

Contemporary Moral Problems

Final Exam Review

Logic

- **Validity** – If all the premises are true, then the conclusion would have to be true.
- **Soundness** – A valid argument, an argument in which all the premises are actually true.
- Difference is you can have a valid argument with false premises
- While not all sound arguments are valid, not all valid arguments are sound.

Ethical Theories

Cultural Relativism

- **Definition** - Different cultures have different moral standards. There are then no objective moral standards or codes and morality is determined by culture. The problem with this is that since morality is determined by the culture there is no objective moral standard.

Ethical Egoism

- **Ethical Egoism** – It is always our duty to act exclusively in our own self-interest.

Divine Command Theory

- **Definition** - Morality is determined by the commands of God. If you are religious he says you ought to reject the DCT.

Aristotle

- **Relative** – Pursued for the sake of something else.
- **Final Ends** – Pursued for their own sake.
- **Doctrine of the mean**
 - To abide by the doctrine of means involves choosing a mean between the extremes with regards to both feelings and actions.

Kant (Deontologist)

- **Done from vs. merely conforming to duty**
 - **An act *merely conforms to duty* if:**
 - It is an act which duty commands

- It is done for any reason other than the fact that duty commands it
 - It has no moral worth
- **An act is *done from duty* if:**
 - It is an act which duty commands
 - It is done because duty commands it
 - It has moral worth
- **First formulation of the CI**
 - Act only on maxims that you can at the same time will be become a universal law.
 - Treating oneself as a special case is the *essence of immortality*.

Mill (Consequentialist)

- **Consequentialism**
 - The moral worth of an act is determined by its consequences. The end does justify the means of the act.
- **Principle of utility**
 - Actions or behaviors are right in so far as they promote *happiness* or *pleasure*, wrong as they tend to produce *unhappiness* or *pain*.
- **Greatest happiness principle**
 - Do things that will result in the greatest happiness for the greatest amount of people.

Capital Punishment

- **Two central issues** – Deterrence and Justice

Ernest Van Den Haag

- **Response to uneven distribution** - CP is unevenly distributed amongst convicted murders because of race or wealth. VOH says that is not relevant to the moral status but rather a distinct other issue.

Jeffrey Reiman

- **Definition of ‘progress to civilization’**
 - Characterized by a lower tolerance for ones own pain and that suffered by others.

Euthanasia

- **Active vs. Passive**
 - **Active Euthanasia** – Involves a deliberate action, which intentionally causes the death of a person.
 - **Passive Euthanasia** – Involves withholding or withdrawing life-prolonging or life-sustaining measures in order to allow for the death of a person.

- **Two common considerations in favor**
 - Compassion for painfully and terminally ill
 - Concerns for human dignity and freedom of choice.

Arthur Dyck

- **Benemortasia** – Allows for actions and inactions which cause or hasten death but never because they cause or hasten death. The death is a side effect.

James Rachels

- **General thesis (AMA Response)** – Passive euthanasia is permissible while active euthanasia is not.
- **What the Smith/Jones case is meant to show**
 1. There is then no MRD between active euthanasia and passive euthanasia.

Abortion

JJ Thomson

- **The right to bodily autonomy** – One has the right to decide what happens to and in one's own body.
- **The right to life**
 - You have the right to not be killed unjustly.

Marry Anne Warren

- **5 Attributes associated with persons**
 - **Consciousness** - Of objects and events internal and external to the being
 - **Reasoning** – Solve new and complex problems
 - **Self-Motivated Activity** – Activity which is relatively independent of internal and external control
 - **Capacity to Communicate** – Message in a variety of types
 - **Self-Awareness**

Don Marquis

- **His general approach to the issue**
 - **Not** that it deprives us of biological life
 - **Not** any conscious life
 - It depressives us of the “future goods of consciousness”
- **Argument against abortion**
 - **Future Like Ours** – Killing is wrong because it deprives one of a FLO
 - **It is wrong to kill one with FLO**
 - **A fetus has FLO**
 - **Therefore it is wrong to kill a fetus.**

