

1 Supplemental notes for Phil 104:

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3 I) Divine Command Theory

4 Roots moral standards in the will of God (the gods): actions are good because God (the
5 gods) so will(s) them. This is known as a voluntaristic theory of the good (the moral good is the
6 solely determined by fiat (the will of some rule giver).

7 DCT assumes that moral norms require a rule giver. A typical argument for DCT is that if
8 there is no God, then everything is permitted (a view held by a Ivan Karamazov in Dostoevsky's
9 novel *The Brothers Karamazov*). Why? If the only sources of moral norms are human wills, then
10 we are reduced to moral subjectivism since one person's will cannot provide the norms for
11 anyone else).

12 In the Plato's *Euthyphro* the dilemma for this view is put this way: (1) either God (the
13 gods) commands actions because they are good or (2) they are good because God (the gods)
14 command them. If (1) then the actions are morally good independently of divine will and thus
15 DCT is false; if (2) then in principle divine will could command actions that appear to be
16 morally atrocious -- killing innocent children to test a parent's faith. In this case, DCT does not
17 seem to be a good moral theory.

18 If there are many gods, then problems arises with the gods giving conflicting advice.
19 Unless it is assumed that God (the gods) are inherently good, then there is no guarantee that
20 divine commands will be morally good. Even if God (the gods) are inherently good, that
21 goodness is prior to the will.

22 DCT is incompatible with both cultural relativism and subjectivism. But it is not a
23 rationally based normative ethics.

24 Further problems: how do we determine whether God (the gods) exists and if so, who is
25 the true God or gods. Secondly, if the moral good is entirely a matter of divine fiat then it would
26 seem we could only know what to do through some sort of revelation. The problem then
27 becomes that of determining the veracity of any particular claim to revelation: many religious
28 people, Jews, Christians and Muslims, may accept the veracity of God's revelation to Abraham
29 to sacrifice Isaac; few if any of those people are likely to accept the claims of someone in the 21st
30 C that he killed his children because God directed him to do so.

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32 II) Ethical Egoism (a brief supplement to what is on the Ethical Theory Review Sheet)

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34 Universal Ethical Egoism requires that each person act in his or her own self-interest regardless
35 of the interests of others (unless it so benefits him/her). This does not prevent people cooperating
36 with each other even when there are different self-interests.

37
38 Jones and Smith have differing self-interests:

39 A) what is in Jones's s-i is not in Smith's s-i.

40 Jones needs digitalis for a heart condition; but digitalis will kill Smith if Smith doesn't have a
41 heart condition. There need be no conflict here since Jones's pursuing the digitalis need not
42 harm or interfere with Smith's pursuit of her s-i.

43
44 B) Conflict arises between UEE's when, e.g., in pursuing Jones's s-i, Jones will act in a way to
45 harm Smith's s-i. In this case, since each person is morally obligated to pursue his/her own s-i
46 without regard to others except insofar as other people benefits one's own s-i, this sort of

1 situation leads to conflict. The ethical egoist can cooperate with people by basically negotiating
2 to constrain pursuing certain things in his/her s-i that conflict with others' s-i, if they will do the
3 same for themselves. In this way, cooperation among egoists can minimize conflict, allow people
4 to live in some sort of peace, which is generally in people's s-i. That is, one trades certain things
5 in one's self-interest for other things.

6
7 Cooperation among people is permissible for UEEs but only provided that the consequences of
8 the cooperation are beneficial to the individual.

9
10 However, if cooperation is not possible, then a serious problem arises in regard to UEE. Suppose
11 that both Jones and Smith need digitalis in the sense that each will die without it. Suppose also
12 that there is only enough digitalis for one person. Jones, a UEE, and Smith plan to go after the
13 digitalis. However, Smith asks Jones for moral advice. Since Jones holds UEE as a theory, Jones
14 should tell Smith that she should do what is in her own self-interest regardless of his s-i. But
15 doing so will directly lead Smith to a course of action that will harm Jones. That is, Jones will
16 violate UEE and do something immoral. However, if he either lies to Smith about what she
17 should do or says he doesn't know what moral principles she should follow, then he has
18 abandoned UEE as a moral theory and, thus, undermined his own moral justification for
19 obtaining the digitalis without regard to Smith's interests. These sorts of situations raise serious,
20 and many believe, fatal problems with UEE as a moral theory -- that is, a view which should
21 hold for all people.

22 23 24 III) Utilitarianism (supplemental notes)

25
26 1) Objection: Utilitarian's can't necessarily give reliable moral advice prior to an action. Since
27 only the consequences of an action make it good or bad, one can't really know whether an action
28 is good or bad until one knows the ACTUAL consequences of the action. If actions will likely
29 have long term consequences, then knowing whether one acted correctly can be delayed well
30 into the future. The utilitarian can simply say that the desires for moral guarantees prior to action
31 is not possible given that consequences are morally relevant. In addition, the Utilitarian can look
32 to the past to see the consequences of various practices: truth telling, lying, taking human life etc.
33 When we do so, we can make a good determination about the good and bad consequences of
34 actions and use that as the basis for deciding what to do in the present. This procedure is part of
35 rule-utilitarianism -- making moral judgments for a practice rather than just an individual action.
36 But these rules are always just guidelines since if in a particular situation the action brings about
37 good and bad consequences that differ from the same action in the past, then one would have to
38 make, or one should have made, an exception to the rule. Recourse to past actions won't work in
39 cases where actions are being contemplated for which there is no past precedent. This sort of
40 situation can easily arise in our age because of technological and other changes.

41
42 2) Objection: Utilitarian's may have to morally support the wrongful punishment of an innocent
43 person if it benefits the majority. Case: A white woman has been viciously murdered by a black
44 man in a town that has a great deal of racial hostility and tension. There is a serious danger of
45 riots and of white vigilante groups killing black people. The police apprehend a black man who
46 was near the scene of the crime, has a past history of violence but whom the police know to be

1 innocent of the crime. They have no idea of the identity of the real murderer. However, to
2 prevent riots and violence for the town, they frame the black man. He is convicted and sent to
3 prison. Since such an action promoted the advantage of the vast majority of the citizens in the
4 town, the objection is that the utilitarian must give moral approval to the actions of the police.
5 A common Utilitarian reply is that if such practices were widespread, they would become known
6 and would undermine the rule of law, thus leading to far worse consequences for people in
7 general than the riots that were prevented. The objection continues: even if this is correct and
8 even if one could show, apart from this consideration, that the false conviction would have lead
9 to more negative than good consequences, it doesn't seem that the consequences of an action are
10 morally relevant here. It is simply unjust to punish an innocent person for a crime he/she did not
11 commit. Justice commonly requires treating people according to what they deserve. It's wrong to
12 punish innocent people because they don't deserve to be punished, not because not punishing
13 them promotes general welfare. Similarly, one would object to the severe punishment of an
14 individual for a minor infraction in order to deter others (a possible utilitarian justification for
15 deterrence theories of punishment) since the punishment is utterly disproportionate to the offence
16 and, hence, unjust and underserved. The thrust of the objection is that notions of justice and
17 desert (what people deserve) are not founded on moral utility.
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