**Moral Philosophy Exam Questions**

These are the terms that are likely to be asked about in a 3 mark question.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Absolute** | Term applied to ethical theories which hold that what is right or wrong will be the same for all people, at all times (e.g. Kantian deontology) |
| **(A) categorical imperative** | An imperative is a command or order. A categorical imperative is a statement about what you ought to do, without regard to what you want. |
| **(The) Categorical Imperative (Kant)** | Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.' (Kant) |
| **Cognitive** | Language which makes claims about reality that are true or false, i.e. language which states facts |
| **Consequentialist** | Term applied to ethical theories which judge whether an action is right or wrong on the basis of consequence of the actions, not the action itself (e.g. utilitarianism) |
| **Contradiction in conception** | In Kantian ethics, the test for whether we can will a maxim to become universal law can be failed if it would somehow be self-contradictory for everyone to act on that maxim. |
| **Contradiction in will** | In Kantian ethics, the test for whether we can will a maxim to become universal law can be failed if, although the maxim is not self-contradictory, we cannot rationally will it. |
| **Deontological**  | Term applied to ethical theories which make judgements about ethical actions based on the intention of the moral agents or whether they are consistent with moral laws (e.g. Kantian deontology)  |
| **Doctrine of the mean** | Aristotle's claim that virtue requires us to feel, choose and act in an 'intermediate' way, neither 'too much' nor 'too little', but ‘to feel [passions] at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way’. |
| **Emotivism** | The theory that claims that moral judgements express a feeling or non-cognitive attitude, typically approval or disapproval, and aim to influence the feelings and actions of others. |
| **Ergon** | ‘Function’ or ‘characteristic activity’ of something, e.g. the ergon of a knife is to cut, the ergon of an eye is to see. |
| **Error Theory** | The theory that moral judgements make claims about objective moral properties, but that no such properties exist. Thus moral judgements are cognitive, but are all false. Moral language, as we mean to use it, rests on a mistake. |
| **Ethics**  | The area of philosophy concerned with what behaviour is morally right or wrong, good or bad. |
| **Eudaimonia** | ‘Living well and faring well'. According to Aristotle, eudaimonia is not subjective and is not a psychological state, but an objective quality of someone’s life as a whole. It is the final end for human beings. |
| **Felicific/Hedonic Calculus** | In Bentham's ethics, the means of calculating pleasures and pains caused by an action and adding them up on a single scale. The total amount of happiness produced is the sum total of everyone’s pleasures minus the sum total of everyone’s pains. |
| **Function Argument** | Aristotle's argument that the human good (eudaimonia) will be achieved by performing our characteristic activity (ergon) well. Traits that enable us to fulfil our ergon, which is rational activity, are virtues (arête). |
| **(The) Good Will** | In Kant, the good will is the will that is motivated by duty, which Kant argues means that it chooses in accordance with reason. It is the only thing that is morally good without qualification. |
| **Hypothetical Imperative** | An imperative is a command or order. A hypothetical imperative is a statement about what you ought to do, on the assumption of some desire or goal |
| **Integrity** | Acting on and living by the values that you endorse. |
| **Intuitionism** | The theory that some moral judgements are self-evident, i.e. their truth can be known just by rational reflection upon the judgement itself. Moral intuitions are a type of synthetic a priori knowledge. |
| **Maxim**  | A moral rule. |
| **Meta-ethics** | The branch of ethics which discusses what ethical language means. Typical questions include, ‘What does it mean to say something is good?’, ‘Does ethical language refer to anything in objective reality?’ (the third major topic in this course) |
| **Moral**  | Actions, behaviour or intentions that are considered good or right  |
| **Moral agent**  | Someone involved in making ethical or moral decisions  |
| **Moral/ethical theory**  | A set of ideas about ethics and how people should behave  |
| **Moral realism** | The view that mind-independent moral properties and facts exist |
| **Moral anti-realism** | The view that mind-independent moral properties and facts do not exist |
| **Non-cognitive** | Language which does *not* make claims about reality that are true or false, i.e. language which does *not* state facts |
| **Normative ethics** | The branch of ethics which discusses what individuals *ought* and *ought not* do. Typical questions include, ‘What moral rules should people follow?’, ‘What is it to be a good person?’ (the first major topic in this course) |
| **Objective** | Something which is part of mind-independent reality; a fact. It is true for all people regardless of age, culture, gender, etc. *Note*: this is not the same as *absolute* – Bentham’s principle of utility is *relativistic* but it is *objective* because it holds that pleasure is a part of mind-independent reality. |
| **Partiality** | Favouring some people, e.g. family and friends, over others. |
| **Pleasures (Higher and Lower)** | According to Mill, one pleasure is higher than another if almost everyone who is ‘competently acquainted’ with both prefers one over the other. Higher pleasures include thought, feeling and imagination, while lower pleasures involve the body and senses. |
| **Practical Wisdom** | An intellectual virtue of practical reason, ‘a true and reasoned state or capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man’ (Aristotle). It involves knowledge of what is good or bad in general and what is good in a particular situation, and the abilities to deliberate well and act on that deliberation. |
| **Prescriptivism** | The non-cognitive theory that moral judgements are prescriptive, that is, moral judgements provide commands and recommendations about how to act. |
| **Relative** | Term applied to ethical theories which hold that actions which may be right in one circumstance, may be wrong in another, and vice versa (e.g. utilitarianism) |
| **Secondary Principles** | Mill’s moral 'rules of thumb' that, if followed, generally produce happiness, e.g. 'tell the truth'. Mill argues that we have learned secondary principles through human history, through trial and error. |
| **Skill Analogy** | The analogy between virtues and practical skills. In Aristotle, virtues are said to be like practical skills because we learn both through practice (what we do), not (just) theory; and we gain an expertise that is sensitive to individual situations. |
| **Subjective** | Something which is mind-dependent, e.g. an opinion. May be true for some individuals, but not for others. *Note:* this is not the same as *relative* – subjectivist theories of ethics hold that there is *no such thing* as ethical truths, relativist theories hold that what is true in one situation may be false in another. |
| **Tyranny of the Majority** | The unjust exercise of power by a majority of people over a minority who have different values or desires, e.g. outlawing a minority religion because most people want it outlawed. (This is a problem with utilitarianism) |