Property and Poverty

Peter Singer

- **Absolute Poverty** – Having less than is needed to provide oneself and one's dependents with the basic biological necessities. Food, shelter, medicine, etc.
- **Absolute Affluence** – Having more than is needed to provide for oneself and one's dependents with the basic biological necessities.
- **The shallow pond**
 - **Principle that explains our intuition**
 - First premise in his argument with poverty
 - If it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without sacrificing anything morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it
 - **2 points regarding the first premise**
 - **Forward Looking** – Based on consequences
 - **Involves moral equality**
- **Objection and Replies**
 - **Population control**
 - If we help those people in absolute poverty there will be a massive increase in population. There will be a boom in population and more people will then be more people in absolute poverty.
 - Singer allows this possibility, something equally as likely. Four factors that correlate in lowering birth rate, we can help those people in absolute poverty and avoid this doomsday scenario
 - Female education, lower infant mortality rate, economic prosperity, and availability of contraception
 - **Assisting the poor is supererogatory**
 - Helping the poor is just charity. It's praiseworthy if you do, not blameworthy if you don't.
 - Helping the child in the shallow pond case is not supererogatory. It's morally blameworthy if you don't. There's no MRD between shallow pond case and absolute poverty. Our obligation to help in absolute poverty is just as much as in the shallow pond case.

John Arthur

- **Singer's 'greater moral evil principle'**
 - If we can prevent something very bad from happening without sacrificing all of comparable moral significance, then we ought to do it.
- **Moral equality (two kinds)**
 - **Jeffersonian** – We have the right to pursue our lives without interference from others.

- **Equal Consideration of Interests (Singer)** – Like amounts of suffering are of equal significance no matter who is experiencing them.
- **Entitlements**
 - **Positive Rights** – Recipience. Not natural rights, results of a contract, agreement, or promise. No right to others stuff, unless you agree.
 - **Negative Rights** – Rights against interference. Life, property, privacy. Natural rights, acquired through birth.
 - **Dessert** – We deserve to keep what we earned.
- **What's included in the 'ideal moral code'**
 - Include both entitlements and the GME principle.

Robert Nozick

- **Libertarianism**
 - **The Role of the State ought to be Severely Limited to**
 - **National Defense**
 - **Local Protection** – Protection from fellow citizens (police)
 - **Administration of Courts of Justice** – If someone wrongs you, they ought to be punished.
 - **Each person has the right to life, liberty, and the fruits of their labor.**
 - **Liberty** – The absence of unjustified interference in our lives.
- **Entitlement Theory**
 - **Definition of entitlement** - One is entitled to a holding, if and only if one acquires that holding by way of a just acquisition, a just transfer, or a rectification of past injustices.
 - **Three topics**
 - **Acquisition**
 - Each person owns him or herself (self ownership)
 - By mixing our labor in, with some part of the material world, self-ownership can generate ownership of that part of the material world
 - **Lockian Proviso:** Acquisition of the material world, if and only if, after that acquisition there's enough and as good left for others.
 - **Transfer**
 - **Rectification of Past Injustices**
- **Wilt Chamberlain case**
 - What it's meant to prove
 - Trying to show that, any view other than its own, will lead to unjust consequences.
 - **Liberty Upsets Patterns** - Voluntary exchanges between free & willing individuals will disrupt any patterned distribution
 - **Patterns Destroy Liberty** - Maintaining any patterned distribution will involve unjustified interference in our lives

- **Views on taxation**
 - If you are against forced labor, then you ought to be against forcing the unemployed to work for the benefit of the needy
 - If you are against forced labor, then you ought to be against forcing the employed to work X extra hours for the benefit of the needy
 - There's no difference between (2) and taking X hours worth of your earnings from you (being paid for 35 hours when you work 40)
 - **Taxation for the needy is like forced labor**, to the extent that the government taxes you for the benefit of the needy. *That implies partial ownership of you.*

