

Exams

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR FINAL EXAM

The exam will have three parts (with their weighted percentage of the grade indicated in parentheses):

I. Identifications

The first part (35%) will consist of identifications: you will be given five quotations and you must provide (i) the author's name, (ii) an explanation of the quote's meaning in your own words, and (iii) a brief description of the debate to which it contributes, including a statement of (at least) one of the opposing views.

EXAMPLE:

"There is, in point of fact, no difference between the man that is cast out of the window by another and the man who throws himself out of it, except for the impulse in the first instance comes immediately from without whilst that which determines the fall in the second case, springs from within his own peculiar machine, having its more remote cause also exterior."

i) Holbach

ii) Holbach is claiming that freewill is an illusion because actions that might appear to be done "of our own free will" (jumping out a window) are just as much caused as actions over which we have no control (being pushed out). In the case of supposed free actions, the immediate cause may be our desire or intention, but desires and intentions are ultimately caused by external factors over which we have no control.

iii) Holbach is taking a stand in the debate over whether we have freewill. He defends hard determinism which is the view that freewill and determinism are incompatible and of the two, determinism is true, so we lack freewill. Libertarians agree that freewill and determinism are incompatible, but believe that determinism is false and we have freewill; Compatibilists argue that freewill and determinism are compatible, determinism is true, and we have freewill.

II. Short Answers

The second part (15%) will consist of short answer questions, e.g., "Define utilitarianism."

III. Essays

The third part (50%) will consist of essay questions drawn from the list below. You will be given *three of the following five* questions, and will be asked to write on *two* of them.

Note that the essays will count for 50% of the exam grade.

Essay Questions

1. We all hold beliefs that we cannot prove. E.g., we hold beliefs about the past and the future for which there is (and can be) no demonstrative proof. I believe that dinosaurs existed long ago. I believe that the sun will rise tomorrow. I believe that if I am kind to others, they will be kind to me. Are we ever justified in believing something we cannot prove, or must we count such beliefs as simply a matter of faith (or ideology??)? Explain how an evidentialist and a pragmatist would respond to this question and their reasons they would offer to support their view. Among those beliefs that we cannot prove, are some kinds more justified than others, and if so, what sort of justification do they have? Explain where you stand and why.

2. According to the problem of evil, it is irrational to believe in an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good God in a world such as ours that contains the kinds and degree of evil that is evident around us. The freewill response counters this by claiming that the evil in the world is due to human free will, and not due to God, and a world with free will and evil is better than a world without free will.

Re-evaluate the freewill response in light of the more refined approaches to freewill we considered. What conception of human freedom would be required in order to avoid the problem of evil? E.g., would a compatibilist conception of freewill be sufficient? (Why or why not?) Would a libertarian conception of freewill be sufficient? (Why or why not?) Considering the strengths and weaknesses of the main views on freewill (hard determinism, compatibilism, and libertarianism), do you now think the freewill defense is compelling? (Why or why not?)

3. In our discussion of personal identity, we distinguished *metaphysical identity* from *ethical identity*. Reading Rorty and Wong as addressing questions of ethical identity, they propose that

one's ethical identity is dependent on one's physical make-up, one's social/cultural position, and one's values. Rorty and Wong argue, however, that typically discussions of ethical identity ignore the difficult *normative* question of what sorts of identities we *ought to* have, e.g., should we strongly identify with our social roles and group membership (race, ethnicity, gender, occupation, family), or should we place more importance on role-independent traits such as personality, kinds of intelligence, talents, etc. They say very little, however, about how to go about answering the normative question. Explain Rorty and Wong's account of ethical identity, with attention to the ways in which our identities are and/or are not under our control. In light of the moral theories we've considered, how should we answer the normative question: what sorts of identities should we have? E.g., should we (and if so, to what extent) bring in such facts as our race, gender, occupation, etc., in deliberating about what is the right thing to do? Choose *either* Utilitarianism *or* Virtue Ethics and critically evaluate what you think its approach would be to this normative question. Be sure you give reasons for thinking the view *would* be committed to the approach you describe.

(Note: it may be easier to think about this question if you consider some examples: Imagine Ralph, an artist and father of three small children; Sarah, a single mathematician with no children; Leroy, the pastor of a Black church, with a talent for theoretical physics...though you need not consider these examples in your essay and should avoid getting too caught up in them; focus on the theoretical issues!)

4. According to Forbes.com, Bill Gates is the richest person in the world with a net worth of \$54 billion. Suppose Bill liquidates his assets and gives virtually everything to famine relief, keeping only the equivalent of the American median net worth. (For some examples of what this could accomplish, see: <http://www.quuxuum.org/~evan/bgnw.html#Charity>)

And suppose he does this with the intention of achieving fame and notoriety, perhaps with the fantasy of winning the Nobel Peace Prize (assuming that economic hardship and inequality is at least one factor in global conflict). Has Bill done something that is morally right? (Is it required? Is it only permissible and not required? Is it praiseworthy? Is it not even morally permissible?) Explain and justify your answer in light of the moral theories we've considered.

5. Consider and critically evaluate the following argument:

i) Societies accept different moral codes.

ii) If societies accept different moral codes, then there is no one right moral code (because there is no sound basis for judging one to be better than the other).

iii) Objectivism in ethics states that at least in some circumstances there is a (single) right answer to the question how one ought morally to act.

ii) Therefore, objectivism in ethics is misguided.

Pick one of the objectivist views we've discussed and explain how it could respond to this argument. In particular, how would it defend the rightness of its moral perspective? Do you find this objectivist response convincing? What are its strengths and weaknesses?