

## MIDTERM EXAM ESSAY QUESTIONS

**INSTRUCTIONS:** The following are the essay questions for the midterm exam. On the day of the exam, October 27 (regular class time and room), you will be given at least two of these and be required to answer one. The rest of your exam will consist of true/false and multiple choice questions. If you are well prepared for all of the following essay questions, you shouldn't have difficulty with the other portions of the test. Some of the following questions overlap. Since you will be answering only one, this is not a problem, but you should be aware of it so that you don't think you are misunderstanding a question just because it has a partial overlap with another.

You are free to study for this exam with others in practically any way you want (divide and conquer, duplicate efforts for thoroughness, read each other's draft answers, *etc.*). On the day of the exam, you will have a pen and a blank exam booklet at your disposal—oh, and one more thing, your mind, hopefully not blank. (That's *your* mind, not those of others with whom you may have studied). Get the understanding into your mind about any way you like, but make sure *you* understand it well enough to *explain* it on your own—not just well enough to follow it when someone else explains it.

1. Imagine you are a philosophy teaching associate discussing religious moralism with your introductory ethics class. One of the students in your class writes the following paragraphs in a short paper. Respond to this in a way that clears up the student's confusions. (A satisfactory answer will not just say where the student has gone wrong but will include correct definitions of the crucial terms and correct accounts of the implications of accepting the theories in question.)

“Religious moralism is the theory the moral theory that every religious person believes. It holds that God exists and there are some things that are morally right and others that are morally wrong. God, being all-perfect (and, therefore, all-good) knows which things are morally right and which things are morally wrong. Based on this knowledge, he tells us to do what is right and not do what is wrong. In this way, the rightness and wrongness of an action depends on God.”

“Atheists, on the other hand, all accept a view called ‘secular moralism’. This view holds that all of our moral obligations would be exactly the same whether or not God existed. On this view, we would be in a position to morally criticize God for not doing the right thing. But, this is silly. We must praise God as being morally perfect, not criticize him as being morally bad.”

2. One specific version of religious moralism is divine command theory. What is divine command theory? What are the major arguments for and the major arguments against divine command theory? How might the divine command theorist respond to the arguments against this position?

3. What is normative ethical relativism? How does it differ from descriptive ethical relativism? Consider and critically discuss the arguments for both descriptive ethical relativism and for normative ethical relativism. In particular, if it were to turn out that descriptive ethical relativism is true, would this provide good grounds for accepting normative ethical relativism?
4. You're a philosophy TA again. Now, another student has written the following paragraphs. Respond in such a way that you clear up the student's confusions. (Again, a satisfactory answer will not just say where the student has gone wrong but will include correct definitions of the crucial terms and correct accounts of the implications of accepting the theories in question.)

“Ethical absolutism is the view that *our* moral beliefs apply to everyone regardless of how different their cultures are from ours. The ethical absolutist believes that he *knows* what is morally right and that it is morally okay for him to impose his standards on others.”

“The moral relativist believes that what is right for one society may well be wrong for another and, therefore, we should not impose our standards on other cultures. This gives the relativist a firm basis for defending tolerance of other cultures.”

5. What is ethical egoism and how does it differ from psychological egoism? Is ethical egoism an adequate moral theory? Defend your answer.
6. Consequentialism tells us that the rightness (or wrongness) of an action depends upon the intrinsic value produced by the action. However, there is serious disagreement over the nature of intrinsic value. Bentham's hedonism encounters several serious problems. Describe these problems and discuss whether Mill's eudaimonism does any better against these problems.
7. It is often argued that consequentialist theories in general and utilitarian theories in particular cannot adequately account for considerations of justice (both retributive and distributive justice). Describe the problems raised for consequentialistic theories by issues of justice. Why does justice raise problems for such theories? How might a consequentialist respond to these problems?
8. Explain in as much detail as you are able how Kantian moral theory determines the moral permissibility of actions. Be sure to explain the following Kantian concepts: a good will, duty, a categorical imperative, a hypothetical imperative, a maxim, a contradiction of the will, a formal contradiction. What is **THE** Categorical Imperative and what role does it play in Kant's moral theory?
9. One problem with Kant's ethics concerns the determination of an agent's maxim of action. Describe this problem in detail and its implications for Kant's theory.

10. What is the “problem of the fanatic” for Kant? Be sure to show why it arises for Kant and why it at least appears to be a serious problem. How might Kant reply to the problem? Do you think his reply is adequate? Explain.