1. **Normative Ethical Theories: Utilitarianism**

Explain Bentham’s quantitative hedonistic utilitarianism. (5)

Explain Mill’s qualitative hedonistic utilitarianism. (5)

Explain Mill’s distinction between higher and lower pleasures. (5)

Explain Mill’s ‘proof’ of utilitarianism. (5)

Explain preference utilitarianism. (5)

Explain rule utilitarianism. (5)

Explain why Nozick’s experience machine may cause a problem for hedonistic forms of utilitarianism. (5)

Explain why utilitarianism risks creating a tyranny of the majority. (5)

Explain why it may be argued that utilitarianism faces a problem in accounting for individual rights. (5)

Explain why utilitarianism faces a problem of calculation. (5)

Explain why utilitarianism has an issue with partiality. (5)

Explain why it may be argued that utilitarianism ignores the significance of the moral integrity of an individual. (5)

Explain why it may be argued that utilitarianism ignores the moral significance of the intentions of an individual. (5)

Explain (Bentham’s) utilitarianism **and** explain how Nozick’s experience machine challenges this view. (12)

Explain (Bentham’s) utilitarianism **and** why it risks creating a tyranny of the majority. (12)

Explain (Bentham’s) utilitarianism **and** why it faces a problem in accounting for individual rights. (12)

Explain (Bentham’s) utilitarianism **and** why it faces a problem of calculation. (12)

Explain (Bentham’s) utilitarianism **and** why it has an issue with partiality. (12)

Explain (Bentham’s) utilitarianism **and** why it may be argued that utilitarianism ignores the significance of the moral integrity of an individual. (12)

