

Midterm 2 – November 11, 2015

Name: _____ Student #: _____

- There are a total of 30 points
- All answers must be in paragraphs with complete sentences
- Bullet points will be penalized
- If you run out of space, continue your answer on the back of the test paper INDICATING CLEARLY which answers are being continued

Short Answer (1-3 paragraphs) *each short answer question is worth 3 points:*

1. What was the purpose of the Stanford prison experiment? Explain how it fulfilled this purpose.

With the Stanford Prison Experiment, Zimbardo intended to show that features of situations are very influential on persons' conduct. More specifically, he wanted to investigate whether ordinary people would behave abnormally just because they are placed in an abnormal situation. The study succeeded in showing that people can be made to behave in surprising ways as a result of the situation in which they are placed. Zimbardo divided his subjects into two groups: inmates and guards. Within days, the inmates were rebelling against rules set by the guards, and the guards responded by acting violently towards, and humiliating the inmates. The study was supposed to last two weeks, but was called off after only six days because the participants' behaviour became dangerous. Thus, Zimbardo succeeded in showing that his subjects, who were screened to make sure that they did not show signs of psychological abnormality, were disposed to behaving brutally once placed in brutal circumstances.

2. Gilbert Harman argues that character traits do not exist. Explain why he thinks that recognizing this fact would be a good thing.

First, Harman suggests that philosophers can benefit by avoiding virtue ethics, which is based on character traits. Second, he claims that we can all benefit from knowing that there is no such thing as character traits, because this entails that there is no reason to expend effort toward the building of character. Third, Harman claims that we will be more tolerant of others if we attribute their actions to situations instead of character traits. Fourth, knowing that all character trait based explanation is fundamentally flawed makes it easy to see that particularly extreme examples (such as ethnic hatred) rest on errors.

Students mentioning any 3 of the 4 claims above should receive full marks.

3. Paul Bloom is “Against Empathy.” Present at least three reasons why.

Bloom claims that empathy is *biased*. For example, persons are more likely to feel empathy for attractive people, or people with whom they share an ethnic or national background. He also claims empathy is *narrow*, by which he means that empathy connects us to particular individuals, but is insensitive to statistical data.

Bloom also claims that empathic considerations are a poor guide for the construction of public policy. One example that illustrates this is the slow development of responsible climate policy, which following Bloom, might be judged due to the fact that the primary beneficiaries of such policy are people yet to be born, and thus difficult, if not impossible, to empathize with. Bloom also mentions long-distance charity, which can be attenuated by the difficulties many people have in empathizing with people from distant parts of the world.

Bloom also notes that high levels of empathy can be problematic for people’s personal lives. Highly empathic people show higher-than-average incidences of depression and anxiety, and more often report *asymmetric* personal relationships, in which highly empathic persons are very supportive of their partners but do not feel supported themselves.

Finally, Bloom notes that certain professional relationships, such as that between a doctor and a patient, are better off without much empathy. For example, a doctor should be calm when a patient is anxious, rather than sharing in the patient’s anxiety.

Students presenting any 3 of the points above should get full marks

4. Which emotion does Bloom compare to empathy? What does he think they have in common?

Bloom compares anger to empathy. He claims that both emerge in early childhood, and occur in every known human culture. Both anger and empathy are present in other primates, such as chimpanzees. Additionally, they are both *social*, meaning that they are mainly induced by other people, unlike an emotion such as disgust, which can also apply to inanimate objects. Bloom also points out that anger and empathy both play a role in moral thinking. More generally, Bloom suggests that anger is a useful, but potentially destructive feeling, which we would like to be able to stop feeling once it is no longer useful. He thinks that we should have a similar attitude towards empathy.

5. Barack Obama said “it’s the lack of empathy that makes it very easy for us to plunge into wars.” Explain Obama’s position and why Jesse Prinz disagrees?

Obama’s remark suggests that it is because people can fail to empathize with the citizens of other nations that it can be easy to accept going to war with them. Prinz suspects that the opposite is the case. He suggests that wars reflect the tendency to form biased bonds with people we identify to be part of our group. He takes empathy to solidify the tendency to value fellow in-group members, and devalue others. Further, Prinz suggests that empathy is what compels an interest in aggressive reprisal towards any group that threatens fellow citizens, and that it is all but impossible to cultivate empathy towards enemies.

Long Answer (1-2 pages) this question is worth 15 points:

1. Greene and Cohen argue that neuroscience will and should have a large impact on justice systems. Daniel Dennett disagrees. Present both views and explain which you think is more plausible and why.

Guidelines are below, but use your judgment; there are many different ways to capture the important parts of Greene and Cohen, and Dennett's arguments. Student do not need to present all of the material I do, and they may be rewarded for bringing up other relevant material.

