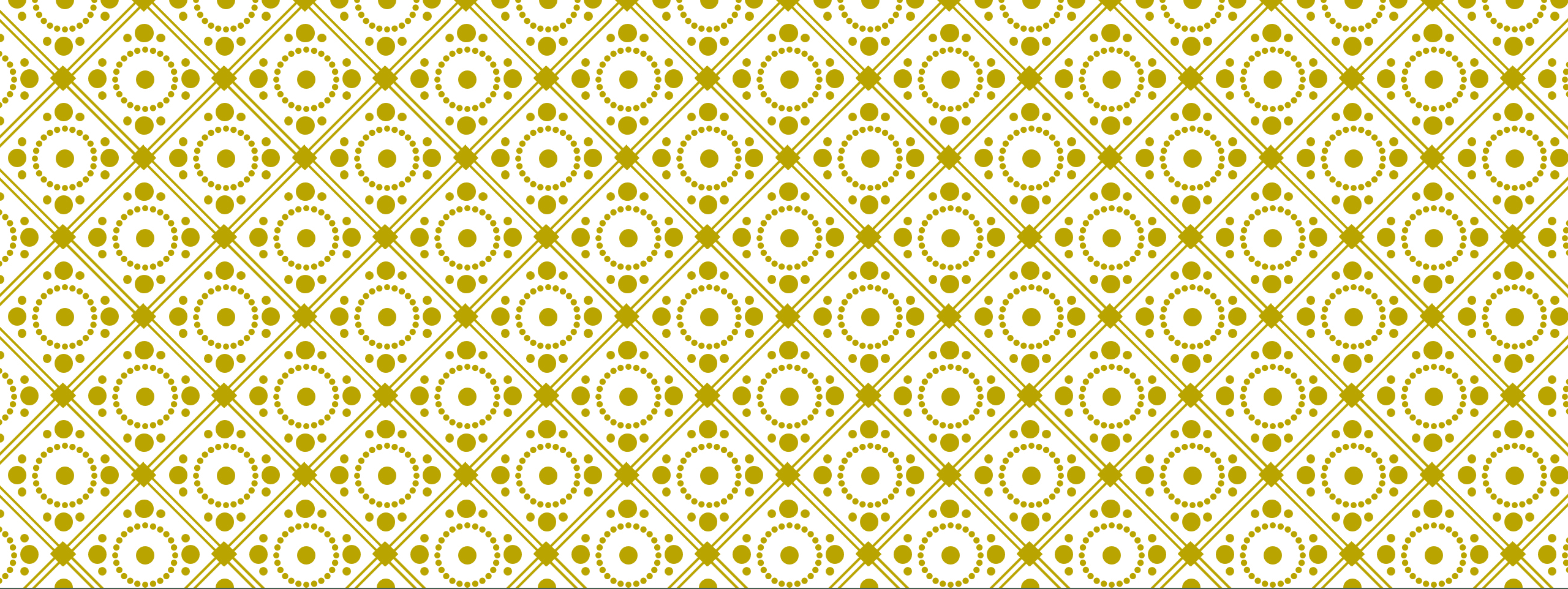


THEORIES OF WELLBEING

PHIL 361, Sumeet Patwardhan

AGENDA

1. Brief Review of Meta-Ethical Cultural Relativism
2. Overview of Theories of Wellbeing
3. Opacity Argument against Preference Hedonism
4. Part-Whole Argument against Objective List Theories
5. Arguments against Desire-Satisfaction Theories



