Exam Practice: Answers

Section 1: Epistemology
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Question 1
A tautology is a proposition that is true in all possible circumstances.
OR
A tautology is a proposition that is true in virtue of its logical form or the meanings of its terms.

Question 2
An abductive argument is one that proceeds from an effect to argue for the most likely cause.
OR
An abductive argument is an argument to the best explanation or best hypothesis.

Question 3
- The view that the immediate objects of perception are appearances or representations within the mind and that the external physical world is perceived only indirectly via these representations.
- Physical objects impact on our sense organs and cause us to experience sense data. And we make a judgement based on these sense data about physical reality. So sense data mediate between us and the world. Sense data are ‘signs’ or resemblances of reality.

Question 4
- The view that all that can be known to exist is my own mind or self/all that exist are my own conscious experiences. The position of Descartes’ solitary ego as established in the cogito.
- The denial that sense can be made of the existence of anything beyond what the subject of experience is directly aware of, i.e. the contents of my own mind.

Question 5
- A contingent truth is one that could have been otherwise.
- A claim that is true in this world, but not true in all possible worlds.

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Question 1
- The tripartite definition claims that knowledge is (a) true, (b) justified, (c) belief.
- Gettier argues that these three criteria are not jointly sufficient as there are cases of a, b, c that we would not count as knowledge.
- For example, a man, Smith, attends a job interview along with Jones. Smith is told (from a reliable source) that Jones will get the job. Smith also knows that Jones has 10 coins in his pocket. From these elements Smith forms the belief that the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.
- It turns out that Smith gets the job and, unbeknownst to him, he also has 10 coins in his pocket. It seems that Smith’s belief was true and justified. However, it was luckily true, and should not be classed as knowledge.

Question 2
• According to indirect realism, we are directly aware only of sense data and must infer the existence of mind-independent physical objects and their properties.
• Sceptics cast doubt on the soundness of this inference.
• It is conceivable that I am a brain-in-a-vat or there is a powerful Cartesian demon deceiving me. For in such scenarios, my experience is the same as it would be if my sense data were caused by the material world.
• Given that I cannot exclude these sceptical possibilities I cannot know that there is a material world or what it is like.
• The veil of perception: I can only know what I am directly acquainted with. I am only directly acquainted with sense data. Therefore I cannot know an external world exists, or, if it does, what its properties are.

**Question 3**
Various arguments could be drawn on. For example:

• Secondary qualities are perceptually relative:
  - The appearance of certain perceived qualities varies. Examples from the Anthology texts could figure: Locke’s two hands in water example, the colour of Russell’s table, Berkeley’s ‘distempered palate’, etc. But the qualities of the objects themselves cannot vary. So these qualities concern how these qualities appear to the mind.

• Primary qualities are ‘utterly inseparable’ (Locke):
  - We cannot conceive of a material object without primary qualities, e.g. a pounded almond still has parts with size and shape. Since these properties are essential to objects they must exist mind-independently.

**Question 4**
P1 Try to conceive of a sensible object which exists independent of any mind. Examples could figure, e.g. Berkeley’s: a tree or a house.
P2 In doing so, the sensible object is being conceived by you.
C Therefore the object is in your mind and not independent of any mind after all.
C2 So it is a contradiction to talk of a thing which is unconceived and it is impossible for any sensible object to exist independently of the mind.

**Question 5**
• Leibniz argued that there are different kinds of truths, some of which he termed necessary.
• These are truths that must be true and the ‘necessity’ of the truth can only be revealed through reason. For example, that $2 + 3 = 5$. This is a necessary truth and the mind, via reason, sees that this will always be the case.
• In contrast, the senses only reveal individual instances of truths, such as the sun rising. We can make general claims based on these cases e.g. the sun will rise every day. But these truths lack necessity. They may not always be true.
• Leibniz argues that our ability to see the ‘necessity’ of some truths cannot therefore be derived from the senses. This ability must derive from reason and the application of principles that are in us innately.
• For Leibniz these innate ideas/principles include such things as truths of mathematics, logical principles such as the law of non-contradiction (for example, an object cannot be blue and not blue at the same time); the concept of identity.

Alternatively, you could present the argument formally:

• P1 The senses only reveal instances of general truths (such as the sun rising).
• P2 The senses cannot reveal the necessity of a general truth (such that $2 + 3$ will always make 5).
• P3 Our minds can see the necessity of some general truths.
• C Our ability to see the necessity of general truth is not derived from the senses, but is based on innate principles (such as the law of non-contradiction and the concept of identity).

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**Question 1**

- Virtue epistemology seeks to justify knowledge in terms of the intellectual virtues and vices of the believer.
- In virtue ethics, an act of kindness would be one that achieves its goal (giving a present to a friend) and that sprang from the virtue of kindness. Likewise, with intellectual acts, an act of knowledge occurs when the belief is successful (it is true) and where its success stems from intellectual virtue (such as clearly seeing).
- Sosa compares cases of intellectual acts to athletic acts, including archery. He identifies three key elements in any act:
  1. Accuracy – whether it hits the target. An accurate shot hits the target (even if luckily so). Likewise, a belief is accurate if it is true.
  2. Adroitness – how skilful it was. An adroit shot is skilful – even if it misses (perhaps because of a gust of wind). Likewise, an adroit belief is one formed by an intellectual virtue (even if not true).
  3. Aptness – an apt shot is one that is accurate because it was adroit (skilful). An apt belief is one that is true because it was formed with intellectual virtue.
- Sosa suggests knowledge is apt belief. That is, a true belief that is true because it was formed through intellectual virtue.
- For example, I know that there are twelve words in this sentence. This belief is true and is true because I carefully counted the words.

**Question 2** [Explain why Locke rejects the doctrine of innate ideas.]

- Locke presents several reasons for rejecting the doctrine of innate idea. One set of considerations could be called his argument from ‘no universal assent’. He also argues that the tabula rasa theory makes the doctrine of innate ideas unnecessary.
- 1. No universal assent. Locke argues that any innate idea, if it existed, would be universally held. But no ideas are universally held, and so none are innate.
- The argument can be summarised as follows:
  P1 Any innate idea, X, if it exists, would be universally held.
  P2 Children and idiots do not have the idea of X.
  P3 If an idea is held in the mind then you must be aware of it. (Locke argues that it makes no sense to say that an idea could be in your mind but that you have never been aware of it. He argues this to counter the claim that children and idiots may have innate ideas, but they are not aware of them yet.)
  C1 So X is not universally held.
  C2 Therefore X is not innate.
- 2. Tabula rasa. The tabula rasa theory claims that the human mind is born with no ideas. It starts as a tabula rasa (a blank slate). Locke uses this argument to attack innatism. The argument may be presented as follows:
  P1 The theory of innate ideas claims we are born with innate ideas.
  P2 All of our ideas can be shown to be derived from experience (tabula rasa).
  C The theory of innate ideas is redundant.

