Test 4

Review

Final Exam:
Tuesday, 12/13
8:00—10:00 am
1025 Brown Hall
Moral Philosophy

• How should I live?
  – How should we live?

• And why?

• Is there such a thing a moral obligation?
  – Are there things that, morally speaking, you should do, even if you don’t want to.

• Is there some general principle that makes things “morally right” or “morally wrong?”
Ways we value/desire things

• **Intrinsically:**
  – Things desired “for their own sake,” not because of what they bring about:
    • Exp.: Listening to music, viewing works of art

• **Instrumentally:**
  – Things desired for what they bring about, not for their own sake.
    • Exp.: Going to the dentist

• **Both intrinsically and instrumentally:**
  • Exp.: Eating
How do we value acting justly?

• Socrates thinks we value justice both for what it brings about (others treat us justly in return), and in itself (simply because it is right).

• Glaucon thinks we value justice only for what it brings about, not in itself.

• His evidence: what we would do if we had Gyges’ Ring—if we could be invisible.
Gyges’ Ring

• In Greek mythology, this ring makes you invisible.

• Plato uses this as a “thought experiment” to get us to think about why we act certain ways.

• Are we concerned with “acting morally” only because we’re afraid that, if we don’t, we’ll get in trouble?
Moral Responsibility

• If our car breaks down, we might blame the manufacturer, but we don’t blame the car.
  — We hold *people* morally accountable for their actions, not *cars*.

• We hold people morally accountable because (we believe) they had a choice in how they acted.

• We believe that to be morally responsible, you need a “free will.”
Free Will vs. “Determinism”

• But *are* we really “free,” or is our behavior determined by factors outside our control?

• We tend to believe we have free will, yet, we tend to believe other things that seem incompatible with our having a free will.

• There are *many* arguments against free will.
Physiological Argument for Determinism

• 1) Every (physical) event is caused by a previous (physical) event.

• 2) Causes necessitate their effects.

• 3) So, every (physical) event is necessitated by a prior (physical) event.
   – Including everything we do or say.
Causal Determinism

• *If* nothing “just happens,”
  – i.e., if all physical events are caused by previous physical events.

• And *if* causes “necessitate” their effects,
  – i.e., given that the cause happens, the effect cannot *not* happen.

• *Then* all our behavior was necessitated by prior events, which were in turn necessitated by prior events, etc.
  – i.e., our behavior is determined by factors outside our control, and we could *never* have acted any other way.
D’ Holbach

• “... it will perhaps be insisted ... that if it be proposed to any one, to move or not to move his hand, ... he evidently appears to be the master of choosing; from which it is concluded that evidence has been offered of free agency.”

• That is, I can prove my free will simply by moving my hand, or my lifting my little finger!
Acts Done “On Purpose”

• D’ Holbach recognize that sometime our actions are done because of our “choices,”
  – i.e., sometimes we do things because we desire (want) to do them.

• But he argues that these desires are themselves caused by factors beyond our control.

• So, even things we do “because we wanted to” are not examples of (true) free will.
Chosen or Discovered?
Can we *choose* our “wants?”

- Deliberate choice *presupposes* that you already have “wants.”
- So you can *choose* your “wants” only on the basis of “wants” you already have.
- Unless this goes on to *infinity*, your “deepest” wants must be *discovered*, not chosen.
- But if so, then all of our “choices” are the result of “wants” we didn’t chose.
Psychological Argument for Determinism

1) In every voluntary act, we always act in accordance with our deepest values, as we understand those values at the time of acting.

2) We have no control over our deepest values; i.e., they are caused by factors beyond our control.

3) So, even our voluntary acts are caused by factors that are beyond our control.
“Choice does not prove freedom.”

• If “choosing” to do something (doing it “on purpose”) presupposes that you already have “wants” or “values,” …

• Then our “deepest” wants cannot be \textit{chosen}, because “choosing” them would imply the existence of still “deeper” wants or values.

• So, even when we do something because “we choose to,” our choices are determined by (deep) values that we did not choose.
“Existentialism is a Humanism”
“Man is condemned to be free.”
--What I think Sartre means by this:

• We have no choice except to choose.
  – This is the “human condition.”
  – We exist in a perpetual state of “what should I do next?”
    • “… man is free, man is freedom.”
  – But we cannot justify our choices.
    • To be free means that we choose things because we choose them.” No other justification is possible.
    • “We are left alone, without excuse.”
“Existence Precedes Essence”

• “We must begin from the subjective.”
  – i.e., we must start with our own experience of ourselves.

• This is Sartre’s own summary of his view of human life—
  – “[Man] ... is a being whose existence comes before its essence.”

