M.A. Exam in Ethics—Summer 2011

Answer three questions, one from each section.

I

1. What is Moore’s “open question” argument? What is it supposed to show, and why is this supposed to be important? Discuss the argument critically.

2. According to Hume, there is no substantive distinction between moral virtues and other kinds of virtues. What is his argument for this claim? Is there a way of drawing a substantive distinction between moral evaluations of people and evaluations of other kinds?

3. What is Mackie’s “queer facts” argument? How does he make sense of the apparent meaningfulness of moral discourse? Does he succeed?

II

4. One of the formulations of Kant’s categorical imperative is that we must act in such a way that we always treat people as ends in themselves, and never merely as means. What does this mean? Present and evaluate Kant’s argument for the requirement, and try to identify a significant weakness.

5. Can moral rights or principles of justice be defended strictly on utilitarian grounds? How might the importance of rights and justice be weighed against the maximization of happiness overall? Discuss regarding at least one historical philosopher.

6. In his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume offers an argument that is meant to show that “the ultimate ends of human actions can never, in any case, be accounted for by reason.” Interpret this claim and the argument for it. Is Hume right?

III

7. Describe the position known in contemporary ethical theory as “particularism.” What do you take to be the best argument for it? What might be its main weaknesses? Is the position plausible?

8. What role is played in John McDowell’s moral philosophy by the notion of a moral outlook or point of view? What philosophical position or set of concerns is this notion meant to respond to? Do you find McDowell’s approach compelling?