

Reading Guide #5 - Ethics

These questions are provided to assist you in your reading. I encourage you first to read the material through, then go back to answer the questions. You are not expected to hand in written answers. You are expected to have responses ready for class discussion. References are to pages in Steven M. Cahn, ed., *Philosophy for the 21st Century*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism," pp 575-80.

1. What is the Greatest Happiness Principle?
2. Why do some critics consider utilitarianism "a doctrine worthy only of swine" (575)? How does Mill respond to this objection?
3. How does Mill propose to determine which of two pleasures is more desirable?
4. "[It is] better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied" (576). Explain. How does Mill rectify this claim with his hedonism?
5. According to Mill, why might people sometimes choose lower pleasures over higher ones?
6. Why is measuring an individual's happiness not the way to evaluate an act, according to utilitarianism?
7. Does utilitarianism see self-sacrifice as good in itself? What good is it?
8. How does Mill say that you can prove that some thing is desirable? How does this relate to utilitarianism? What more needs to be shown in order to establish utilitarianism as the sole standard of morality?
9. How does Mill respond to the allegation that people desire ends other than happiness, such as money?
10. Why does the utilitarian want people to be virtuous?

Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine," pp 580-1.

1. What does the experience machine provide?
2. "What else can matter to us, other than how our lives feel from the inside?" (580).
3. What kinds of things do we want to do? Can the experience machine facilitate these things?
4. Does the experience machine allow us to be what we want to be? How is plugging in to the machine like suicide?
5. What do we want out of life, besides experiences? What does this mean for the experience machine?

Immanuel Kant, "Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals," pp 582-6.

1. What is the only thing Kant thinks good without qualification? Why are intelligence and wealth not good without qualification?
 2. Why is the good will good?
 3. Contrast Kant's notions of inclination and duty. When does an act have moral worth?
 4. "That an action done from duty derives its moral worth, not from the purpose which is to be attained by it, but from the maxim by which it is determined, and therefore does not depend on the realization of the object of the action, but merely on the principle of volition by which the action has taken place..." (584) Explain.
 5. "I am never to act otherwise than so that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law" (584). Explain. (This rule is called the categorical imperative in the formula of universal law.)
 6. Why is false promising wrong, according to the formula of universal law?
 7. According to Kant, why is suicide wrong?
 8. May we neglect our natural gifts, according to the categorical imperative?
 9. Why may you not neglect others in need, according to Kant? (See Illustration 4)
 10. How are the answers to questions 6 and 7 different from the answers to questions 8 and 9? That is, what are the two ways in which one can fail to be able to will a maxim?
-

Onora O'Neill, "A Simplified Account of Kant's Ethics," pp 587-9.

1. What is Kant's formula of the end in itself?
2. What is a maxim? What are intentions? How do you turn an intention into a maxim?
3. How do we decide whether an action is right or wrong, for Kant?
4. What is using someone as a mere means? How is it different from using that person as a means?
4. Why is false promising wrong, according to the formula of the end in itself?
5. What are two ways to use someone as a mere means?
6. What does being good require, in Kant's view? What does beneficence require? What is the difference between them? Be specific.
7. What kinds of acts are obligatory, for Kant? Provide an example.
8. Which types of acts are permissible? Provide an example.
9. How are Kantian ethics and utilitarianism different in terms of scope and precision, according to O'Neill? Provide examples.

W. D. Ross, "The Right and the Good," pp 589-93.

1. Are our attitudes toward promise-keeping and relieving distress utilitarian or Kantian? Explain.
 2. How does utilitarianism ignore particular relations among people?
 3. What is Ross's distinction between prima facie duties and duties proper?
 4. Describe the six kinds of prima facie duties Ross distinguishes.
 5. How does Ross defend his list of duties against criticism that it may not be complete?
 6. "It may... be objected that our theory... leaves us with no principle upon which to discern what is our actual duty in particular circumstances" (591). Explain.
 7. How are our actual duties determined by combinations of prima facie duties? How does this fact alleviate the need for a moral theory?
 8. How do we know about the morality of general principles that require us to fulfill promises, effect just distributions, or return services rendered?
 9. Describe the factors which make our judgments in actual circumstances less certain than judgments about our general, prima facie duties.
 10. How, according to Ross, are our moral judgments like aesthetic judgments?
 11. Why must we be fortunate to do the right thing?
 12. How does Ross defend his list of prima facie duties against the criticism that we should not accept our "present moral consciousness" (593)?
 13. How are the methods of moral philosophy different from those of natural science?
-

J. L. Mackie, "The Subjectivity of Values," pp 561-8.

1. Describe Mackie's thesis that there are no objective values. What kinds of claims does it include?
2. What is the difference between first-order moral skepticism and second-order moral skepticism? Which one does Mackie defend?
3. How could one be a first-order moral skeptic without being a second-order moral skeptic? How could one be a second-order moral skeptic without being a first-order moral skeptic?
4. Can the second-order moral skeptic distinguish between just and unjust actions? Explain. Provide examples.
5. How does Mackie reconcile the objectivity of some evaluative standards with his moral skepticism?
6. Does Mackie deny the objective validity of hypothetical imperatives? Does he deny the objective validity of categorical imperatives? Explain.
7. How is Mackie's view a rejection of the traditional, moral philosophical view?
8. Why does Mackie call his view an error theory?
9. What is the argument from relativism? Does disagreement about a claim entail that the claim is not objective?
10. What is wrong with the claim that people are monogamous because they approve of monogamy? How does this result support the argument from relativity?
11. Why does the moral intuitionist claim that we have a special faculty of moral intuition? Why does Mackie call this faculty a lame answer?
12. How does the question of whether there are objective values depend on whether empiricism is sufficient to account for our knowledge?
13. Why would objective values have to have motivation built into them? Why would this make them odd?

Ronald Dworkin, "A Critique of Mackie," pp 568-70.

1. "We would not count the popularity of our moral opinions as evidence for their truth. Why should we count their controversiality as evidence against it?" (568). Explain, including how this question relates to Mackie's claim.
 2. How, according to Dworkin, is the argument from diversity to skepticism incomplete?
 3. Why is the hypothesis that motivation is built in to moral claims implausible when interpreted as entailing an emotional tug on anyone who contemplates the claim?
 4. Why does the conceptual connection between motivation and good end fail? Is the conceptual connection between bad ends and motivation more plausible?
 5. Do people who fail to act on their moral beliefs actually lack those beliefs? Explain.
-

Renford Bambrough, "A Proof of the Objectivity of Morals," pp 570-4.

1. How does Bambrough argue that we have moral knowledge?
2. Is there more diversity of opinion in ethics than in science? Explain.
3. How does Bambrough argue that the argument from diversity is irrelevant to the objectivity of morality?
4. How can the objectivist understand differences among burial rituals without succumbing to skepticism?
5. Does the diversity of opinion about monogamy settle the case against the objectivist? Explain.
6. Describe two ways to understand the case of stealing which do not require skepticism.
7. Is it necessarily wrong to leave the infirm to die? Explain.
8. Describe the parallel between approve and believe, and good and true.
9. Is skepticism supported by the fact that moral reasoning has to stop (or, start) somewhere? Explain.
10. Is there a kind of reasoning used strictly in morality? Explain the ginger cake analogy.
11. Is it more difficult to settle moral disputes than logical or other factual disputes? Explain.