly on your phone) all the time to record every single choice you make. These include: getting up, breakfast, what to say to your friends, etc. It might happen that there is a case when you just really can’t do what utilitarianism would command (either because it would bring about permanent damage or you just can’t bring yourself to it for some other reason); record that too. At this point, the journal should be very personal; you can record things that you would not necessarily share.
- (2) **The written part:** After all this, you will need to write a paper. A *philosophical paper*, not a personal essay. Here is how.
 - Start by going over your journal. After reading it carefully, you will need to select **two** things in it: your most significant ethical choice that you made based on utilitarianism during those two days (the “significant utilitarian choice”); and a situation where you either just could not do what the utilitarian choice would have been, or you did it but knew it was wrong (the “problematic situation”).
 - In the first part of your paper, describe the *significant utilitarian choice*. Describe the situation in detail, and state the two alternatives between which the agent (in this case, you) must choose. Show how the utilitarian arrives at the choice: who are those concerned by the action? What are the effects of the actions? How do both alternatives affect the happiness of all concerned? If you think the utilitarian reasoning gave the right result, you should explain why. If you think that it did not, you should also explain why, and why you rather would have done the other alternative.
 - In the second part of your paper, describe the *problematic situation* in a similar way. Again, describe the situation in detail, and state the two alternatives between which

the agent (you) must choose. State which alternative utilitarianism seems to favor and why. If this alternative goes against commonsense morality, state the commonsense moral principle with which utilitarianism appears to conflict, and show which option commonsense favors. Present how the utilitarian might respond, using either the “denial” or the “biting the bullet” strategy. (Remember: if you did not end up doing the action, you cannot bite the bullet!) If you do *not* agree with utilitarianism, show why the strategy employed in the previous point does not ultimately work.

- Be as clear in your paper as you can. Assume that your reader does not even know what utilitarianism is; start with explaining that. The expected length of the paper is 2–3 pages maximum (Times font, 12pt, double spaced, Letter paper, 1” margins).

(3) Finally, type in your journal and, if you wish, edit it. If you think some things in it are too personal, you can leave them out (mark it with ellipses in square brackets, like this: [...]). Otherwise, leave it relatively untouched. I will read the journals, but will not grade them; the grade is exclusively the grade of the paper.

Please bring your paper and journal in hard copy to class on the day of the due date. Late assignments will not be considered.

Do NOT write your name on your paper or on your journal. Submit them with your Fordham ID#, on both.