

General Examination for Max Parish
Ethics

Fall 2012

Answer one question from each of the three sections, and one question from either section I or section II, for a total of four questions. Plan to write for close to one hour on each question.

Please number your answers, giving section number and question number.

Section I. History of Ethics

1. Critically discuss Plato's account of justice, with attention to his parallel between justice in the soul and justice in society in the *Republic*. Evaluate the use of the parallel as a way of illuminating the nature of justice.
2. Explain Aristotle's view of *eudaimonia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, including the place of virtue, the place of pleasure, and the place of good fortune. How can you tell that a person has lived a life of *eudaimonia*, according to Aristotle? Critically evaluate some aspects of his view.
3. Explain Aquinas' general account of virtue and vice. Mention some particular virtues, including the cardinal virtues and the theological virtues, and discuss briefly his debt to Aristotle.
4. Explain Kant's Formula of Universalizability and his Formula of Humanity, both of which are versions of his Categorical Imperative. Discuss the way they are related to each other, and why Kant thinks that both formulations are expressions of the same Categorical Imperative.
5. Explain Mill's Principle of Utility, with examples. Explain and evaluate the way Mill thinks that justice should be handled in a utilitarian theory.

Section II. Contemporary Ethical Theory

1. Explain what Rawls means by the Original Position and how he uses it to derive two fundamental principles of justice. Explain both principles and discuss whether they are the principles that people would agree to in the Original Position.

2. The idea of autonomy has been an important value in modern moral philosophy since Kant. Explain what Kant means by autonomy and some of the other senses of autonomy in contemporary discussion. What view of autonomy do you think is most defensible?
3. Explain and evaluate Bernard Williams' objection to utilitarianism on the grounds that it leads to the violation of integrity.
4. Discuss one important contemporary exponent of virtue ethics that is roughly Aristotelian in spirit (e.g., Hursthouse, MacIntyre). What is the motive for this philosopher's modifications of the theory of Aristotle? Critically evaluate the theory.
5. What does Thomas Nagel mean by moral luck? What are the categories of moral luck? How does he think we should respond to this phenomenon? Critically evaluate his claim that moral luck exists, and respond to his conclusion about the proper response to it. (You may also discuss Bernard Williams on moral luck if you wish).

Section III. Human nature as a foundation for ethics

1. What does it mean for an ethical theory to be naturalistic? Describe at least two versions of ethical naturalism and critically evaluate them.
2. What is the so-called naturalistic fallacy in ethics? What are the strongest arguments for treating it as a fallacy? Evaluate the argument and present your own conclusion.
3. What are the different types of natural law theory? Compare and evaluate them. In your essay make it clear whether or not natural law is intended to give us a comprehensive moral theory.
4. Discuss the following objection to nature-based ethical theories: "Given the great amount of diversity among people, any plausible account of human nature will be very general. So any precepts that arise from it will be too vague to give action guidance, and will not accord with common conceptions of morality. We expect an adequate ethical theory to support specific precepts, but a genuine account of human nature cannot do so." Do you think a nature-based ethical theory can have the resources to handle this objection? Discuss.