• This is what distinguishes us (i.e., “Men,” i.e., “persons”) from every other kind of being.
The Distinction

Essence Precedes Existence

• “Created” or manufactured things
  – If something is manufactured, there is a “design” from which it follows.
  – For something that is manufactured, its “essence,” i.e., its “nature” precedes its existence.
  – It is created in order to be a certain kind of thing.

Existence Precedes Essence

• For Sartre, “Man” is a being whose existence precedes its essence.
  – Sartre is starting from an atheist view.
  – If there is no God, then humans were not “designed.”
  – But he is saying more than that.
  – He is denying there is any “human nature.”
Existence before or after essence?

• If something is created ("an article of manufacture") then it was made according to some plan or design. In this case we would say that it’s essence precedes its existence.

• To say that something’s existence precedes its essence is to say that it was not designed or manufactured, and so that it is no “essential nature” given to it by its designer or creator.
“Atheistic existentialism …

• “… declares … that if God does not exist there is least one being whose existence precedes its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it….”

• *We* are such beings.

• “Man first of all exists, surges up in the world — and defines himself afterwards.”
“Man is Freedom”

• What Sartre is really describing (when he talks about “Man”) is a being with a free will.
• If we had an “essence” or a “nature,” we could not really be free.
• If we are free, we have no essence, no human or individual “nature.”
• We are nothing but our choices.
No Human Nature?

• Why does one act cowardly?
  – If I say that I acted in a certain way because I am a coward, I am saying that it is simply my nature (my essence) to act that way.
    • This relieves me of responsibility for my acts (“I couldn’t help it: that’s just the way I am.”)
    • But it denies my own free will.
  
• For Sartre, I am coward because I act cowardly,
  – Not, I act cowardly because I am a coward.
  – “Being a coward” is the result of my actions, not the cause of them.
  – Essence comes after existence.
I am Responsible for all Mankind

• By making certain choices, we affirm certain values as being appropriate for everyone.

• “And, when we say that man is responsible for himself, we ... mean ... that he is responsible for all men. ... [In making a choice] I am creating a certain image of man as I would have him be. In fashioning myself I fashion man.”
No Justification

• Having a free will means that there can never be any (external) “justification” for my choices.

• If do something freely, then I did it because I chose to. Period. There is no other justification.
  – Anything else is not acting freely.

• There can be no justification other than “because I chose to.”
Responsibility

• “If ... existence is prior to essence, man is responsible for what he is. Thus ... existentialism ... puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders.”

• Being free means accepting responsibility for one’s choices.

• This is both our burden, and the source of our dignity.
“Justice as Fairness”
A Social “Contract”

• Rawls’ position is a version of what is known as “social contract theory.”

• Social contract theory views societal limits on individual rights as being justified as a kind of agreement or “contract” that reasonable people would make with each other.

• Social contract theories provide a way of understanding how to avoid a “state of nature.”
Social Contract Theory

- Social contract theory tries to explain how to justify social limits on individual behavior without appealing to a “police state” to coerce social cooperation.

- According to social contract theory, limitations on individual rights are just if they are the limits that rational people would agree to (even if we have not in fact “voted” to enact them).
“State of Nature”

• 17th c. philosopher Thomas Hobbes asked us to think about a “society” in which there were no rules. He called this the “State of Nature.”
  – This is a mere thought experiment to help us think about what life would be like without social rules. (Hobbes didn’t claim that there ever was such a true “state of nature.”)

• In this “state of nature,” there are no social rules, and so everyone has a “natural right” to do whatever will best advance their interests.
  – In this situation, there is a maximum of “individual rights,” as there are no social limits on behavior.
Rawls’ Social Contract Theory

• “The principles that free and rational persons would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamental terms of their association.”

  – i.e., to obtain social justice, the rules that society ought to establish are those that rational people would agree to, were they to voluntarily enter into a contract with one another, beginning from “an initial position of equality.”
A “Veil of Ignorance”

- Rawls says that just social principles are those that people would agree to “from behind a veil of ignorance.”
  - “This ensures that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances.”
- This is the core of his notion of justice as fairness.
- This is what he means by “an initial position of equality.”
Behind the Veil

• If you didn’t know your personal conditions in society (wealth, race, gender, etc.), you wouldn’t agree to rules that advantaged/disadvantaged people because of these conditions.

• So, just social rules are those that rational people would agree to if they didn’t know how these rules would affect them individually.

• For Rawls, this is what makes for a “just” society. These are the limitations on individual rights that are morally acceptable.
Two Principles of Justice

• 1) “Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with similar liberty for others.

• 2) Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both
  – (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and
  – (b) attached to positions and offices available to all.”
Equality of Rights

- “Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with similar liberty for others.”

