

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY  
VALUE THEORY COMPREHENSIVE EXAM  
PERMANENT QUESTIONS**

Note: the exam will consist of three questions from each of the following sections, of which the examinee must answer one from each section. (Three answers total.)

**ANCIENT & MEDIEVAL**

1. Describe the major points of contention between the ethics of the Stoics and Epicureans, and the strengths and weaknesses of each. Which do you think has the better position, and why?
2. Does Plato present a cogent argument against Gyges using his ring?
3. Aristotle wavers between two different conceptions of *eudaimonia*. Explain their differences, the arguments in favor of each, and the extent to which they can be reconciled.
4. Are human beings by nature political animals? Discuss the meaning of this concept in Aristotle, the role it plays in shaping his political thought, and whether you find it true and insightful.
5. Critically compare the views of Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas on the purpose and value of the state.
6. It is sometimes said that the psychological systems of Plato and Aristotle have no place for the deliberate choice of evil recognized as such. Is this true? And do the respective approaches of Plato and Aristotle to this issue represent a strength or a weakness in their philosophies?
7. Taking one emotion of your choosing (fear, anger, love, etc.), explain its importance for Aristotle's account of the life of virtue. Explain the sense in which this emotion and emotion generally are necessary to virtue, in contrast to the Stoic refusal of emotions. Which view do you find more persuasive, and why?
8. Explain the tripartite division of the soul. In what sense is this division of the soul able to answer the guiding question of the nature of justice? In what sense is this division of the soul challenged or undermined by one of either: (a) the "longer way" announced in Book VI, (b) the discussion of regimes in Books VII-IX, or (c) the Myth of Er?
9. What is law, according to Aquinas? What are its main aspects, from where does its authority derive, and how does it relate to human nature? What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of Aquinas's account?
10. Explain and differentiate the Epicurean and Stoic conceptions of freedom. What do you take to be some of the strengths and weaknesses of each view, and which view do you favor?

**17TH-19TH CENTURIES**

11. Discuss in detail the three versions of Kant's Categorical Imperative as it applies to either the case of suicide or the case of making a false promise. Do you find his account of the moral status of this act persuasive?

12. Hobbes believes that we can defeat the moral skeptic by showing that acting morally is always in one's self-interest. How does he show this? Evaluate his answer.
13. Why should I obey laws with which I do not agree? Explain and evaluate the answers to this question offered by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau.
14. Kant and Hume have widely different views on the role of reason and of sentiment/emotion/feelings in moral action. Do you think they are talking past each other? Explain. Do you find one view more plausible than the other?
15. Compare the accounts of freedom in Rousseau and Marx, explain the implications of these accounts for their understanding of political community, and assess the adequacy of their notions of freedom and community.
16. Explain and assess Nietzsche's ambiguous interpretation of the slave revolt in morality.
17. Mill believes that he can save act utilitarianism from the problem that it does not respect rights, or that it makes rights subservient to utility. Exactly what is the problem for Bentham's version of act utilitarianism? Discuss in detail Mill's attempt to solve it. Evaluate his success or failure.
18. Notoriously, Mill's *On Liberty* appears inconsistent with his *Utilitarianism*. Describe the major points of inconsistency and to what extent, if at all, they can be overcome.
19. Critically compare the views on the origin and justification of private property, and the resulting social inequalities, held by Locke, Rousseau, and Marx.
20. Why is the moral motive so special for Kant? What role does it play in the moral status of actions? Refer in your discussion to some of the cases Kant discusses in connection with the three *propositions* of morality. Do you think his account is right? Explain why or why not.
21. Compare Kant and Hume on the question of whether reason by itself can motivate action. What bearing does this have in determining whom we can consider responsible for moral action? Which view do you consider more nearly correct, and why?

## **PLATO TO NIETZSCHE**

22. Should liberation be an important goal of political philosophy? If so, liberation from what, and how is it to be achieved? Explain and defend your own view in dialogue with those of at least three of the following: Plato, Augustine, Rousseau, and Marx.
23. Discuss the role of autonomy in the moral theories of Aristotle and Kant. Which provides a more adequate approach to this aspect of the moral life?
24. What does it take for an action to be virtuous or (in the fullest sense) morally right? Discuss with reference to Aristotle and either Kant or Hume. Which of the two authors do you consider more nearly correct, and why?
25. Both Marx and Nietzsche reach back to recover important insights from ancient philosophy that they feel have gone unrecognized to the detriment of philosophy. Choosing one figure or the other, explain how this thinker incorporates ancient insights into his philosophical system, and evaluate his success.

26. The idea of history bursts onto the scene in a significant way in the 19th century. Explain the importance of this idea for either Nietzsche or Marx, and explain what might be importantly lacking in an account that does not acknowledge the importance of history.
27. What might be some advantages and disadvantages of a character-based moral theory (e.g., Aristotle, Plato) as opposed to a rule-oriented one (e.g., Hobbes, Kant, Mill)? Which view do you favor, and why?
28. Compare Aristotle's account of eudaimonia to Bentham's account of pleasure and Mill's account of happiness. Do you think that one is better than the others in terms of the role it plays in grounding a moral theory? Explain your answer.
29. "All humans are created equal" – true or false? More precisely, in what ways is this assertion true and in what ways is it false, and what significance do any various forms of (in)equality have for political philosophy? Explain and defend your own view in dialogue with those of at least three of the following: Aristotle, Augustine, Locke, and Nietzsche.
30. Critically compare Aquinas's conception of natural law and Kant's idea of universal moral law. Which do you find more tenable, and why?
31. Do we choose to be moral? Discuss with reference to one philosopher from each of the above periods.