**Question 3**
The question relates to Russell’s discussion of ‘The Existence of Matter’ in Chapter 2 of *The Problems of Philosophy*.

- Explanations of how scepticism about mind-independent objects arises would not be necessary but could figure without ‘redundancy’: the veil of perception problem, brain-in-a-vat or deceiving demon scenarios, life as a dream, Berkeley’s arguments for idealism.
- Russell accepts that no deductive proof of the existence of mind-independent objects is possible since the sceptical scenarios above are conceivable without contradiction. Instead he offers an abductive argument: the external world is the best hypothesis.
- He considers whether the fact that others have similar sense data suggests there are public objects corresponding to them. However, this argument begs the question since the testimony of others presupposes their existence independent of my mind.

Russell’s main argument:
- Common sense/instinct strongly suggests that mind-independent objects exist corresponding to our sense data; that we perceive the same objects as other people.
- This view doesn’t lead to any contradictions. Rather it adds coherence to our system of beliefs because:
  - It accounts for the common sense conviction of object permanence and the existence of ‘public neutral objects’.
  - It gives an account of the source of our sense data explaining why they are not within our control. It explains why they are regular and predictable.
  - Russell’s cat and/or the behaviour of other humans may figure as illustrations.
- The hypothesis of mind-independent objects is the simpler hypothesis than the sceptical scenarios or idealism.
- There can never be any reason for rejecting one instinctive belief except that it clashes with others; thus, if they are found to harmonise, the whole system becomes worthy of acceptance.

**Question 4**
- Discussion of how scepticism about the external world arises may figure. Key sceptical arguments are Descartes’ deceiving demon, the possibilities that I am a brain-in-a-vat or in a continuous dream.
- Berkeley accuses Locke’s indirect realist view of leading directly to scepticism about the external world: If I only have direct access to my own sense experiences, then I cannot know for sure that the external world exists. Without being able to compare sensations with reality I cannot tell that they are accurate representations of the external world. If I am only aware of my own sensations, then the very idea of matter or that which cannot be directly experienced, makes no sense.
- Berkeley argues that the claim that sensible objects exist independently of the mind is incoherent. For if objects are things perceived by sense and what we perceive are only our own ideas, then it is a contradiction to say that something can exist unperceived.
- Berkeley’s response is to collapse the appearance–reality distinction. There is no mind-independent world the existence of which needs to be proved. Objects are collections of sensible qualities which we are directly aware of. Because they exist in minds and are directly perceived scepticism about their reality doesn’t arise.
- Berkeley denies the existence of matter but not physical objects. He claims his view is in line with the common sense view that we perceive objects and their qualities directly.

Candidates may develop the account of Berkeley’s idealism:
• I am not the author of my sense experiences and objects continue to exist unperceived by me. Ideas are not active as we perceive no power in them. Only minds or spirits are active and so only mind can be the source of ideas. So my perceptions must come from some other mind and the existence of physical objects is sustained by being perceived by the mind of God. In this way Berkeley ensures object permanence and explains the regularity of sense experience.

• The coherence of our experience provides a proof for the existence of God and so overcomes scepticism about the existence of God (atheism).

• Dreams are fainter and less distinct than veridical perception and do not cohere with the rest of our experience and so there is no danger of confounding the two. In this way Berkeley overcomes the problem that his view cannot distinguish veridical perception from dreams or illusions.

Question 5
• Descartes’ ontological argument for the existence of God is an a priori deductive argument, based on the concept of God.

• The argument is presented in the Meditations where, previously, Descartes has argued that his mind can take any intelligible object (e.g. a concept) and work out which features are essential to it.

• He attempts this with his idea of God, which is the idea of a supremely perfect being. To be perfect God must have all perfections, and this includes the property of existence. Therefore, God must exist.

• Formally, his argument might be summarised as follows:
  P1 I have an idea of God, as a perfect being.
  P2 A perfect being must have all perfections.
  P3 Existence is a perfection.
  C God exists.

• Criticism: ‘the perfect island’.

• Gaunilo questioned the ontological argument, suggesting that, by the same logic, the perfect island must also exist

• If this seems ridiculous, then so must the ontological argument.

Or

• Criticism: existence is not a predicate.

• A criticism put forward by many including Kant is that existence is not a quality of an object – so cannot be a ‘perfection’ that an either object has or lacks.

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Question 1
The question concerns the ‘Perception as a source of knowledge’ section of the specification and relevant material could be drawn from the full range of arguments discussed in this section and good answers would need to be selective.

Arguments against the view that we directly perceive a mind-independent world of material objects (direct realism) could be examined:

• Perceptual variation, Illusions, hallucinations, time lag used to show that the immediate objects of perception are sense data or appearances not material reality.

• Responses to these arguments in defence of direct realism. We perceive the world directly, but objects may appear differently from their intrinsic natures.
The view that we directly perceive appearances and that these resemble or represent the real or 'external' world (indirect realism):

- Arguments for the primary–secondary quality distinction and problems with this.
- Scepticism about the nature and existence of matter: the veil of perception and the trap of solipsism.
- Responses to such scepticism: Locke/Cockburn on the coherence of the senses and the involuntary nature of sense data. The best hypothesis (Russell).

Berkeley's criticisms of indirect realism:

- We can only be aware of the world of appearances so cannot have knowledge of any other world.
- The perceptual variation argument to show that all sensible qualities are mind-dependent appearances.
- The Master argument: we cannot frame a coherent concept of mind-independent objects so all objects are appearances.
- Our ideas of secondary qualities cannot be separated from our ideas of primary qualities and so both exist only as appearances.
- The likeness principle: that ideas cannot resemble anything but other ideas and so cannot represent mind-independent objects.

Indirect and direct realism may be defended against these arguments.

Berkeley's Idealism: the world is as it appears to the mind, but not just human minds.

Objections to idealism:

- The difficulties with Berkeley's use of God.
- Matter as the better explanation: Russell's cat and the best hypothesis argument.
- The issue of whether idealism can distinguish hallucinations, dreams or illusions from veridical perception.
- The problem that idealism leads to solipsism.

The arguments selected should be used to support a clear judgement concerning whether the world is as it appears (direct realism, idealism) or is not (indirect realism).

**Question 2**
This question explores ideas from the ‘Reason as a source of knowledge’ section of the specification. A possible outline for an essay would be as follows:

**Introduction**

- Empiricism and the tabula rasa theory – the human mind is born with no ideas – it starts as a tabula rasa (a blank slate).
- If true, this theory would mean that all our concepts are derived from experience. This would also imply that we have no innate concepts.
- But is the tabula rasa theory true? Are all our concepts derived from experience? In this essay I will be arguing x,y,z.

**Setting out the table rasa theory**

- Locke (and Hume) argue that our minds receive impressions from the senses and that these are then copied into ideas or concepts.
• These ideas allow us to think about things that are not present to our senses. I can think about cheese even though I am not currently in the presence of any cheese. We can also combine simple ideas in our minds to create concepts which may have no corresponding impression (for example, a unicorn), but the elements (white, horse, horn) all must derive from actual impressions.