Greene and Cohen argue that neuroscience will eventually make it possible to make detailed predictions about persons' behaviour on the basis of information procured through brain-scanning technologies. They describe this as a shift from thinking about the mind as a *black-box* to thinking about the brain as a *transparent bottle-neck*. They claim that this will make it increasingly difficult to be a dualist, i.e. believe that the mind is separate from the body. In turn, this will make it harder and harder to believe in free will. According to Greene and Cohen, this will eventually change people's moral intuitions about punishment. Specifically, Greene and Cohen suggest that as belief in free will erodes, people will be less and less inclined toward the retributive treatment of criminals. Instead, Greene and Cohen foresee (and recommend) that neuroscientific advances compel most people toward a purely consequentialist justification of criminal punishment, according to which the purpose of criminal punishment is to secure future welfare, as opposed to giving criminals the treatment they deserve. Once this is the dominant position among the citizenry, Greene and Cohen argue that legal systems will need to become purely consequentialist in order to stay credible to such a public.

It is important that students explain what Greene and Cohen mean by 'free will.' Greene and Cohen argue that most people's conception of free will corresponds to traditional conceptions, according to which people have free will only if their actions could have been otherwise. Dennett uses the phrase 'absolute free will' to refer to the concept Greene and Cohen deploy. It would also be fine to use 'libertarian,' 'incompatibilist,' 'alternativist' or 'indeterministic' as qualifiers to convey Greene and Cohen's usage of 'free will.'

Students may recap the story of 'Mr. Puppet' to illustrate Greene and Cohen's view. This is fine as long as they draw out the implications of the story, which concern the various inferences described above. Finally, Greene and Cohen entertain the possibility that belief in free will and retributivism are too deeply ingrained in people's viewpoints to ever be rejected. To rebut this point, Greene and Cohen compare the task of satellite engineers and rocket scientists, who need to reject their day-to-day conception of reality as Euclidean and adopt a relativistic or Einsteinian position in order to do their work, to that of judges and jurors. Greene and Cohen claim that judges and jurors can conceivably abandon their day-to-day belief in free will and retributivism in order to take into account neuroscientific insights and thus more responsibly discharge their duties to justice procedures.

Dennett concedes to Greene and Cohen that most people have an ‘indeterministic,’ ‘absolute,’ or ‘libertarian’ conception of free will, and that neuroscientific developments of the sort envisioned by Greene and Cohen would make trouble for such a concept. However, Dennett thinks that there are good reasons to redefine or reconceptualise free will, so that it is no longer vulnerable in this way. Dennett’s over-arching motivation is drawn from two claims: he thinks that people might start to behave immorally if they stop believing in free will (students might mention a study done by Vohs and Schooler, which is widely taken to demonstrate this), and that moral/legal responsibility practices are necessary to civilized societies.

Dennett is a compatibilist, which means that he thinks free will can be redefined so that it becomes compatible with determinism. His first step is to show that the traditional/absolute/libertarian conception of free will requires that persons are fundamentally unpredictable, which would require that there is an element of randomness in people. Dennett argues that it doesn’t make sense to hold people responsible for the outcomes of random processes, which he takes to show that the traditional conception of free will rests on a deep mistake. Next, Dennett argues that the way most people conceive of deterministic systems is flawed. He uses the descriptor of ‘being on hidden railroad tracks’ to capture what he thinks troubles people when they contemplate determinism. He then points out that there is an important difference between *being on tracks* and making human decisions in a deterministic world. Dennett claims that even if our decisions are determined by the laws of nature, our thoughts still make a difference to our conduct, whereas a person traveling on hidden tracks is unable to alter their trajectory no matter what they think or do. This notion of one’s thoughts ‘making a difference’ to one’s conduct ought to be enough free will to legitimize moral responsibility, according to Dennett. He describes this as ‘moral competence,’ which is his intended replacement for/redefinition of the traditional free will concept.

Additionally, Dennett critiques Greene and Cohen directly. He points out that a purely consequentialist justice system is not obviously a good thing. He alludes to the tyrannical practices of the former soviet union and to the book/film *A Clockwork Orange* to give a sense of how such systems are highly corruptible. Dennett also points out that it shouldn’t surprise anybody to learn that neuroscience could be used to make effective predictions about people. This should only be surprising for ‘closet Cartesians’ who, in Dennett’s view, naively hold onto a conception of the mind as separate from the body. Finally, Dennett thinks Greene and Cohen’s ‘Mr. Puppet’ thought experiment is misleading. He provides a counter-story about ‘Captain Autonomy,’ which is supposed to show that Greene and Cohen misdiagnose the significant features of Mr. Puppet’s case. According to Dennett, the Mr. Puppet story fails to show that determinism is moral responsibility-mitigating because the intuition to withhold moral responsibility from Mr. Puppet is actually a result of the presence of the nefarious scientists who create and control Puppet.

The students own positions on this debate, and their supporting arguments should be evaluated according to your judgment.