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 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

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?