• In this way Locke and Hume argue that all our concepts derive from experience. For example, whereas Descartes argues that our idea of an infinite God must be innate, Hume contends that our concept of an omnipotent, omniscient God is derived from our experience of human qualities such as knowledge and power and then imagining these qualities without limit.

Support for the tabula rasa theory
• People born lacking a sense (for example, lacking impressions of, say, red) also lack the corresponding ideas (red).

• A second line of support is that it is possible to show how most concepts are derived from experience. Indeed, it is hard/impossible to imagine a new idea/concept that (for example, a gold mountain) that is not ultimately derived from impressions (gold + mountain).

Arguments against the idea that all concepts come from impressions
• Arguments for innate ideas:
  o Plato’s argument from recollection. Meno’s slave boy experiment.
  o We cannot acquire certain ideas from experience, e.g. perfection, perfect shapes, equality, cause, so they must be innate.
  o Descartes’ wax experiment as revealing innate knowledge of substance.

• Hume’s own counter example: the missing shade of blue. It is possible for the imagination to conjure a simple idea of shade of blue never before seen if it lies between shades that have been seen. By allowing this counter instance Hume undermining his claim to have established the copy principle and the claim that all ideas come from experience.

• Some concepts, such as that of ultraviolet light, are not derived from an impression in a straightforward way. The extent to which this concept is derived from experience is debatable.

• Relational concepts such as sameness are not easy to trace back to experience. ‘Sameness’ does not have a particular colour or taste. This raises the question of whether we derive the concept of ‘sameness’ from our experience, or whether the recognition of ‘sameness’ exists in us prior to experience?

• In a similar vein, Kant argues that in order to have any experience at all, our raw sense data must be structured by some framework which is not derived from experience but necessary for experience to exist in the first place. All experience must be represented by us as occurring in space and time and conforming to certain categories such as causality and unity.

• Chomsky argued that our minds must have innate structures in place to learn language so efficiently as children. However, these structures might not be classed as concepts.

Conclusion
The arguments selected should be used to support a clear judgement concerning whether all concepts can be derived from experience.

Question 3 [Can knowledge be defined?]
The question concerns the ‘What is knowledge?’ section of the specification and relevant material could be drawn from the full range of arguments discussed in this section and good answers would need to be selective.

Propositional knowledge and the nature of definition
Types of knowledge and the nature of propositional knowledge.
The nature of definition (Linda Zagzebski). Real essences/definitions. Does knowledge have a real essence, is it susceptible to a real definition?
What pitfalls should a definition avoid?
Necessary and sufficient conditions.

The JTB account of knowledge

- Plato’s and the JTB account of knowledge.
- Is each of the conditions necessary?
- Are the conditions jointly sufficient? Gettier-counter-examples and other counter-examples involving ‘lucky’ knowledge e.g. ‘fake barn county’.

Responses/defences to the problem of ‘lucky’ knowledge

This should include evaluations of some/all of these responses:

- Infallibilism – we should only count as knowledge those things which we cannot rationally doubt. Is this definition too restrictive?
- No false lemmas – knowledge is a justified, true belief, where the justification is not based on a false belief/lemma. Does this approach overcome the counter-examples?
- Reliabilism – knowledge is a true belief formed by a reliable process. Does this approach overcome the counter-examples?
- Virtue epistemology – knowledge occurs when a belief is successful and where its success stems from intellectual virtue (apt belief). Does this approach overcome the counter-examples?

Conclusion

The arguments selected should be used to support a clear judgement concerning whether knowledge can be defined.

Question 4

The question concerns the ‘Limits of knowledge’ section of the specification. Global scepticism and various sceptical arguments could be discussed. For example:

- The infinite regress of justificatory reasons.
- Descartes’ three waves of doubt: illusions, dreams, the evil demon, or brain-in-a-vat scenario.
- The veil of perception problem and the threat of solipsism. Is knowledge confined to immediate sense data?

Responses to global scepticism:

- Pragmatic arguments, e.g. instinct, is more important than reason in forming beliefs (Hume’s mitigated scepticism).
- The demon hypothesis is empty if the deception cannot be detected. That global scepticism is self-defeating. Any statement of scepticism presupposes some knowledge.
- Descartes’ response to scepticism: the cogito, clear and distinct ideas/the possibility of a priori knowledge. Proving God’s existence (the trademark and ontological arguments) and the role of God in rebuilding empirical knowledge.
- Empiricist responses: foundationalism (some beliefs are epistemically basic), arguments to show that it is reasonable to believe in an external world (Locke and Russell).
- Berkeley’s attempt to collapse the appearance/reality distinction.
- Fallibilism: if we demand less of justification then scepticism can be resisted.
Reliabilism: so long as perception and induction reliably produce true beliefs, then these can count as sources of knowledge. The externalist claim that we don’t need to have conscious access to justificatory reasons in order to have knowledge.

- Arguments from common sense, epistemically basic beliefs are not doubtworthy.
- Ordinary language defences: scepticism as misusing epistemic terms.

The arguments selected should be used to support a clear judgement concerning whether or not knowledge is possible. A judgement might include specifying those domains where knowledge is possible and those where it is not.

**Question 5**

Berkeley’s idealism denies the existence of matter. Physical objects are mind-dependent. The fact that we do not control what we perceive and that our perceptions are coherent and predictable is because they are caused to appear in our minds by God. Object permanencies are made possible because they are perceived by the mind of God.

Various arguments from the Dialogues may be examined:

- The immediate objects of perception are sensible qualities and sensible qualities are mind-dependent. So the immediate objects of perception are mind-dependent.
- The perceptual variation argument as deployed against both secondary and primary qualities being mind-independent: matter cannot possess contradictory properties.
- The Master argument: we cannot frame a coherent concept of mind-independent objects.
- Our ideas of secondary qualities cannot be separated from our ideas of primary qualities and so both must be mind-dependent.
- The likeness principle: that ideas cannot resemble anything but other ideas and so cannot represent a mind-independent reality.

Criticisms of these arguments should be considered.

Problems for idealism:

- The difficulty of how to account for illusions and hallucinations.
- That idealism leads to solipsism.
- Difficulties with the role of God: is it ad hoc? We do not perceive God so cannot frame an idea of him. If sensations are in the mind of God, then he would be imperfect.

The arguments selected should be used to support a clear judgement concerning whether or not all that exists are minds and their ideas. An alternative theory of perception (direct or indirect realism) could be endorsed, but his would not be necessary.

**Section 2: Moral philosophy**

**Page x: Three-mark questions**

**Question 1**

Any object or action has utility (is useful) if it helps achieve a specific goal (or goals). An action maximises utility if it is the one that achieves the goal most successfully. For classic utilitarians the goal is to bring about happiness, so an action that brings about more happiness than alternative actions can be said to be maximising utility.