  - I should be able to do whatever I want as long as it doesn’t interfere with other people’s ability to do what they want.
    - “My right to swing my fist ends at your nose.”
Economic Inequality

• Rawls does not completely oppose an unequal distribution of economic wealth.
• But he thinks there should be limits on social arrangements that create such inequality.
• He thinks the opportunities (to gain more wealth than others) should be equally available to all.
• He thinks arrangements that allow unequal wealth or acceptable only if no one is hurt by them.
UTILITARIANISM
--a.k.a.--
The Greatest Happiness Principle

“...actions are right in proportion as they tend to produce happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain....”
Two Kinds of Moral Theories:

**Consequentialist**
- The moral value of an act is determined by the consequences of performing that act.
  - I.e., something external to the act—what happens as a result of doing it.
  - Mill’s utilitarianism is a version of consequentialism.

**Non-consequentialist**
- The consequences of performing an act do not by themselves determine its moral value.
  - The moral value of an act arises from something internal to the act itself—
    - **Kant**: The value of an act is determined by one’s reasons for doing it.
    - **Rawls’ Theory of Justice** is “Kantian” in spirit.
Consequentialism

• An act is:
  – morally *right* if it has *good* consequences;
  – morally *wrong* if it has *bad* consequences.

• Question: OK, but what makes certain consequences *good* or *bad*?
Hedonism:

- A theory about what has intrinsic value
- The only thing that is intrinsically good, that is valued in and of itself, is happiness. This is Mill’s view.
- Mill: by happiness is intended pleasure or the absence of pain.
Utilitarianism = 
Consequentialism + Hedonism

• Consequentialism:
  – Acts are morally right only to the extent that they produce good consequences; plus

• Hedonism:
  – Those consequences are good only to the extent that they create happiness.
    • Utilitarianism adopts hedonism as a value theory.
Are all pleasures equal?

• Some *kinds* of pleasure are more desirable than others.
  
  • *(Different strokes for different folks!)*

   – Mill says that “intellectual pleasures” are more desirable than “physical pleasures.”
   
   • They are preferred by those who know both.

   – For Mill, “pleasure” isn’t limited to “pleasures of the flesh.” Some pleasures, Mill thinks, are *better* than others.
Whose Happiness Counts?

• For utilitarians, everyone’s happiness counts equally
  – What matters is not whose happiness is involved, but how much overall happiness.

• **Utilitarianism:**
  – An act is morally right to the extent that it maximizes overall happiness (i.e., pleasure or the absence of pain), and wrong to the extent it does not.
Fairness, Justice, and Rights

• What if the “greatest good” for the majority requires substantial unjust “costs” for a minority?

• What if what we need to do to maximize happiness is unfair?
  – If maximizing overall happiness is the “ultimate” moral principle, then following it could never be “morally wrong” (in fact, not following it would always be morally wrong).

• Utilitarianism has no way to account for “justice” or “individual rights” if they don’t maximize happiness.
“Peter Singer”
Thought Experiment:

• Suppose “I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it.”

• Am I **morally obligated** to help the child?

• Singer says **yes**: “I ought to wade in and pull the child out. This might mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing.”
The ‘Core’ of Singer’s “Core Principle”

• If we can prevent a “bad thing” (pain/suffering) from happening, when, if ever, are we *morally responsible* for doing so?

• Singer believes that in at least *some* cases, we are morally obligated to prevent bad things from happening if we are able to.
  
  – The “strong” and “moderate” versions of this principle differ only about when we are
My “Fair Share”

1) If everyone who could afford to do so gave, say, $10, we could eliminate world hunger.

• 2) I am not more obligated than anyone else to end world hunger.

• 3) So, I am not obligated to give more than $10 to help eliminate world hunger.
My Obligation

• My obligation to the child is to do what it takes (until the cost to me is “morally significant”) to save the child.
  – If others help, I don’t need to do as much.
  – But if others don’t help, I am still obligated (until the cost is significant) to help the child.

• Likewise, I am obligated to (until the cost to me is significant) to feed the hungry, whether or not others do their “fair share.”
We are wrong not to do more

• “The uncontroversial appearance of the [moderate] principle ... is deceptive. ... If it were acted upon, even in its ... [moderate] form, our lives, our society, and our world would be fundamentally changed.”

  – For example, spending money on things we don’t need (booze, cigarettes, fancy clothes, etc.) when others are starving to death is, by our own principles, morally wrong.
The End!

• It’s been fun having you in my class. Thanks for attending. Please fill out the on-line class evaluation.

• Study hard. Remember that the final will include 5 questions each from Tests 1-3, for a total of 55 questions.

• Good luck on the final!