



Ethics: contemporary perspectives [PY3115] (Prerequisite: PY1095)

Introductory reading

Mackie, J.L. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) revised edition.

Williams, B. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. (London: Fontana, 1985).

Sample examination questions

1. If a principle is a moral principle, must it be universalisable?
2. 'In order to act I must have some end which I desire to achieve by so acting.' Discuss.
3. Must cognitive theories about conflicts of obligation 'eliminate from the scene the ought that is not acted upon'?
4. Does consequentialism give a plausible account of the importance of consequences to the moral evaluation of actions?
5. Can consequentialism adequately account for the way in which we condemn ingratitude or disloyalty and the way in which we praise people who return good for evil?
6. Is the concept of character important to an adequate account of morality?
7. 'Impartiality is not the essence of morality; it is one particular virtue.' Discuss.
8. Is there an important distinction between saying that an act is intrinsically wrong and that it should under no circumstances be done?
9. Are emotions integral to morality? If so, how?
10. What is the best way of defining an altruistic act?
11. Are moral judgments true or false?
12. Discuss the idea that something is intrinsically valuable if and only if a moral person would choose it for itself.
13. What kind of objective moral considerations can there be?
14. Is there a problem about how moral considerations can motivate? Is this problem a special one for moral realists?
15. What is it for an action to be self-determined or autonomous? How is this related to moral responsibility?
16. Is there any form of moral relativism that can escape the charges of incoherence or self-contradiction?
17. If killing a baby is morally wrong, why isn't contraception also morally wrong?
18. How coherent is pacifism?

19. If a doctor has the resources to treat only one of two patients, what sort of grounds should he use to choose which one?