**Question 2**
Also known as the universal law formulation, the first formulation of the categorical imperative expresses the claim that a person should only act on principles that she can consistently universalise that other rational beings should follow. Kant expresses it (roughly) in these terms: Act only according to maxims that you can at the same time will to be universal laws without contradiction.

**Question 3**

Answers may include some of the following points:

- **Eudaimonia** refers to the final goal which Aristotle argues all human actions are aimed towards.
- **Eudaimonia** can be translated as ‘happiness’ or ‘flourishing’ and people often think of it as ‘the good life’, in other words living well and doing well.
- **Eudaimonia** is not a means to an end – it is an end-in-itself, and it is the final or ultimate end; nothing can be added to *eudaimonia* to make it better (it is ‘self-sufficient’); *eudaimonia* is what we most desire as humans.
- **Eudaimonia** is not something that we have complete control over, as there are circumstances and luck which affect whether or not we can reach it.
- **Eudaimonia** is the Good Life, best reached, Aristotle argues, by developing our virtues, in other words the character traits and habits which can be shaped by reason and which enable us to live well as human beings.
- **Eudaimonia** is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue.

**Question 4**

- A dilemma is a problem that we face, in which all the options available to us seem equally undesirable and so the choice is a difficult one.
- Someone is in a dilemma when they have to choose between actions that lead to bad outcomes, or between obligations which conflict. For example, you might have made a promise to return a knife to someone but when they ask you for it back you realise that they are likely to cause harm to someone.

**Question 5**

- Moral nihilism is the view within ethics that there can be no successful justification of morality, or foundations for morality, and there is no knowledge about moral facts because there are no moral facts. So moral nihilism can be seen as an extension of moral anti-realism.
- In its most extreme form, moral nihilism takes the view that there are no moral values at all, which leads to the rejection of morality (as we usually think of it). This leads to the conclusion that humans can act in whatever way they like, as there are no rules which limit their behaviour.

**Page xi: Five-mark questions**

**Question 1**

- In ethics, naturalism is the realist claim that moral facts (like good or right) are properties of the natural world.
- For example, utilitarianism makes the naturalistic claim that an action is good or bad depending on the amount of pleasure/pain (which are natural properties) that the action brings about.
- However, G.E. Moore argued that there was fallacy at the centre of ethical naturalism – and he called this the naturalistic fallacy. His argument is as follows:
  P1 Using his ‘open-question argument’ Moore claims to have demonstrated that ethical concepts, like good, are indefinable – they cannot be defined. This is because whenever we offer a natural definition of a concept like good, we can always ask ‘but is that good?’; i.e. the question remains open.
  P2 Attempting to define the indefinable is fallacious.
P3 If ethical concepts cannot be defined, then theories that attempt to define ethical concepts are attempting to define the indefinable – which is fallacious.

C4 Moore concludes that naturalistic theories which attempt to define moral concepts in natural terms (e.g. utilitarianism) are therefore guilty of this ‘naturalistic’ fallacy.

**Question 2**

- In terms of moral judgement, for act utilitarianism, an act is judged as good or bad based on its consequences – on the overall amount of happiness or pain that act causes.
- For rule utilitarianism (strong version) an act is judged as good or bad based on whether it follows a specific rule or not (e.g. do not steal). The rules are judged as good or bad according to whether the rules are ones that, if followed by all, would maximise happiness.
- In terms of moral deliberation, rule utilitarian involves following general moral rules. Act utilitarian requires the individual to estimate the likely consequences of each action.

**Question 3**

- The function argument is used by Aristotle to establish what sort of life we need to live if we are to achieve *eudaimonia*.
- Humans must have a function (or characteristic activity) – he uses the analogy with parts of the body, and with parts of society, to argue that each of these has a function so it’s very unlikely that humans themselves don’t also have a function.
- The particular function of humans can’t be something we share with plants (growth), nor can it be something we share with animals (sentience). Our function is what is distinctive to humans – namely to reason.
- Like anything else (for example, musicians who are good when they perform their function well) humans are good when we perform our function well.
- So a good human is someone who reasons well (as that is the distinct function of a human), and in doing so develops all the right qualities (or virtues).
- Aristotle concludes that *eudaimonia* (the good life for a human) is reached by being a good (highly functioning) human, which means excelling at using reason in all aspects of our self and all parts of our life.

**Question 4**

- There is a debate within meta-ethics about the status and meaning of moral language, and two broad camps have emerged: cognitivism and non-cognitivism.
- Cognitivism within ethics is the claim that moral sentences and judgements express beliefs about the world. Beliefs can be true or false – reflecting the world correctly or incorrectly – and they are expressed in ethical statements/propositions which can also be true or false.
- In other words, for a cognitivist, moral judgements have truth conditions, or are ‘truth-apt’: they are capable of being true or false.
- Non-cognitivism rejects this position. Moral sentences do not express beliefs about the world that reflect the world truly or falsely – they are not statements or propositions and they have no truth conditions.
- Instead, a non-cognitivist would argue that moral judgements have a different linguistic function – for example, Emotivists would argue that moral judgements are an expression of our own feelings about the situation (‘Boo’ or ‘Hooray’); and Prescriptivists would argue that moral judgements are prescriptions, recommending or even commanding that we do certain actions.

**Question 5**

- J.L. Mackie’s error theory rests on two distinct meta-ethical claims.
• First is Mackie’s ontological claim (i.e. a claim about what exists). Mackie is an anti-realist and argues that there are no objective moral values, no moral facts which exist ‘out there’ in the world. Morality is subjective not objective.
• Secondly there is Mackie’s semantic claim (i.e. a claim about meaning). He is a cognitivist about moral language and argues that when we make moral claims and judgements we are expressing genuine beliefs that we have about the world, which are capable of being true or false.
• Mackie’s semantic and ontological claims combine as follows: we have genuine moral beliefs about the world, expressed in our moral judgements; but there are no objective moral facts, so our moral judgements are always false – they are always in error.
• This permanent error that we make gives Mackie’s theory its name.

Page xi: Twelve-mark questions

**Question 1**

No acts are inherently wrong for a utilitarian, the condemnation of the use of simulated killings in video games cannot be based on the nature of the game, but on effects of playing such games. The arguments that could be used to condemn such games will depend on the variety of utilitarianism in question. The arguments could be based around the following:

• Whether an individual playing/creating such a game brings more harm than happiness (act utilitarianism):
  - An act utilitarian would not make a generalised claim in relation to condemning use of simulated killings in all video games. An individual act of playing or creating such a game would have to be judged on its consequences. If creating/playing a game with simulated killing made a particular individual less empathetic, such that they cause harm to other people (which outweighs the pleasure brought), then playing the game in that particular instance would be wrong (but it would not be wrong in other instances).

