

PHILOSOPHY 130 SAMPLE MIDTERM QUESTIONS

1. T F Bentham's hedonistic theory of value is obviously false since it forces him to deny that things like money, power, love, and friendship have any value.
2. T F Mill believes that because morality requires us to produce the best consequences, we ought always to calculate the consequences of our actions before acting.
3. T F The point of the "pleasure machine" example was to criticize Bentham's hedonism by showing that pleasure is not the *only* thing that is valuable.
4. Which of the following is a plausible defense of the Divine Command Theory against the Euthyphro Argument?
 - a. The Euthyphro Argument applies to the false gods believed in by the Greeks, but to say of the true God that His will is not the ultimate source of right and wrong is blasphemy.
 - b. The Euthyphro Argument concerns piety and Divine Command Theory is not a theory of piety; hence, the argument has no application to Divine Command Theory.
 - c. There may be certain properties of actions that lead God to approve of them (thus His will is not capricious) but these properties do not make the acts right or wrong—only God's will does that.
 - d. If God were to will the universal suffering of all creatures, then this would be morally good.
 - e. The Euthyphro Argument is fallacious because it rests on a false analogy between God and man.

5. Which of the following best explains why utilitarianism appears to have problems with special obligations, rights, and retributive justice:
- a. According to utilitarianism, one must adopt a strictly impartial perspective and be motivated only by considerations of total utility.
 - b. According to utilitarianism, the only relationship we have that is ultimately morally relevant to determining our duty is the benefactor/beneficiary relationship—so that, ultimately, our *only* duty is to promote utility.
 - c. According to the utilitarian, the rightness or wrongness of an action does not depend on the *extrinsic* value produced.
 - d. The utilitarian mistakenly counts the utility of people other than the agent in determining what should be done.
 - e. None of the above.

ANSWERS:

1. FALSE Bentham's hedonism is a theory of *intrinsic value*. He claims that pleasure is the only thing that is valuable *in itself*. Other things (money, health, and so forth) are valuable, too. But they are only instrumentally valuable—valuable in virtue of their ability to cause intrinsic value (pleasure according to Bentham).
2. FALSE Though maximizing the sum of individual utility is what makes an action right, Mill thinks we often should not calculate utility (maybe we never should). This is because such calculations, themselves, take time and resources that could be better spent doing something else and they are often prone to error. Instead of calculating on particular occasions, we should generally rely on secondary moral principles that we have some evidence are productive of good consequences.
3. TRUE The pleasure machine example asks us to compare two lives that are very different in many respects but have equal amounts of pleasure in them. Most people find one (the life of accomplishment and respect) more desirable than the other (the life with the pleasure machine). This suggests that most people intrinsically value something other than pleasure. While there are replies that the hedonist could make, the *point* of the example is to show that there are things that are intrinsically desirable other than pleasure.
4. C If this isn't clear, take a look at the PowerPoint presentation—especially the part where a reply for Euthyphro is given. This reply depends on an analogy to law. The idea is that whether or not an action has some property (being legal, being moral, being pious) may depend on the decisions of some individual or group without those decisions being capricious.

Other Answers:

- A This is a non-starter. That something is blasphemy is not a refutation of it.
- B Euthyphro's position on piety is structurally analogous to the divine command theorist's position on moral rightness. The criticism is aimed at the structure of the argument, not whether it is about piety or moral rightness. So, despite one theory being about piety and the other about moral rightness, the criticism of Euthyphro's position is relevant to divine command theory.
- D This is relevant to the "Abraham Argument" not to the Euthyphro argument.
- E Also a non-starter. There is no false analogy between God and man relied on by this criticism.

5. B For the utilitarian, ultimately the correctness of a moral decision is determined only by how much good you can produce. Each agent is viewed as a producer of utility and everyone (everyone else as well as the agent himself) as a potential beneficiary. The critic charges that this results in not taking other morally relevant relationships (obligor/obligee, promissory/ promise, *etc.*) seriously enough. And this, they allege, causes the problems of special obligations, retributive justice and so forth.

Other Answers:

- A The impartiality of utilitarian ethics may be responsible for some of its problems. However, it is not responsible for these problems.
- C Making rightness and wrongness depend on instrumental value (in addition to intrinsic value) would not solve any of these problems.
- D This suggests that the utilitarian could avoid these problems by, in effect, becoming an ethical egoist. This is not true.
- E B is correct, so E is not.