

# Practical Comprehensive Examination Topics

2010-11

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## I. Ethics: Core

Obligation and Resolution of Conflicts of Obligation

## II. Social and Political Philosophy

Justification and Limits of State Authority

## III. Contemporary Ethics\*

Expressivism (see Guide below)

\* N.B. All students who take the Practical Comprehensive Exam must write on the Core Ethics topic (I). Students then have the choice of writing on *either* the Social and Political Philosophy topic (II) *or* the Contemporary Ethics (III) topic. In January 2010, those students taking the Practical Comp who choose to write on the Contemporary Ethics (III) topic may choose to write on *either* the topic of "Impartiality," or the 2010-11 topic, "Expressivism."

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## Guide to Ph.D. Practical Comprehensive Exam

### INTRODUCTION

This document is a guide for preparation for taking the Ph.D. comprehensive examination in ethics and social-political philosophy. It is divided into three parts. The first part (Core Texts) lists those texts in ethics, knowledge of which, all students taking the exam are expected to have. In studying these texts students will acquire the necessary historical background in ethics that will provide a foundation for understanding more specialized work in the area. The second part (Selected Topics) mentions some topics in both normative ethics and metaethics that have been and continue to be of central interest in ethics. Readings will be announced when specific topics for the exam are set. The third section (Social-Political Core Texts) lists central texts in social-political philosophy. On the area exam in ethics/social-political philosophy, students will normally be asked to write on two questions. Students must answer a question on ethics pertaining to the core ethics texts (section I), and will choose to answer either a question pertaining to the selected topics in ethics (section II), or a question pertaining to the core readings in social-political philosophy (section III).

### I. CORE TEXTS

Plato: *Republic*

Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*

Hume: *Treatise of Human Nature*, bk. II, pt. III, sec. III; bk. III.

Kant: *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*; *The Critique of Practical Reason*; *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Introduction, pt. II, "The Tugendlehre"; *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, bk. I.

Mill: *Utilitarianism*

Nietzsche: *On the Genealogy of Morals*

## II. SELECTED TOPICS IN ETHICAL THEORY: *Expressivism*<sup>†</sup>

- A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, & Logic*, Chapter VI [1]  
S. Blackburn, *Ruling Passions*, Chapter 1 & 3 [6]  
D. Copp, Ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* [G]  
    (1) Chapter 5 by Blackburn [one might read this before all else]  
    (2) Chapter 7 by D'Arms & Jacobson [one might read this just before 14 & 15]  
J. D'Arms & D. Jacobson  
    (1) "Expressivism, Morality, and the Emotions" (*Ethics*, 1994) [14]  
    (2) "Sentiment and Value" (*Ethics*, 2000) [15]  
S. Darwall, A. Gibbard, P. Railton, eds., *Moral Discourse and Practice*  
    Excerpts or articles by Stevenson [2], Harman [3], Mackie [4], Blackburn [5], Gibbard [7],  
    McDowell (2) [9], & Wiggins [10]  
A. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, Chapters 7, 8, 9 [8]  
A. Miller, *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*, Chapters 1-6 [G]  
P. Railton, *Facts, Values, Norms* (collection of essays)  
    (1) "Facts and Values" [11]  
    (2) "Noncognitivism about Rationality: Benefits, Costs, and an Alternative" [12]  
C. Wright, "Realism, Antirealism, Irrealism, Quasi-realism," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 12, 25-49 [13]

<sup>†</sup> Readings are paired with a suggested ordering in brackets; "G" refers to a general guide

## III. SOCIAL-POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY CORE TEXTS

Plato: *Crito*

Aristotle: *Politics* 1, 2 (i-v), 3, 7, 8

Hobbes: *Leviathan* (books 1 and 2)

Locke: *Two Treatises of Government* (both treatises)

Mill: *On Liberty* and *The Subjection of Women*

Rousseau: *The Social Contract* and *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men*