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24.02 Moral Problems and the Good Life
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THIRD PAPER TOPICS

Write a short (1500-2100 word) paper on ONE of the following topics.

Also recall that you are required to submit 20 pages of written work @ 300 words/page during the term in order to receive HASS-D CI-H credit. Make sure that this requirement is met! Submit an electronic copy of your paper to your TA.

1. Consider two versions of the following situation:

A company is hiring a supervisor who will supervise a group of male workers who have always worked for male supervisors. [Clearly] the sex of a candidate for the job is relevant to the candidate's prospects of moving smoothly and successfully into an effective working relationship with the supervisees. (Frye, 18-19)

In one case, the company doing the hiring is one of the main Boston cab companies; they are looking for a supervisor for their drivers. In the other case, the company doing the hiring is MIT; they are looking for a supervisor for their robotics lab. Would it be permissible for the relevant company in each case to hire a man instead of an otherwise equally qualified woman? Frye introduced this example to argue that an act can be sexist without it being motivated by sexist attitudes. Does your analysis of the case support this conclusion? Why or why not?

2. There is empirical evidence that cognitive processing relies heavily on unconscious schemas that influence our perception of and evaluation of situations. Schemas concerning race are prevalent and negatively affect the evaluation of persons of color in the United States. (For more information see <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/>). For the purposes of this paper, suppose that this is true—in other words, suppose that there is such an evaluation bias and that it is prevalent. Now, consider the following argument in favor of affirmative action:

Persons of color are systematically and unfairly disadvantaged in all evaluations in which the evaluator knows the race of the individual. Throughout school and college, students are known to their teachers, and most evaluations are of student work whose author is known to the evaluator. Small disadvantages of this sort accumulate: if a student is viewed as a B-student rather than an A-student, they will get different sorts of attention, opportunities, etc. Affirmative action is necessary in higher education in order to offset these mis-evaluations and to create a level playing field.

Again, for the purposes of this essay, you are *not* being asked to evaluate the empirical research on schemas and evaluation bias. Your job is to consider whether affirmative action is permissible, or even required, as a response to accumulated evaluation bias. If so, what sort or degree of affirmative action would you recommend; if not, what other policy, if any, would you propose to offset the disadvantage caused by evaluation bias.

3. In his essay, "Liberty and Pornography," Ronald Dworkin considers whether it is permissible to qualify the right to freedom of speech, e.g., to institute any sort of content-based regulation

within the criminal or civil code, in order to prevent or remedy what he acknowledges are significant harms to women caused by pornography. He says,

...we must as individuals and nations, choose among possible combinations of ideals, a coherent, even though inevitably and regrettably limited, set of these to define our own individual or national way of life. Freedom of speech conceived and protected as a fundamental negative liberty, is the core of the choice modern democracies have made, a choice we must now honor in finding our own ways to combat the shaming inequalities women still suffer. (112)

It appears that on his view, neither inequality nor harm are sufficient justification to limit freedom of speech. Present and explain Dworkin's argument. Then, consider how either a consequentialist (such as Mill) or a deontologist (such as Kant) would object to Dworkin's argument. Is the objection you have considered compelling? If yes, why? If no, why not—and do you think there is any other good objection to Dworkin's argument?

4. California's *Proposition 8* was passed in the most recent election (See: <http://www.voterguide.sos.ca.gov/title-sum/prop8-title-sum.htm>). *Proposition 8* adds the following 14 words to the state constitution:

Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.

Explain what, to your mind, are the strongest arguments in support of this restriction of marriage to one man and one woman. Are they sound? What are their strengths and weaknesses?