

James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*

Adopted from lists created by W.O. Stephens, PhD (Creighton University)

Chapter 1.

- a.) How does Socrates define morality?
- b.) What must moral judgments be backed by? Why?
- c.) Why is impartiality necessary for moral judgments?
- d.) How does Rachels characterize "the minimum conception of morality"?

Chapter 2.

- a.) What is Cultural Relativism?
- b.) Reconstruct the Cultural Differences Argument.
- c.) Explain why the Cultural Differences Argument is not sound.
- d.) Explain three consequences of taking Cultural Relativism seriously.
- e.) What values do all cultures have in common?
- f.) What two lessons can be learned from Cultural Relativism?

Chapter 3.

- a.) Explain what Rachels calls Simple (Ethical) Subjectivism.
- b.) What are the two most prominent objections to Simple Subjectivism?
- c.) Explain Charles L. Stevenson's theory of Emotivism.
- d.) How does Emotivism avoid the two objections to Simple Subjectivism?
- e.) Explain Rachels' criticisms of Emotivism.
- f.) What explanations does Rachels offer for the fact that people persist in believing that moral judgments are "unprovable" and so ultimately neither true nor false?
- g.) Explain the arguments for and against the view that homosexuality is immoral.

Chapter 4.

- a.) Explain Divine Command Theory.
- b.) What are the two strengths of this theory Rachels describes?
- c.) What are the serious problems with this theory?
- d.) Explain the problem Socrates raises with Divine Command theory.
- e.) Explain the Theory of Natural Law.
- f.) Which Catholic theologian-philosopher is most associated with it?
- g.) From which Greek philosopher does 4f derive the Theory of Natural Law?
- h.) What is David Hume's criticism of this theory?
- i.) What is the second criticism of this theory which Rachels describes?
- j.) How does the third part of the Theory of Natural Law allow believers and non-believers to "inhabit the same moral universe"?
- k.) What was St. Thomas Aquinas' position on abortion?

Chapter 5.

- a.) Explain the theory of Psychological Egoism
- b.) How do psychological egoists use the *strategy of reinterpreting motives* to explain charity and pity?
- c.) Reconstruct two different general arguments for Psychological Egoism.
- d.) What are the criticisms of these arguments that Rachels describes?
- e.) Explain Ethical Egoism; how does it differ from Psychological Egoism?
- f.) Reconstruct Ayn Rand's argument for Ethical Egoism. What is the problem with this argument?
- g.) Reconstruct the "Commonsense Morality" argument for Ethical Egoism. What are two serious problems Rachels sees in this argument?
- h.) Explain Kurt Baier's argument that Ethical Egoism cannot handle conflicts of interest.
- i.) Explain the argument that Ethical Egoism is logically inconsistent.
- j.) Explain Rachels' nearly "outright refutation" of Ethical Egoism. When does he think we can justify treating people differently? How does this idea shed light on racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, nationalism, and religious intolerance?

Chapter 6

- a.) Who first proposed the theory of Utilitarianism and when did he live?
- b.) Who was Jeremy Bentham and when did he live? State precisely Bentham's Classical Principle of Utility.
- c.) Who was John Stuart Mill and when did he live? State precisely J. S. Mill's Greatest Happiness Principle.
- d.) Explain the primary rule of morality, according to Mill.
- e.) Explain what these principles mean.
- f.) Describe how these principles would be applied to the Mathew Donnelly euthanasia case.
- g.) Explain Bentham and Mill's view regarding the purpose of law and the freedom of citizens.
- h.) Compare and contrast the Christian tradition following St. Thomas Aquinas with the utilitarian tradition following Bentham on the treatment of nonhuman animals.
- i.) Who is Peter Singer? Explain Singer's arguments regarding animal experimentation and the system of meat production. What does Rachels think is most revolutionary about Singer's utilitarian ideas?

