

Practical Comprehensive Examination Topics

2011-12

The following is a guide for taking the Ph.D. comprehensive examinations in ethics and social and political philosophy for the period 2011-12, beginning in May 2011. The first section lists the topic for the ethics core examination and a reading list of texts of which all students are expected to have knowledge. The second section lists the topic and the reading list for the examination on contemporary ethics. The third section lists the topic and reading list for the examination on social and political philosophy. All students taking the practical comprehensive examination must write on the core ethics topic and *either* the contemporary ethics topic *or* the social and political topic.

I. ETHICS CORE – *Consequences, Duty, and Virtue*

Some moral philosophers have argued that duty (the rightness and wrongness of action) should be understood entirely in terms of the values (goodness and badness) of the consequences of actions. Such ‘consequentialist’ moral theories are opposed by versions of deontological ethics and by (at least some versions of) virtue ethics. In preparing for the examination focus on issues such as: (1) What account does each of the core figures take on the relationship between consequences, duty, and virtue? (2) What are the relative philosophical advantages and disadvantages of the various accounts? (3) Which, if any, do you find most plausible? Why?

READING LIST

- 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. CONTEMPORARY ETHICAL THEORY – *Consequences, Duty, and Virtue*

In recent years, one main focus in the field of ethics has been debates among various types of moral theory: consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics. In preparing for this part of the comprehensive exam, you should concentrate on the following questions: (1) What are the distinctive features of each of these three types of moral theory? (2) Based on 1, how do these theories differ? (3) What are the main arguments in favor of and against each of these theories? (4) How do you stand on this debate?

READING LIST

Consequentialism (which includes versions of utilitarianism)

- Moore, *Ethics*, Ch. 1 and 2.
- Nielson, “Against Moral Conservatism” (*Ethics* 82 (1972)).

- Rawls, “Classical Utilitarianism” (in *Consequentialism and its Critics*)
- Bales, “Act-Utilitarianism: Account of Right-Making Characteristics or Decision-Making Procedure?” (*American Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (1971)).
- Smart, “Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism” (*Philosophical Quarterly* 6 (1956)).
- Rawls, “Two Concepts of Rules” (*Philosophical Review* 64 (1955)).
- Williams, “A Critique of Utilitarianism” in *Utilitarianism: For and Against*
- Railton, “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality”
- Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism*

Deontology

- Ross, *The Right and the Good*, Chapters 1, 2, 5-7.
- Dancy, “Intuitionism” (In P. Singer, Ed., *A Companion to Ethics*.)
- Dancy, “An Ethic of Prima Facie Duties” (In P. Singer, Ed., *A Companion to Ethics*.)
- McNaughton, “An Unconnected Heap of Duties?” (*Philosophical Quarterly* 46 (1996)).
- Nagel, “Autonomy and Deontology” (in *Consequentialism and its Critics*)
- Nagel, “War and Massacre” (in *Consequentialism and its Critics*)
- Foot, “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect” (in *Consequentialism and its Critics*)

Virtue Ethics

- Statman, “Introduction to Virtue Ethics” (in D. Statman, ed., *Virtue Ethics: A Critical Reader*).
- Hursthouse, “Virtue Theory and Abortion” (in *Virtue Ethics*)
- Foot, “Virtues and Vices” (in *Virtue Ethics*)
- Stocker, “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories” (in *Virtue Ethics*)
- Wolf, “Moral Saints” (in *Virtue Ethics*)
- McDowell, “Virtue and Reason” (in *Virtue Ethics*)
- Slote, “Agent-Based Virtue Ethics” (in *Virtue Ethics*)
- Hurka, “Against Virtue Ethics” (Chapter 8 of Hurka’s *Virtue, Vice, and Value*)

Main Texts

- Crisp and Slote, *Virtue Ethics*
- Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*
- Mill, *Utilitarianism*
- Scheffler, *Consequentialism and its Critics*
- Smart and Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*

Background Reading

- M. Baron, P. Pettit, and M. Slote, *Three Methods of Ethics* (1996). In this book each author defend a particular type of moral theory and then each of the authors respond to the other two.
- M. Timmons, *Moral Theory: An Introduction* (2002). Text aimed at advanced undergraduates and graduate students needing an overview of the field of normative moral theory.

III. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY – *Justification and the Limits of State Authority*

While Hobbes was not the first philosopher to focus on the political obligation of the individual in the political orders, his work has set the tone for much of the discussion and debates the limits of state authority to the present day. In preparing for this part of the comprehensive exam, you should consider the history of the problem of political justification and concentrate on the following questions: (1) Why is the relationship between the individual and the authority of the state a moral and ethical problem? (2) How has the social contract been seen as a way to resolve this problem of the limits of state authority? (3) Does the concept of “hypothetical consent” help resolve the issues of state authority? (4) Which of the philosophers gives the best resolution to this problem? Situate his work in the history of the issue.

READING LIST

Social Contract

- Freeman, Samuel (2007). *Justice and the Social Contract*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Freeman has published extensively on John Rawls’s work)
- Gough, J. W. (1967). *The Social Contract*, 2nd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lessnoff, Michael (1986). *Social Contract*. London: Macmillan.
- Lister, Andrew. “Public Justification and the Limits of State Action.” *Politics Philosophy Economics* April 28, 2010 vol. 9 no. 2 151-175
- Rawls, John (1958 [1999]). “Justice as Fairness”, *Philosophical Review* 67(2): 164-194. Reprinted in *John Rawls, Collected Papers*, Samuel Freeman, ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Political Obligations

- Edmundson, William (ed.) (1999). *The Duty to Obey the Law: Selected Philosophical Readings*, Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hardimon, Michael (1994). “Role Obligations,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 91: 333–63.
- Hare, R. M. (1976). “Political Obligation,” in *Social Ends and Political Means*, T. Honderich (ed.), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Knowles, Dudley (2010). *Political Obligation: A Critical Introduction*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Waldron, Jeremy (1993). “Special Ties and Natural Duties,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 22: 3–30; reprinted in W. A. Edmundson (ed.), *The Duty to Obey the Law*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999
- Wellman, Christopher Heath and A. John Simmons (2005). *Is There a Duty to Obey the Law?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wolff, Jonathan (1995). “Political Obligation, Fairness and Independence,” *Ratio* (New Series), 8: 87–99.
- Wolff, Robert Paul (1998 [1970]). *In Defense of Anarchism*, 3rd edition, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Commentaries

- Boxill, Bernard, *Blacks and Social Justice*
- Lawson, Bill E., *The Underclass Question*
- Mills, Charles, *The Racial Contract*
- Pateman, Carol, *The Sexual Contract*

- Pateman, Carol and Charles Mill,

Main 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*
- Rawls: *A Theory of Justice*

Background Reading

- J. Chrisman, *Social and Political Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction* (200). A good basic introduction, but not to be used as definitive.
- Colin Bird, *An introduction to Political Philosophy* (2006). This text covers some material not discussed in Chrisman.) A good basic introduction, but not to be used as definitive.