• Whether playing such games breaks a rule, which, if followed by all, would bring more harm than happiness (rule utilitarianism):
  - A rule utilitarian condemning simulated killings in games would look at whether playing such games, overall, makes people less empathetic/violent and leads to copy-cat killings. The rule established may be nuanced, e.g. children under a certain age should not play the game. Or certain types of games are wrong. Again, this would be based on evidence of the effects. Utilitarians making a qualitative distinction (e.g. Mill’s concept of higher/lower pleasure) may argue that the pleasure the games bring is low quality and does not cultivate the development of the mind. Such an approach would affect the calculations and would make the condemning of such games more likely as they may not maximise utility as well as forms of entertainment.

• Whether playing such games, overall, goes against the preferences of all relevant people (with the strength of the preferences taken into account) (preference utilitarianism):
  - A preference utilitarian might condemn an individual instance of playing such a killing-based game by, say a child, because the parents’ preferences that the child should not play the game outweigh the child’s preference to play the game. A rule-based preference utilitarian might argue that the preference of people in society that such games not be made/played outweighs the preferences of those that wish to play it (even when the preference towards the general rule of liberty of individual choice is taken into account).

**Question 2**

• The problem of the tyranny of the majority is that the preferences or happiness of a majority can outweigh the considerations of individuals/minorities. Because utilitarianism is concerned with
maximising the net amount of happiness or satisfaction of preferences, and everyone’s happiness/preferences count the same, this means the action that benefits the majority will be deemed morally right. However, this result may offend against our intuitions about the rights or interests of minorities.

- For example, a majority of people in a country might disapprove of vegetarianism. They might vote to make vegetarian options on menus illegal or make daily meat-eating compulsory. The preferences/happiness of the ten percent (or so) vegetarians is overwhelmed by the preferences of the majority, such that the majority can ‘tyrannise’ the minority. At first glance, this would seem to be in accordance with utilitarianism.

- Another example (due to Scanlon): Suppose that Jones has suffered an accident in the transmitter room of a television broadcast station during the broadcasting of the Football World Cup Final. We cannot rescue him without turning off the transmitter, and until we do he will suffer painful electric shocks, but no lasting damage. Utilitarianism seems to recommend that we leave Jones to suffer until the match is over because his discomfort is outweighed by the small but very numerous pleasures of the football spectators. The problem is that it doesn’t seem as though the number of people watching the match should determine whether it is right to rescue Jones.

- Opponents to utilitarianism will say that there are certain things we must not do regardless of calculations of utility because we have a duty to prevent such things, or because the person has a right not to have such things done to them. Rights, it is said, ‘trump’ considerations of utility.

Possible response 1

- Rule utilitarianism can be used to defend the theory from these counter intuitive conclusions. Rule utilitarianism may establish rules to protect individual rights/liberty on the grounds that such rules will ultimately produce a society which maximises the general happiness. Mill, for example, argued that individuals flourish and are happiest when they are given the maximum amount of freedom (compatible with the freedom of others) to ‘pursue their own good in their own way’. So he argued in favour of the ‘harm principle’ as a rule that utilitarians should adopt. The harm principle states that the only reason governments and other individuals should interfere in a person’s life is to prevent the individual from causing harm to others. If the individual is not harming others, then they should be left to pursue their own lives as they see fit, regardless of the preferences of others. Mill argued that following this ‘harm’ principle will maximise utility and so is consistent with the principle of utilitarianism.

Possible response 2

- Utilitarians might point out that we make trade-offs like the Jones example all the time. For example we could save lives by reducing the speed limit to 60 on the motorways, but we calculate that this saving is not worth the minor inconvenience caused to a great number of people. We spend money on cures for minor ailments when we could channel these resources into research into a fatal but rare disease. So while the examples given seem to go against our intuitions, in fact we must bite the bullet and accept that it is maximising happiness or preferences overall which is the ultimate goal of all moral decision making.

Question 3

The doctrine of the mean is the name given to Aristotle’s general principle that should help us develop the virtues, and so flourish (live a eudaimon life).

- Aristotle observes that positive qualities (like health or strength) are destroyed by ‘deficiency’ and by ‘excess’ – for example, doing too much exercise, or too little exercise, will damage our strength, whilst eating too much or too little will damage our health.
• From this observation Aristotle draws the conclusion that the virtues (those positive qualities of our character) will also be damaged by excess and deficiency.
• Aristotle argues that if we are to develop the virtues we must avoid excess and deficiency by aiming at the intermediate (the ‘mean’).
• It is worth noting that Aristotle is not advocating a doctrine of ‘moderation in all things’. He is very clear that the mean needs to be worked about relative to the actual context. For example, 10 pounds of food may be too much for one athlete, and 2 pounds may be too little for another athlete, but it doesn’t follow that all athletes should have 6 pounds (10 + 2 divided by 2 = 6) – it depends on what event they’re competing in.
• So the doctrine of the mean requires us to assess each situation, and to respond appropriately, in our feelings and in our actions, in a way that avoids an excessive or deficient response.

We can apply the doctrine of the mean to the virtue of courage to see what it means in practice.
• Aristotle argues that the person who fears everything is a coward; whilst the person who rushes towards every danger is foolhardy and rash.
• The coward is displaying too much fear and too little confidence, and the rash person is displaying too much confidence and too little fear.
• Aristotle says that the virtue relating to feelings of confidence and fear is ‘courage’.
• So someone with courage assesses the situation they’re in, and then responds with an action driven by the right amount of fear (avoiding too much or too little) and the right amount of confidence (avoiding too much or too little).
• For example, a courageous person might see a child fall into a river. They don’t freeze with fear, but nor do they suddenly jump in. Instead they assess the situation and mindful of the dangers, whilst overcoming their natural fear, they may wade safely in with a stick to reach the child.

So the ‘mean’, as illustrated by the virtue of courage, is about doing the right thing, at the right time, towards the right people, in the right way – and this is achieved by avoiding excessive and deficient responses.

Question 4
• Philippa Foot argues that moral systems cannot ignore desires, for example the desire to help others. Without such desires and motives, we do not have a good reason to behave morally.
• Categorical imperatives are not desire/end based, so the reason to act on them is not evident. Foot rejects different possible ‘reasons’:
  o To be rationally consistent. Foot argues that the man who rejects morality because he sees no reason to obey its rules can be convicted of villainy but not of inconsistency.
  o We are ‘bound by moral law’. Foot argues we are not literally bound, this is just metaphorical decoration.
  o Out of respect for the moral law. Foot argues that we do not have to behave morally out of respect for the moral law, any more than we have to follow etiquette for the sake of convention.
• Foot argues that only end-based, ‘hypothetical’ imperatives give sufficient reasons to act, e.g. You ought to practise if you want to win the match.
• Ends such as justice, liberty and fairness are suitable moral goals and provide the proper motivation to be moral. Some people fight hard for these ends.
• Foot sees morality as a series of hypothetical imperatives: you should not steal if you care about fairness, you should help others if you care about equality. You might have some of these moral ends, but not others. There is no single overall imperative to be moral.
• Collectively, this series of hypothetical (not categorical) imperatives constitutes morality.
**Question 5**

Moore was one of the first philosophers to systematically investigate what ethical concepts like ‘good’ actually mean, and he argues that many previous generations of philosophers, especially ethical naturalists, have been wrong in their understanding.