Chapter 7

- a.) Explain the three "propositions" of Classical Utilitarianism.
- b.) How impartial about people's happiness does J. S. Mill say a Utilitarian must be?
- c.) Describe the two examples Rachels says reveal the flaws of "Hedonism."
- d.) What are the three types of intrinsic goods according to G. E. Moore?
- e.) Explain in detail (and give examples illustrating) the **FIVE** different criticisms of Utilitarianism.
- f.) Explain the three "lines of defense" a Utilitarian could make in response to these criticisms.
- g.) Explain the difference between *ACT Utilitarianism* and *RULE Utilitarianism*. Show how they can reach opposing moral evaluations of various actions.
- h.) What did J.J.C. Smart say about "the common moral consciousness"?

Rachels Chapter 8

- a. List the **SEVEN** acts that Elizabeth Anscombe believed may not be done no matter what.
- b. Why did Anscombe think that Harry Truman was a murderer?
- c. Explain the difference between *hypothetical imperatives* and *categorical imperatives*.
- d. State **verbatim** the first formulation of Kant's Categorical Imperative.
- e. Explain what this formulation means (e.g., what is a *maxim*?), and describe how it would be used to test the morality of various actions.
- f. What criticisms can be made of the Categorical Imperative? Explain the Case of the Inquiring Murderer and what it shows about lying.
- g. What does it mean to say that a moral judgment is universalizable? Why is universalizability important for moral judgments?
- h. Explain the basic idea Rachels draws from Kant's moral theory.

Rachels Chapter 9

- a. What was Kant's view of our moral obligations to nonhuman animals?
- b. Explain Kant's view of humans as ends in themselves. What things are mere means and why are they mere means?
- c. State **verbatim** the second formulation of Kant's Categorical Imperative.
- d. Explain what this formulation means, and describe how it can be used to test the morality of various actions.
- e. Explain Kant's concept of human dignity. What is the relationship between the moral law and rational agents? Explain Kant's concept of autonomy.
- f. What are the two Utilitarian justifications for "punishment"? Who may be punished and for what reasons, according to Utilitarianism?
- g. What are Kant's criticisms of the Utilitarian theory of punishment?
- h. What did Kant think was the just punishment for murder? What is Kant's argument for this?

Rachels Chapter 11

- a. What did Kant say about women's "civil personality"?
- b. What did Rousseau say about the virtues of men and women?
- c. What do recent feminists think about female ways of thinking?
- d. Describe Lawrence Kohlberg's account of "Heinz's Dilemma."
- e. Explain Kohlberg's six stages of moral development.
- f. Explain Carol Gilligan's objection to Kohlberg's theory of moral development.
- g. Describe Virginia Held's view about the nature of ethics. (p.164)
- h. What does Rachels say about women and men thinking differently about ethics?
- i. What two possible explanations for how the sexes think differently about ethics does Rachels discuss? Which of these two accounts does Rachels believe is "more interesting"?
- j. Explain how the ethics of care does a better job of explaining the nature of our moral relations with family and friends than traditional theories of obligation do.
- k. Explain how Nel Noddings applies the ethic of care to the issue of famine relief.
- l. Explain how Nel Noddings applies the ethic of care to the issue of obligations to nonhuman animals.
- m. What does Rachels say about intuitions and feelings?
- n. Which virtues are required in public life? Which virtues are required in private life?
- o. Explain why Rachels thinks that the ethics of care ultimately turns out to be one part of the ethics of virtue.

Rachels Chapter 12

- a. Explain how virtue ethics approaches morality much differently than Consequentialism (e.g. Mill's Utilitarianism) and Deontology (e.g. Kant).
- b. Which ancient Greek philosopher is most associated with the ethics of virtue and when did he live?
- c. What five things must a theory of virtue ethics do, according to Rachels?
- d. How does Rachels define what a virtue is?
- e. How much does a person have to give to be considered "generous"? Explain.
- f. Does the virtue of honesty require telling the truth under all circumstances? Explain the case of Athanasius and what it shows (p.179–180).
- g. Explain Rachels' account of the virtues of loyalty and friendship. What does Aristotle say about friends?
- m. Explain Rachels' account of how a virtue ethicist would reply to the question of whether the virtues are the same for everyone and in every society.
- j. Explain the **two advantages** of virtue ethics as presented by Rachels
- n. What **partial virtues** does Rachels think apply to family and friends?
- k. Why does Rachels think unsupplemented virtue theory couldn't handle cases of moral conflict? How might "b." appeal to the virtue of **practical wisdom** as a reply to *this* criticism?