

PHL 202: Review for Exams

Below are some general review questions for the material we should cover in class. You may use these to help you read and study the material. The review questions are intended to be a general guide and not a specific list of actual questions I will ask on the exam. Also, the following list is not necessarily complete. However, if you can answer these questions, you will be well prepared for the exam. You should use class discussion as a guide to help you determine what material may appear on the exams. If you have any questions, please ask. I will be happy to tell you what I expect you to know come exam time.

Advice for answering short answer questions:

Each question is asking for something specific. Be sure you understand what you are being asked, and then provide a complete, but concise, answer to that question (and that question only). On average, it should take 2-3 sentences to provide an appropriate response.

Advice for answering essay questions:

Each essay question will ask you to do two tasks: (1) show that you understand the appropriate material, and (2) provide an argument for some conclusion related to that material. Your job will be to decide how to approach these tasks, to determine what material to include (leaving out whatever is not relevant to your answer), and to formulate an argument supporting your own view of the topic. The argument will be the most important element to your grade, so put some thought into it. For a short essay, an answer of ½ to 1 pages should be sufficient. For longer essays, your response should be about 2 pages.

Introductory material:

Explain the difference between normative and descriptive ethics.

Is philosophical ethics an empirical science? Why?

Why is metaethics different from just plain ethics?

What are three frameworks for answering moral questions?

What are moral values? Give three kinds of moral values.

What is an argument? (Know the definition, and be able to produce arguments in your essays.)

What's the point of taking an ethics class? Why is this the point? Do you agree?

How are we to determine the difference between right and wrong? Explain your response.

Utilitarianism

What is the principle of utility?

What qualifications does Mill make to the principle of utility?

What are the criticisms raised against utility? (There are several criticisms.)

How does Mill respond to these criticisms?

Why must moral judgments be disinterested and impartial?

What does Mill mean by "duty"?

How does Mill try to "prove" the principle of utility?

Why is his proof not quite a proof?

Why does utility have difficulty respecting individuals?

What does Mill mean by "happiness"?

How does a utilitarian determine if an action is right or wrong?

Comparison of Utility with Deontology and Virtue Ethics

What are the similarities and differences in Mill's and Kant's moral philosophy? (There are at least three major similarities, and at least one central difference.)

Which moral theory, if either, do you find more attractive? Why?

How does Mill determine if an action is right or wrong? How does Kant distinguish right and wrong?

Why is motivation unimportant for Mill but of primary importance for Kant? What about Aristotle's view of motivation?

Why are consequences central to utility but irrelevant for deontology? Are they important for Aristotle?

Why do both Mill and Kant say their principle is consistent with the Golden Rule? Would Aristotle agree?

How are the universal theories of Mill and Kant different from the virtue ethics of Aristotle?

Why is utility both teleological and consequentialist? Why is virtue ethics only teleological?
Explain why Aristotle thinks that there can be no single moral principle? What does he offer instead?

Kant/Deontology

What does Kant mean by the expression "good will"? Why is it always good?
Why does Kant say happiness cannot be the end of morality?
What is "duty" for Kant? How does one determine their duties? Would Mill agree?
What should one do when duties conflict?
What makes an action morally right?
What is the categorical imperative? Be able to explain it in your own words.
Why is the categorical imperative not an imperative for God?
What gives human beings dignity and not a mere price?
Why does Kant say ordinary moral reasoning is more accurate than philosophical moral reasoning?
Why investigate philosophical morality if common reasoning is more likely to be correct?
Why does Kant say we have a duty to be happy?

Aristotle

What does Aristotle mean by "happiness"? Is this the same as Mill's definition?
What does he mean by "human good"?
How does the idea of human functioning determine morality?
What is the difference between theoretical and moral virtue? Why does Aristotle stress moral virtue?
What is the "mean between the extremes of excess and deficiency" (i.e., the Golden Mean)?
What does Aristotle mean by "virtue"? Be able to put this in your own words.
How do we know what actions are virtuous? Why is there no rule for determining which actions are virtuous?
How does one become virtuous? When does someone become virtuous?
What are the conditions for virtuous action?
Are motives or consequences important for establishing virtue?
How is virtue related to pleasure and pains?
What is practical wisdom? How does one obtain it?
Why is habit necessary for moral action?