

HUL 258: Social and Political Philosophy
IInd Semester, 2017-18
Minor 1

Instructions

Make your answers as clear and precise as possible. Feel free to write your answers in point format, and to use Hindi words or phrases if you need to.

A (5 marks)

For each of the following questions, choose *one* of the possible options. Explain your answer in one line: no marks will be awarded without a correct explanation.

1. Which of the following is a conceptual claim?

- (a) The universe is expanding.
- (b) Inter-caste marriages are on the rise.
- (c) Happiness consists of feeling more pleasure than pain.
- (d) It is the duty of all citizens to defend the country.

2. According to Peter Singer, "if it is in our power to prevent something very bad happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance, we ought to do it." This statement belongs to the category of:

- (a) Conceptual claims
- (b) Empirical claims
- (c) Normative claims
- (d) None of the above

3. According to utilitarians, you should care about your own happiness

- (a) Never, because it is wrong to be selfish.
- (b) Always, because if you don't care about your own happiness, who will?

- (c) Sometimes, as long as it doesn't come in the way of other people's happiness.
- (d) Always, because your own happiness counts just as much (but no more) than the happiness of others.
4. Suppose we could construct an "experience machine" which stimulated your brain to produce any mental state that you thought was valuable. This could be used to show that
- (a) "Basic needs" perspectives on poverty are preferable to income-based perspectives on poverty.
 - (b) We should care more about absolute poverty than relative poverty.
 - (c) Hedonistic theories of well-being are false.
 - (d) We should prefer desire-based theories of well-being to objective theories of well-being.
5. According to James Rachels, utilitarians ignore backward-looking considerations. Which of the following examples best illustrate this point?
- (a) Utilitarians tend to be vegetarians.
 - (b) Utilitarians care about the intentions with which people act.
 - (c) Utilitarians wouldn't punish a guilty person if the punishment caused more harm than good overall.
 - (d) Utilitarians give a lot to charity.

B (5 marks, 500 words)

Peter Singer claims that the failure of rich people in affluent countries to aid those who live in absolute poverty is the moral equivalent of murder. One objection to this claim is that it is not difficult to avoid killing people, while it is extremely difficult to sacrifice all luxuries to save all those one can possibly save.

How does Singer respond to this objection? Are you convinced by his response?

C (10 marks, 1000 words)

The Bihar Prohibition and Excise Act, 2016 bans the production, sale, and consumption of alcohol in Bihar. How, as a utilitarian, would you analyse this law? Clearly identify the empirical assumptions you are making in your analysis.