Kai Nielsen

- **Socialism ['Pure & Impure']**
 - **Socialism** – An economic system characterized by *public* ownership and control of the means of production.
 - **Pure Socialism** – *Democratic Socialism* – Workers control the means of production with industrial and political democracy.
 - **Impure Socialism** – *State Bureaucratic Socialism (Soviet Union)* – State-owned means of production.
- **Capitalism ['Pure & Impure']**
 - **Capitalism** – An economic system characterized by *private* ownership and control of the means of production.
 - **Pure Capitalism** – *Competitive Capitalism* – No (or minimal) government intervention in the market.
 - **Impure Capitalism** – *Monopoly or Corporate Capitalism* – Massive government intervention.
- **How socialism is preferable to capitalism**
 - **Autonomy and Freedom**
 - **Autonomy** – Ability to determine and pursue one's own ends
 - **Freedom** – Absence of unjustified interference with one's own autonomy
 - More people will be more autonomous
 - **Democracy**
 - While Competitive Capitalism is limited to political democracy, democratic socialism allows for both economic and political democracy.
 - **Equality**
 - **Moral Equality** – Everyone's life matters equally.
 - **Equality of Opportunity** – Life chances
 - **Equality of Condition** – Living and working conditions
 - Pure Capitalism the capitalist, the vast minority, determines who works, where, conditions they're under, what they'll make, what will be done with what they make, etc

- Under socialism it's determined through various democratic procedures. Much more power over the aspect of your work life.
- **Justice**
 - A fancy word for fairness (Equality)
 - If one system is preferable to another system for justice and equality, it is more than just for a society.

Animals and The Environment

Peter Singer

- **Principle of equal consideration**
 - Requires that the suffering of being “be counted equally with the like suffering of any other being”
 - **3 Points**
 - Does not require equal treatment, but rather equal consideration
 - Not based upon the equality of abilities, but interests
 - To have interests = to be ‘sentient’ = The capacity to suffer
- **Speciesism (& Examples in practice)**
 - Favoring the interests of one’s own species over those of other species
 - **3 Examples in Practice**
 - Factory farming, experimentation, and product testing.
- **What examples of Speciesism have in common**
 - Systematic disregard of the suffering of non-humans.
- **What rejecting Speciesism does not imply**
 - Equal value of lives. When it comes to pain, all animals to equal. It does not mean that all lives are equal. This is where he brings up persons and non-persons.
- **Sentient persons** - Those that have: Self-awareness, intelligence, capacity for abstract thought, awareness of one’s past and future, capacity for meaningful relations with others, having goals, and complex acts of communication.
- **Sentient non-persons** - Something that does not have any of those features but has the capacity to suffer.

Bonnie Steinbock

- **3 points about cruelty to animals**
 - Cruelty to animals is wrong
 - Cruelty is the “infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering”
 - What is to count as necessary is determined, in part, by the nature of the end pursuit.
- **Counterintuitive result of equal consideration**

- “If singer is right, then we get this result. Feeding starving children before feeding starving dogs is just like a catholic charity feeding hungry Catholics before feeding hungry non-Catholics.”
- Non-discrimination is OK in the Catholics case, but we would not admire it in the dogs’ case.
- Singer is not committed to that at all.
- **Uniquely human capacities**
 - **Moral Responsibility** – We are normally held responsible for what we do.
 - **Reciprocation (Capacity for Altruism)** – We can be motivated by moral reasons. Requires relatively abstract concepts.
 - **Desire for Self-Respect** – Interest in freedom & self-determination
- **Singer’s commitment**
 - Singer: We need not value the lives of humans and nonhumans equally because of ‘Person’ Capability
 - Freedom from suffering is “the minimum condition” for the exercise of the ‘Person’ Capability
 - Therefore, we need not value the suffering of humans and non-humans equally.
- **Moral Agent** – Can act in a way that is right and wrong, non-human animals cannot
- **Moral Patient** – Acted upon a way that is right or wrong. Can be harmed or benefited.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. State and explain Peter Singer's argument for our obligation to prevent some absolute poverty. Do you agree? Explain your answer.