- Ethical naturalism is a form of moral realism, and it claims that moral properties are actually natural properties of the world.
- One example of ethical naturalism is utilitarianism, which understands moral concepts like ‘good’ in terms of pain or pleasure or happiness, all of which are natural properties.
- Moore uses his ‘Open Question’ argument to show that moral concepts like ‘good’ are indefinable, and therefore cannot be defined in naturalistic terms.
- His argument is that no matter how we define moral concepts, e.g. ‘Good means X’, we can always ask the further question ‘but is X really good?’ No matter what our attempted definition, this question remains open.
- (Compare this to our definition of ‘bachelor’ as ‘unmarried man’ – this concept is definable as it does not make sense to further ask ‘but is an unmarried man really a bachelor?’)
- For Moore, ethical naturalism is fundamentally flawed: defining moral concepts in naturalistic terms: e.g. ‘good is maximising happiness’, is an attempt to define the indefinable, which is not possible. Moore calls this the naturalistic fallacy.
- As a moral realist Moore is committed to the autonomy of ethics: morality is unique and non-natural, and moral concepts cannot be defined in any other terms. So how are we able to make and understand moral judgements?
- Moore argues that we are able to grasp moral truths as self-evident intuitions (hence the name given to his theory – intuitionism). So it is through our intuition that we can recognise the non-natural moral properties of the world and then make moral judgements like ‘killing is wrong’.

**Page xii: Twenty-five-mark questions**

**Question 1**

The question primarily concerns the ‘Utilitarianism’ section of the specification, but relevant material could be drawn from other sections including Kantian ethics and Virtue ethics. Good answers would need to be selective.

1) **Bentham’s argument from psychological hedonism to ethical hedonism:** humans do, as a matter of fact, pursue pleasure, therefore it is morally right to maximise pleasure.
   - Criticisms: this goes from is to ought and so breaks Hume’s Law.

2) **Mill’s ‘proof’ of utilitarianism:** In his ‘proof’, Mill concludes that happiness is the only good on the grounds that the only way to determine what is desirable is on the basis of what is in fact desired.
   - Criticism: Mill may be guilty of equivocation, changing from a descriptive use of ‘desired’ to a prescriptive/moral use of ‘desirable’.

3) **Whether pleasure is the only good:** Nozick’s pleasure machine thought experiment used to argue that it is not happiness or pleasure we seek. We may reject entering the pleasure machine as it is not an ‘internal’ sensation/feeling of contentment we seek, but real objects in the world. The cheating spouse example: I would not choose blissful ignorance but would rather know that my partner is unfaithful, even though this is not the happiest option.
   - Response: Preference utilitarianism may solve this problem.
4) **Utilitarianism ignores fairness and individual liberty/rights:** Some actions would bring about more happiness but because they are unfair, offend against individual freedoms, or rights, do not respect what we deserve, our intuitions suggest they are wrong. Examples, e.g. the little red hen, the scapegoat, Jones and the World Cup broadcast, etc. Liberty, justice, fairness, rights may be end or goods in-themselves.

5) **What is meant by ‘happiness’:** Mill’s broader conception of happiness/utility ‘in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being’ could be discussed. The distinction between higher and lower pleasures as a way of responding to the criticisms above. We are only truly fulfilled if we respect individual liberties, rights and preferences.

6) **Kant’s arguments that the only pure good is a good will:** Happiness, intelligence, money and so on can only be considered good if they are accompanied by, or result from, a good will. The pursuit of pleasure would be a hypothetical imperative whereas good actions are performed for their own sake.

The arguments selected should be used to support a clear judgement concerning whether happiness is the only good or not.

**Question 2**
The question primarily concerns the Kantian Ethics and Utilitarianism sections of the specification, but relevant material could be drawn from other sections.

Discussion might include some/all of the following:
- The different kinds of ethical theory, consequentialist, Kantian/deontological and virtue ethics and the role of consequences of actions in the different approaches:
  - The difference between act/rule/preference utilitarianism and the different role that consequences may take in decision making.
  - The extent to which Kantian ethics consider the consequences in determining whether an action can be consistently willed. An act may be judged on the consistency of the will, so the consequences are not part of the evaluation of the act, but they may form part of the decision-making process.
  - Discussion of the extent to which consequences are relevant in moral decision making in Virtue ethics.
- Kant’s argument that the only pure good is a good will. Happiness, intelligence, money and so on can only be considered good if they are accompanied by, or result from, a good will.
- From the section issues with ‘Kantian ethics: The moral value of consequences’. Whether focusing solely on the motive and the consistency of will misses the larger (and consequentialist) moral picture. Discussion of the case of lying to the axeman.

The arguments selected should be used to support a clear judgement concerning whether the consequences of actions are relevant to moral decisions or not.

**Question 3**
This answer is longer than other answers, as it tries to show in more detail the decision-making process a student may go through when writing a 25-mark exam essay, in order to optimise their marks.

One common approach to answering this question would be to go through each of the three normative theories in turn, explain how they would answer the question, and then come to your
favoured conclusion. However, this type of essay is in danger of coming across as a bit of a list, and may not display all your skills as a philosopher. So here’s an alternative approach.

**Introduction: define your terms and show your reader the way**

- Think on your feet, and be philosophical – the question may appear to be straightforward, but carefully clarifying terms or highlighting assumptions is helpful: 1) because it demonstrates to the examiner what a great philosopher you are, and 2) because it starts to guide the reader towards the conclusion you want to reach.
  - For example, you could explain that in your answer you will assume that ‘eating meat’ means ‘eating meat that comes from an animal which has been deliberately killed for that purpose’. You could explain that you recognise that there are people who eat roadkill (which is accidental), and also that in the future there may be people who eat meat which is ‘grown’ in a laboratory. But in this essay you will put those less obvious interpretations to one side, and focus on the judgement of the whole process by which animals are grown and killed specifically in order to be eaten.
  - From the very beginning write your essay with the answer and the direction of your argument in mind. For example, you might state that you’ll be showing that growing and killing animals to be eaten is morally unjustifiable, except in certain circumstances.
  - You may then want to highlight a number of sub-questions that will help with the essay’s structure, and lead towards your conclusion. These sub-questions each contribute part of the answer to the main question and could form the main body of your essay, and form the first sentence of each paragraph. For example, ‘what makes an action justifiable? ’; ‘are there good reasons for raising animals to be eaten?’; ‘are there good reasons against raising animals for this purpose?’
  - Note: that at the end of each sub-question you could draw a mini-conclusion, and it is these mini-conclusions that you can pull together in your final conclusion at the end.

