

Department of Philosophy
M.A. Exam/Ph.D. Qualifying Exam 2016
Ethics and Political Philosophy Exam

Answer exactly *three* questions, including at least one from section I and one from section II. Defend your claims as well as you can and make your answers as detailed as you can within the allotted time. You have two hours for the entire examination, so you should devote approximately 40 minutes to each essay.

Section I. Historical Figures

1. Discuss **Plato**'s tripartite division of the soul in the *Republic*, attending to both Plato's reasons for thinking the division is accurate, and the account of justice that emerges from it. Evaluate the account of justice Plato presents.

2. How does **Aristotle** characterize *eudaimonia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*? How does it relate to his famous Function Argument? To what extent does Aristotle think that *eudaimonia* is under our control?

3. Early **Confucian** accounts suggest that ethical development consists largely in training the emotions, and that being virtuous resides to some significant degree in high moral-emotional competency. Describe one such account, explaining how the emotions are to be developed, and characterizing the moral-emotional competency in which virtue would consist. Then give one objection to the account.

4. The idea that civil society is founded through a social contract is central to the political philosophy of **Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau**. Compare and contrast the accounts of two of these philosophers, noting the way the view of the later thinker includes a critique of the view of the earlier thinker.

5. According to **Kant**, both the formulation of the Categorical Imperative as universal law and the Formula of Humanity follow from our rational nature. Choose one of these formulations of the Categorical Imperative and explain how Kant thinks it follows from our rational nature. Discuss at least one potential problem with his argument.

6. What does John Stuart **Mill** mean by Utility? What is his argument for the supremacy of the principle of Utility in morality? Explain Mill's argument that it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied, and critically evaluate the claim within the context of his overall theory.

Section II. Contemporary Issues

7. Compare **act-based** moral theories with theories based on **character**. Do you think that moral theory should focus primarily on the issue of what makes an act right or wrong, or instead on what makes a person good or bad? Refer to at least two philosophers in your discussion and defend your own view.

8. Discuss and evaluate some of the ways contemporary **liberalism** has been criticized. Mention critiques by communitarians, by libertarians, or criticisms arising from the racial or gender limitations of liberalism. Refer to at least two contemporary philosophers in your discussion.

9. Discuss the idea of **moral luck** as defended by either Bernard Williams or Thomas Nagel. Be sure to clarify what they mean by moral luck. How serious is the challenge that moral luck poses to moral judgment and practice?

10. Discuss the connection between **moral philosophy and empirical studies**. What would it mean for a moral theory to be empirically adequate? Can empirical studies weaken or disconfirm moral theories? Can moral philosophers reveal problems in empirical work? Use examples in your discussion.

11. Discuss the problem of **moral disagreement** between individuals or between cultures. Does such disagreement undermine the objectivity of morality? Are there any signs of convergence of moral opinions among people from diverse backgrounds? How should agreement or the lack of agreement affect our confidence in our moral judgment?

12. Write an essay on the value of **autonomy**, including objections that have been given to autonomy as an ideal from the side of care ethics, or from those who believe that autonomy is excessively individualistic. Clarify what you think autonomy is and evaluate the objections you discuss.