

PHI 202 | Study questions 2

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Readings:

Nozick, R. (1974). The Experience Machine.

Parfit, D. (1984). Appendix G: What Makes Someone's Life Go Best.

Stocker, M. (1976). The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories.

The structure of consequentialism

(i) In his article, Shaw discusses a version of ethical consequentialism which he called *standard consequentialism*. But this is just one version. Can we come up with a fully general statement of consequentialism?

(ii) A theory of consequentialism has two main components: (i) an axiological theory (= a theory of moral value), and (ii) a deontic theory. What are the theoretical choices that we need to make to fully characterise each of these components?

(iii)* In normative ethics, we ask: what should you do? Ethical consequentialism provides one answer. In normative epistemology, we ask: what should you believe? Roughly, what would a theory of *epistemic consequentialism* look like?

Well-being: general issues

(i) Where in the scaffolding of consequentialism is there place for theories of well-being?

(ii) Some consequentialist theories hold that well-being is only one of the values relevant for assessing the goodness of states of affairs. Is it possible to construct a consequentialist theory which takes no account of well-being? Would such a theory be plausible?

(iii) The theoretical choices concerning the structure of *prudential* value parallel the choices concerning the structure of *moral* value. Are we forced to give parallel answers to these questions? If no, which commitments make more sense at one of these levels than on the other?

Stocker's critique of consequentialism

(i) What is Stocker's dilemma for consequentialism? And how is it supposed to undermine this family of views?

(ii) Some consequentialists are not utilitarians. They maintain that things other than positive and negative experiences are among the bearers of final moral value. For Moore, for instance, love and friendship are among the bearers of final moral value. What is Stocker's critique of such views?

(iii) What is it to value people as (=qua) particular individuals as opposed to just as the bearers of certain properties or as instantiators of valuable relationships?

(iv) Railton (1984) argues that Stocker's objection misses the mark: it applies to *naive* consequentialism but not to *sophisticated* consequentialism. What is the difference between these two views?

(v) Railton uses the example of Juan whose many gestures of affection towards Linda are motivated by his love for her. He suggests that Juan will count as committed to consequentialism as long as his motivational structure will meet *the counterfactual condition*. What is this condition? Doesn't it preclude engaging in genuine relationships or valuing people as particular individuals?

Hedonistic theories

(i) Bentham and Mill were both hedonists, but there was an important disagreement between. Mill distinguished between *lower and higher pleasures*. We can cash out Mill's view in terms of *value superiority*, but it is important to distinguish between *strong superiority* and *weak superiority*. How do these ideas differ? We can leave it to historians of philosophy to decide which one Mill had in mind. For now, let's ask: which of these is more plausible as a model for a theory of well-being? What difficulties do theories committed to value superiority have?

(ii) Parfit argues that we should abandon *simple hedonism* in favour of *preference hedonism* (this label can be confusing). What are these two views? What is Parfit's argument? There is a simple way of restating hedonism to avoid "stretching" the meaning of the terms pleasure and pain; what is it?

(iii) In the lecture, Johann Frick asked you to compare a relatively short but intense life of Leonardo da Vinci with a life that involves a "drab eternity of muzak and potatoes". Many people have the intuition that the former is more valuable. Does this challenge hedonism generally or only some of its versions?

Desire-satisfaction theories

(i) How do desire-satisfaction theories differ from preference hedonism?

- (ii) Which desires matter? Can you think of cases which put pressure on each of these possibilities?
- (a) Only desires about our own lives or also those about others' lives and the world?
 - (b) Actual desires or informed desires?
 - (c) Only desires fulfilled when you are alive or also those fulfilled after you are dead?
 - (d) Local desires, global desires, or both?
 - (e) Only desires which are not evil or trivial or also those which are?

Objective list theories

(i) Which items would be on the list? Why?

(ii) In the lecture, Johann Frick described a *hybrid* view "according to which certain goods do benefit people independently of pleasure and desire-satisfaction, but only when they do in fact bring pleasure and/or satisfy desires". To what extent is this view different from hedonistic views?