**Sub-question 1: What makes an action morally justifiable?**

- It would help for you to explain briefly how you understand the phrase ‘morally justifiable’.
- You could argue that an action is morally justifiable if moral reasons can be given for that action, or that no moral reasons can be given against doing that action.
- So you now have a two-pronged approach:
  1) Are there any moral reasons for concluding that we ought to eat meat, or that it is good (in a moral sense) to eat meat? If there are no strong reasons for this conclusion, then that would suggest eating meat is not morally justifiable (but it might not be morally unjustifiable).
  2) Are there any moral reasons for concluding that we ought not to eat meat, or that it is bad or wrong? If there are strong reasons, then that would suggest eating meat is actually morally unjustifiable, although there is a further issue as to whether these reasons apply in all circumstances or only in some circumstances.

**Sub-question 2: Are there good reasons for raising and killing animals in order to be eaten?**

- From within any of the three main ethical theories it’s hard to find a moral argument that an animal actually should be killed and eaten. The main reason for eating meat is so that we stay healthy – but this reason does not apply in parts of the world (e.g. most of the developed world) where there are equally good, alternative sources of protein that enable humans to live and grow.
- A utilitarian might argue that we get pleasure from eating meat, and therefore it is good. But this is very much outweighed by the overwhelming evidence that destroying forests in order to
grow food to feed cattle is leading to climate change and all the negative and painful consequences that this brings.

- An Aristotelian virtue ethicist might argue that we should not be deficient in enjoying our food (we should not be ‘insensible’) – but any virtues of enjoyment in the pleasures of meat-eating can also be found amongst vegetarians.
- Mini-conclusion: So there are no strong reasons that we ought to eat meat (that it is good to eat meat) if there are other sources of protein available to us.

**Sub-question 3: Are there good reasons against raising and killing animals to be eaten?**

1) Killing animals is wrong for the same reason that killing humans is wrong:
- Some vegetarians have argued that ‘meat is murder’. This slogan draws on an analogy between killing humans (murder) and killing animals (meat). But arguments from analogy are at their most successful when the two things being compared are very similar. So if you can show that humans are fundamentally different from animals then the ‘meat is murder’ argument will fail.
- The general utilitarian position (such as Bentham’s) is that animals are morally relevant because they can feel pain, just like humans. However, the utilitarian argument against murder isn’t ‘the human feels pain and that is bad’ (after all you could imagine someone being murdered painlessly) – instead a more sophisticated utilitarian approach is that of Preference Utilitarians, who argue that killing someone goes against their preferences. But animals don’t have conscious preferences for life, like humans do, so killing animals does not have the same negative utility as killing a human.
- A Kantian might come to the same conclusion (that killing humans is not at all like killing animals) via a different route. Kant argues that animals lack autonomy, they are not ends-in-themselves, and so the moral law does not apply to them.
- Mini-conclusion: So killing animals is not wrong in the way that killing humans is wrong.

2) Intensive farming of animals is cruel:
- In Applied Ethics facts, not just values, matter. If it can be shown that intensive rearing and slaughter of animals leads to unnecessary pain, and that farming practices tolerate or even ignore this, then this is indication of cruelty on an industrial scale (billions of animals are slaughtered across the world every year, and practices in too many slaughterhouses are inhumane and cruel).
- All three normative theories argue that cruelty is morally problematic: for virtue ethicists cruelty is a vice; for utilitarians cruelty brings suffering; and for Kantians we have a duty towards moral self-perfection, which is damaged by cruelty.
- A virtue ethicist, like Rosalind Hursthouse, would argue that eating meat for pleasure, whilst knowing it came to our plate through cruel practices, is an indication of callousness, greed, and a failure of compassion. This cannot be justified especially if we have access to alternative sources of protein.
- Mini-conclusion: So if it’s a fact that farming animals is cruel, then that counts as a very strong reason against growing and killing animals to be eaten.

**Conclusion**

- Here you will pull together the threads that you have been weaving through the essay. You don’t ‘suddenly’ come to a conclusion, pulling a rabbit out of a hat. Instead you add together the various parts of your argument, forming a coherent whole and an answer to the question set.
- You have shown that eating animals is the end result of a much longer process (of intensive farming and abattoir practice) that must also be judged.
• You have shown that there are no reasons to think that this whole process is actually morally good (that we ought to eat meat) – unless meat is the only source of protein for humans in a particular area.
• You acknowledge that killing animals is not the same as killing humans.
• But you have also shown there are strong reasons to believe there is cruelty in the process of rearing and slaughtering animals, and that this cruelty is unnecessary, especially if there are alternative sources of protein.
• Final conclusion: So eating animals is not morally justifiable, unless there is no alternative source of protein (and even then, farming practices must change to minimise cruelty).

Question 4
Here is a suggested answer to this question.

Introduction
• An ethical theory is an action-guiding theory, it should help us make decisions about how to live.
• We could define useful moral guidance as:
  • Providing specific rules
  • Coherent
  • Systematic
  • Considerate of others
• The accusation made against virtue ethics is that it is none of these things – but this essay examines each issue in turn to show that virtue ethics does, after all, provide useful guidance on how to live: both on a day-to-day basis and when confronted by tough moral dilemmas.

Virtue ethics does not provide specific rules: it is vague
• Utilitarianism and Kantian ethics both provide rules on how to act, and give us a means of working out what the right thing to do is (e.g. the utility calculus and the categorical imperative) when it comes to moral dilemmas.
• But Aristotle provides no such rules. The doctrine of the mean is not a ‘doctrine of moderation’ (i.e. there is no rule there). Moreover saying ‘we should act to the right person, at the right time in the right way’ is very vague.
• Defence: Virtue ethics reflects the complexity of our moral lives – it doesn’t simplify things in the way that the rules of Utilitarian or Kantian ethics do. Instead virtue ethics is a daily practice, requiring us to develop practical wisdom, emotional intelligence, and character traits like generosity and compassion.
• Defence: Hursthouse argues that there are rules in virtue ethics that can be applied to moral dilemmas and to our day-to-day lives. She calls them ‘v-rules’, which are translations of virtues into rules. Take, for example, the virtue of compassion – the v-rule is ‘You should act compassionately’; similarly, take the vice of cruelty – the v-rule is ‘You should not act cruelly’.

Virtue ethics is not coherent: it is circular
• Aristotle’s virtue ethics is charged with circularity. He appears to define ‘a virtuous person’ in terms of someone who ‘does virtuous acts’; but he also then defines ‘a virtuous act’ as an act ‘done by a virtuous person’.
• If that is the case, then Aristotle’s virtue ethics is not a coherent ethical theory.
• Defence: Aristotle’s book, the Ethics, gives a long and complex answer to the questions ‘what is a virtuous person’ and ‘what is a virtuous act’. These do not need to be defined in terms of one another, although there is a connection between them.
Defence: For example, in the Ethics Aristotle describes how a good person is someone who is flourishing, who has excellence of character and practical wisdom. He also gives a detailed account of a virtuous act – it is the result of deliberation and choice, and it is pleasurable in itself; moreover it avoids an excessive or deficient response.

