Phil 112: First Midterm Assignment
Spring, 2023

Instructions

Due, as an attachment, via the "Assignments" tool on Canvas, by 11:55pm Tuesday, May 2, in MSWord format or in a format easily convertible to MSWord.

Answer any *one* of the questions listed below in 2–3 pages (double spaced).

These essay questions are not exactly questions to which there is one correct answer, or at least not questions to which I think I know the one correct answer. Please do your best to back up whatever response you want to make, based on the texts and, if they seem helpful, based on things I said in lecture. As usual, your answer should be your own work. (If you use any outside source — which I don't really recommend — you must cite it.)

If you have any questions about what plagiarism is or how to avoid it, you can ask me, or consult the resources listed on the Library website.[1] For possible consequences of plagiarism, see the Academic Misconduct Policy.[2]

You can cite any of the assigned readings using just the title and page number. If you cite anything else, use any format you want, just please include enough information that I can find the source if necessary.

You can find answers to some commonly asked questions about my assignments and grading in my FAQ (`https://people.ucsc.edu/~abestone/courses/faq.html`).

Questions

1. Consider Bentham's attack on Jefferson's principle that "all men are created equal" (assume for the sake of argument that "men" here is not gender-

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[1] `https://guides.library.ucsc.edu/citesources/plagiarism`.
[2] `https://www.ue.ucsc.edu/academic_misconduct`.

exclusive): "now, for the first time, we learn, that a child, at the moment of his birth, has the same quantity of *natural* power as the parent, the same quantity of *political* power as the magistrate" (p. 120). How might Jonathan Edwards defend the principle against Bentham? That is: in what sense would Edwards defend a principle like this, and how would he explain that the principle, so understood, is not subject to Bentham's objection? Would or would not Edwards's version of the principle be sufficient for the purposes Jefferson wants it for?

2. Emerson says that "the social state," "the state of society," is actually a divided state in which the individual human beings are like limbs that "have suffered amputation from the trunk," whereas a state of true "union" would be one in which each individual was "sovereign" (see *The American Scholar*, pp. 4–5 and p. 30). This is the opposite of what you might think! Explain what Emerson means. How might this make possible a reconciliation between the demands for (ultimately, individual) independence and freedom, on the one hand, and (particular) union, on the other? Does the orator referred to on p. 22 exhibit a possible mode of legitimate political leadership?

3. According to Martineau, the principles of the Declaration of Independence include or imply (or perhaps presuppose?) that "the majority will be always in the right." Here, of course, "majority" means a majority *of the people* — hence the principle is meaningless unless we already know who belongs to "the people." How might Martineau respond? That is: a majority of what people must consent to a given government? Does this reply completely solve the problem? How might Thoreau respond (thinking here mostly about what he says in "Civil Disobedience")? In what sense, and under what conditions, would he admit that the principle is correct?

4. In the third paragraph of *Walden* ch. 5 ("Solitude"), p. 84 in the Dover edition, Thoreau writes: "There is commonly sufficient space about us. Our horizon is never quite at our elbows. The thick wood is not just at our door, nor the pond, but somewhat is always clearing, familiar and worn by us, appropriated and fenced in some way, and reclaimed from Nature." Compare Emerson: "So much only of life as I know by experience, so much of the wilderness have I vanquished and planted, or so far have I extended my being, my dominion" (*The American Scholar*, p. 15). There seems to be some difference between their points of view about wilderness. How might that lead to a different understanding of what it means to "settle" in (what

Thoreau calls) “the only true America” (ch. 10, “Baker Farm,” paragraph 3, p. 133)? You may also want to consider what Thoreau says about the path he wore from his door to the pond-side (ch. 18, “Conclusion,” paragraph 4, p. 209).