Explain (Bentham’s) utilitarianism **and** why it may be argued that utilitarianism ignores the moral significance of the intentions of an individual. (12)

Explain Mill’s ‘proof’ of utilitarianism **and** why it may be argued that it commits the fallacy of equivocation. (12)

How convincing is utilitarianism? (25)

Are utilitarians correct when they say that it is morally right to maximise utility? (25)

1. **Normative Ethical Theories: Kantian Deontological Ethics**

Explain Kant’s account of what is meant by a ‘good will’. (5)

Explain Kant’s distinction between acting in accordance with duty and acting out of duty. (5)

Explain Kant’s distinction between hypothetical imperatives and categorical imperatives. (5)

Explain Kant’s first formulation of the categorical imperative. (5)

Explain Kant’s distinction between a contradiction in conception and a contradiction in will. (5)

Explain Kant’s second formulation of the categorical imperative. (5)

Explain the objection to Kantian deontological ethics that sometimes duties clash or conflict. (5)

Explain the objection to Kantian deontological ethics that not all universalisable maxims are moral. (5)

Explain the objection to Kantian deontological ethics that not all non-universalisable maxims are immoral. (5)

Explain the objection that Kantian deontological ethics ignores the moral value of consequences. (5)

Explain the objection that Kantian deontological ethics ignores the moral value of certain motives. (5)

Explain Philippa Foot’s objection to Kantian deontological ethics that morality is a system of hypothetical, rather than categorical, imperatives. (5)

Explain Kant’s first formulation of the categorical imperative **and** the objection that not all universalisable maxims are moral. (12)

Explain Kant’s first formulation of the categorical imperative **and** the objection that not all non-universalisable maxims are immoral. (12)

Explain Kant’s distinction between acting in accordance with duty and acting out of duty **and** the objection that this ignores the moral value of certain motives. (12)

Explain Kant’s account of what is meant by a ‘good will’ **and** the objection that this ignores the moral value of consequences. (12)

Explain the objection to Kantian deontological ethics that sometimes duties clash or conflict **and** how Kant might respond. (12)

How convincing is Kant’s deontological ethics? (25)

1. **Normative Ethical Theories: Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics**

Explain what Aristotle means by eudaimonia and its relationship to pleasure. (5)

Explain Aristotle’s function argument. (5)

Explain Aristotle’s account of virtues as character traits. (5)

Explain the role of education and habituation in Aristotle’s account of the development of moral character. (12)

Explain Aristotle’s skill analogy for explaining the acquisition of virtues. (5)

Explain Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean and how it applies to moral behaviour. (5)

Explain the role that practical wisdom plays in Aristotle’s virtue ethics. (5)

Explain the objection that Aristotle’s virtue ethics cannot give sufficiently clear guidance about how to act. (5)

Explain the issue of clashing/competing virtues in relation to Aristotle’s virtue ethics. (5)

Explain the issue of circularity in how Aristotle defines virtuous acts and virtuous people. (5)

Explain the objection to Aristotle’s virtue ethics that a trait need not contribute to Eudaimonia to be a moral good/virtue. (5)

Explain the role that practical wisdom plays in Aristotle’s virtue ethics **and** the objection that this account cannot give sufficiently clear guidance about how to act. (12)

Explain Aristotle’s distinction between voluntary, involuntary and non-voluntary actions and how this affects his view of whether a person is morally responsible. (12)

Explain Aristotle’s view on how we develop moral character **and** how this is challenged by the issue of circularity in his definition of ‘virtuous acts’. (12)

How convincing is Aristotelean virtue ethics? (25)

**3. Meta-ethics: Moral Anti-realism**

Explain Mackie’s Error Theory. (5)

Explain the emotivist account of moral language. (5)

Explain the prescriptivist account of moral language. (5)

Explain the objection that moral anti-realism cannot account for moral reasoning. (5)

Explain the objection that moral anti-realism cannot account moral progress. (5)

Explain the objection that anti-realism becomes moral nihilism. (5)

How convincing are anti-realist accounts of meta-ethics? (25)