Virtue ethics lacks a system: it cannot resolve a conflict of virtues

- Virtue ethics does not prioritise the virtues, or put them into a hierarchy, which means that when two virtues clash in a moral dilemma there is no mechanism for determining which of the virtues should take priority.
- Defence: This is true, but that isn’t necessarily a weakness of the theory. Virtue ethics requires us to develop practical wisdom which, if we have it, will help us to determine what the most appropriate thing to do is in this particular dilemma.
- Defence: Hursthouse argues that sometimes there is no resolution of a clash of virtues – and we just have to decide ourselves to prioritise one, which can be painful and a source of regret. However, Hursthouse says that virtue ethics is the only moral theory sophisticated enough to recognise this regret – she calls this residue of pain or guilt the ‘moral remainder’.

Virtue ethics is not considerate of others: it is self-interested

- We are accustomed to thinking of morality (particularly utilitarian and Kantian approaches) as being concerned with others, not ourselves. But Aristotelian virtue ethics, and other forms of virtue ethics based on eudaimonia, begin with what is good for the individual, they begin with self-interest. This suggests it is not a very ‘moral’ theory.
- Defence: It is the case that Aristotelian virtue ethics is self-interested. But Aristotle (like Plato and Socrates before him) is keen to emphasise that this is about our ‘true’ self-interest, not about more money, or more power, or more pleasure (which only appear to be our self-interest). And it is virtue that is in our true self-interest: character traits like honesty, compassion, generosity, courage – all of which benefit other people.
- Defence: If we all strive for eudaimonia, and we all develop ourselves and our virtues, then we will all be better off together in society.

Conclusion

Virtue ethics provides exceptionally useful advice on how to live. It isn’t a moral theory that is triggered only when there are ethical dilemmas, but is something that guides us every day of our lives – requiring us to develop and practice habits of generosity, compassion, honesty etc. on a daily basis. It isn’t vague, but it acknowledges the complexity of our moral lives; it isn’t circular, but gives a well-rounded account of what a virtuous person is; it doesn’t lack a system, but instead requires us to develop emotional intelligence and practical wisdom to equip us to make the right decisions both in our day-to-day lives and when facing moral dilemmas; it is self-interested but recognises that our true self-interest is not selfishness, but is instead developing character traits that benefit ourselves and others.

Question 5

The question primarily relates to Mackie’s Error Theory – but it is also an opportunity towards the end of the essay to explore philosophers (non-cognitivists like Hare) who give a very different account of moral judgements.

Here is a suggested approach to this question.

Introduction

- What is a moral judgement? Give an example such as ‘Stealing is Wrong’.
• The claim that ‘all moral judgements are false’ is the claim that Mackie makes, in his ‘Error Theory’ of ethical language. This emerges from a combination of Mackie’s cognitivist approach to moral language and his anti-realist approach to moral facts.

• Clearly outline the direction of your essay. For example, this might be:
  • First to explain and assess Mackie’s arguments for his Error Theory, including exploring arguments for both his ontological claim (leading to his anti-realism) and his semantic claim (leading to his cognitivism).
  • Then to consider an alternative to the cognitivist position on moral statements – it may be the case that non-cognitivism is a better approach to understanding the meaning of moral terms.

Mackie’s ontological claim – leading to his anti-realist position

• Mackie gives two arguments against the existence of objective moral facts.

  • First Mackie’s argument from relativity:
    • There are differences in moral codes across different societies, and disagreements between those societies.
    • Either these disagreements arise because there are facts (and different interpretations of the facts) or there are no facts.
    • Mackie concludes that the best explanation for these disagreements is that moral codes are simply reflections of different ways of living – morality is relative to each society and there are no objective moral facts.

  • There are issues with this part of Mackie’s argument. For example, a moral realist might claim that there are, in fact, moral principles that all societies share (e.g. tell the truth, look after your kinfolk, don’t murder etc.).

  • Secondly Mackie’s argument from queerness:
    • If the moral realist is correct then there would have to be at least two peculiar features in the world.
    • First, moral realists would be committed to a belief in peculiar ‘objective’ moral properties that somehow motivate us to act – that have a mysterious connection with our desires. For Mackie this is absurd.
    • Secondly, moral realists would be committed to believing in a mysterious ‘moral faculty’ or intuition that we all have, which enables us to detect the moral properties of the world. Again, for Mackie, this is a strong indication that moral realism is incorrect and that there are no objective moral facts.

  • A moral realist might accept that moral facts, and our detection of them, are unusual – but that doesn’t mean they’re not objective. After all, mathematical facts have peculiar features – they seem to be independent of our mind, and yet also dependent on our mind – but we would agree that maths is objective, so perhaps ethics is too, despite the peculiar features Mackie identifies.

  • Mini-conclusion – you should draw a conclusion here as to whether Mackie’s arguments are strong enough to demonstrate that there are no objective moral truths.

Mackie’s semantic claim – leading to his cognitivist position

• Mackie argues that when we make ethical judgements we really do believe that we are talking about objective moral facts.

• So a judgement such as ‘stealing is wrong’ expresses our genuine belief that stealing is wrong, and as such this judgement is a statement, or proposition, which is truth apt/which has truth conditions (Mackie is a cognitivist about religious language).

• But this is an error. Our belief in objective moral facts is a projection onto the world of the moral codes that we have been brought up in.
Mackie’s conclusion – all moral judgements are false

- The combination of Mackie’s cognitivism and anti-realism leads to his Error theory:
  - If Mackie is correct about both his claim then: 1) our moral judgements are genuine statements about the world, capable of being true or false; but 2) they are always in error, i.e. always false (as there are no objective moral truths for them to refer to).
  - Error Theory is analogous to Atheism – atheists argue that religious believers are making genuine statements about God and the world (cognitivism), but there is no God (anti-realism), so all statements about God are false.

R.M. Hare’s criticism of cognitivism

- Even if Mackie is correct in his claim that there are no objective moral facts, he may not be correct in his account of ethical language.
- Non-cognitivists like Hare argue that it is a mistake to think of moral judgements as statements about the world.
- For Hare, moral judgements have a distinct function within our language – they recommend, or prescribe, courses of action.
- So ‘Stealing is wrong’ is the expression of value (it is not a belief about the world, i.e. it is not true or false), and in particular for Hare such a sentence carries all the weight of a prescription or a command like ‘Do NOT steal’.
- Cognitivists like Mackie fail to understand the proper function and meaning of ethical language.

Conclusion

- Mackie’s argument that ‘All Moral Judgements are False’ succeeds only if both parts of his argument succeed, i.e. if both his cognitivist and his anti-realist accounts of moral judgements are correct.
- Hare gives a very different account of moral judgements, and it is a persuasive one; it avoids the mistakes of emotivism whilst capturing the insight of emotivists that moral language expresses rather than describes something. For Hare, moral judgements are neither true nor false.
- So Mackie’s argument fails because his arguments for cognitivism fail – Hare would not say that ‘all moral judgements are false’ but rather that ‘all moral judgements command’.