Peter Singer makes the argument "to prevent what is bad when we can do so without sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance." The uncontroversial argument, if taken with heart, could fundamentally change our world. With each person giving up some resources we could change the world and lower world hunger, disease, so on and so forth. You can bring up the shallow pond argument, in the case of only getting your clothes muddy you would be a moral monster to not help the child. You could say this could become a slippery slope since some may argue that it would cause people to become lazier, comparing it to how welfare works in the United States. While this is a valid argument I believe that the greatest moral good would come out of helping those in absolute poverty. The North Texas Food Bank has a great ad campaign out right now showing individuals that \$1 can feed three people. If you look in your wallet you can easily find \$1 to help feed three individuals who are in absolute poverty. That goes even further in developing countries. However in order to really help those in absolute poverty we also need to educate them on contraception, self sustaining ways of feeding themselves, and so forth.

2. State and explain the claim that assisting the absolutely poor is supererogatory. How does Singer respond? Do you agree? Explain your answer.

Some may have the idea that helping the absolute poor is beyond what it required, otherwise known as supererogatory. I do not share this view myself because the fact that if you turned the table, you wouldn't want to hear that someone believes helping you because of the circumstances you were born into would be helping you beyond what is required. I believe that you can almost view this as the universalizability principle, insofar that you wouldn't want to universalize this. Singer responds stating that assisting in the case of the shallow pond case is not supererogatory thus there is no morally relevant difference between the shallow pond case and the case of helping those in absolute poverty.

3. Explain John Arthur's 'ideal moral code'. What is included? How does his approach affect whether or not we have an obligation to assist others in need? Do you agree? Explain your answer.

John Arthur's 'ideal moral code' takes into account the greater moral evil principle and entitlements. The greater moral evil principle, by Singer, states that "If we can prevent something very bad from happening without sacrificing all of comparable moral significance, then we ought to do it." Entitlements are both positive and negative rights. Positive rights are those of Recipience. They are not natural rights but rather as a result of a contract, agreement, or promise. No one has a right to your items unless you agree for example. Negative rights are those against interference – life, property, and privacy are a few examples. Those rights granted through birth natural rights. The ideal moral code affects your obligation to assist others in need because of the greater moral evil principle. While he adds in entitlements, even with the GME principle you can argue that you should help those in absolute poverty.

- 4. Explain Robert Nozick's entitlement theory. What does it mean to say that his theory is historical? Do you agree? Explain your answer.**
- 5. Explain Robert Nozick's view regarding redistributive taxation. How does he defend his position? Do you agree? Explain your answer.**

Robert Nozick explains taxation for the needy is like forced labor, to the extent that the government taxes you for the benefit of the needy. That implies partial ownership of you. He defends this position by bringing up numerous different examples, such as that if you are against taxation for the needy then you are against forcing the unemployed, hippies, or working extra hours simply for the needy. While I do understand where he is coming from on his position I believe it comes down more to how we redistribute taxes. The current way that the United States does, does not and will never work. The current government programs allow many individuals to get on regardless of why they're on it. It allows not only lazy individuals but those who spend that money on drugs or just flat out lie to get it. I know one individual in person who lied to get these government assisted programs yet drives a brand new BMW 5 series. It is people like those that ruin the reputation of these programs, at the fault of not only the individual but the government as well. If we were to reform these programs and mandate drug tests, requiring them to actually seek out work, and other stipulations then we could have redistributed taxes that not only make sense but of which much more of the population could agree to.

- 6. Explain why Kai Nielsen believes that democratic socialism is preferable to competitive capitalism. Do you agree? Explain your answer.**
- 7. State and explain Peter Singer's principle of equal consideration (including the 3 points discussed in class). What, according to Singer, does the rejection of speciesism *not* imply? Do you agree? Explain your answer.**
- 8. Explain Peter Singer's claim that the rejection of speciesism does not imply the equal value of lives. Do you agree? Explain your answer.**
- 9. State and explain Bonnie Steinbock's three uniquely human capacities. Do any of them justify favoring the interests of humans over non-humans? If so, which one(s)? Explain your answer.**

Distance and proximity are not morally relevant. This is because you can help people across the globe nearly as easy as you can with someone right in front of you.

There is no MRD between cases when you are the only one and when you're one amongst many who can help.

- 10 fill in the blank, one point each, 3 out of 5 essay questions (17 points each)