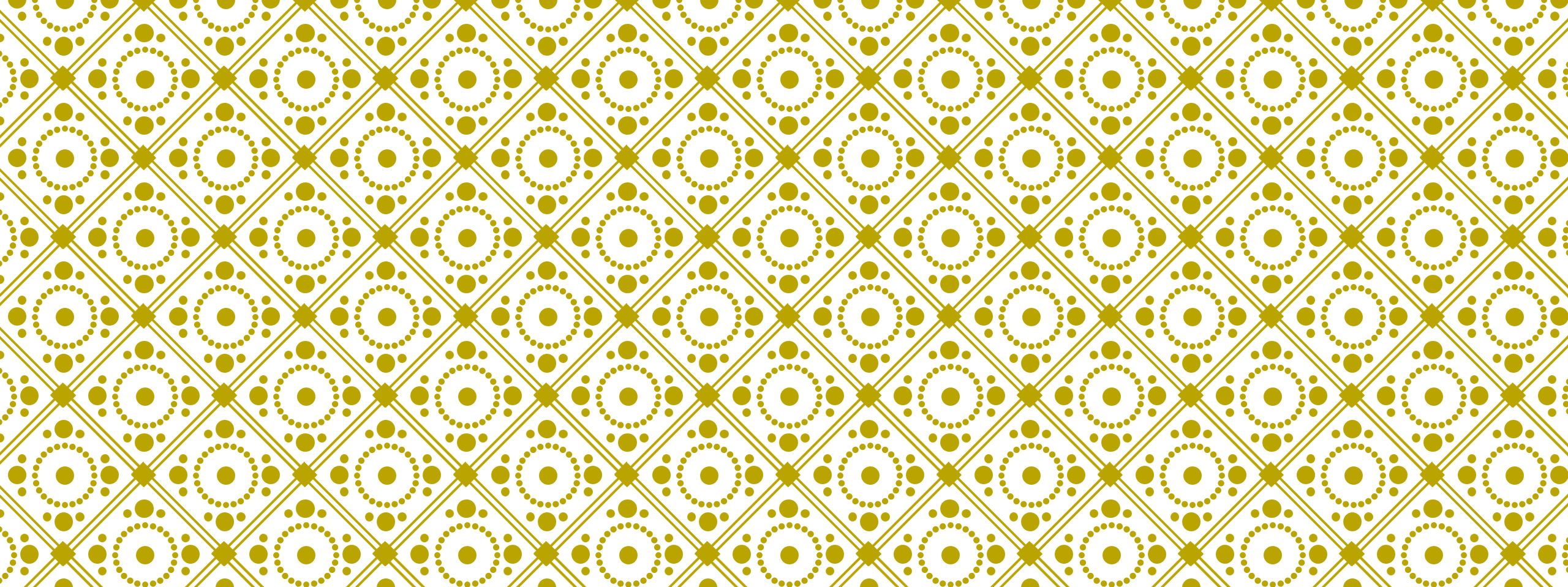
BRIEF REVIEW OF 5/10 |

META-ETHICAL CULTURAL RELATIVISM: DEFINITION

Something is 'good' or 'right' for the society in question (and its members) if, only if, and because the majority of that society judges that thing to be 'good' or 'right'.

WHAT'S THE 'CONTRADICTION' IN THE SELF-CONTRADICTION ARGUMENT AGAINST MER?

If MER were true, it would be contradictory for me (or anyone) to simultaneously say (a) X is wrong; and (b) the majority of my society judges X to be right.



THEORIES OF WELLBEING



READINGS: PARFIT



THEORIES OF WELLBEING: THE QUESTION

What would make a person's life go, for them, as well as possible?
In other words, what would be most in a person's interests?

This is not the same question as: what is the morally right thing to do?

ANSWER 1: HEDONISTIC THEORIES

Narrow Hedonism

Things are good for someone to the extent that they contain the distinctive common quality of pleasure and do not contain the distinctive common quality of pain.

Parfit says: there are no such distinctive qualities.

Preference Hedonism

Things are good for someone to the extent that they satisfy one's preferences about introspectively discernible, present features of our lives (overall, not just in the short term).

ANSWER 2: DESIRE-FULFILLMENT THEORIES

Unrestricted Theory

What would be best for someone is what would best fulfill all of their desires (overall, not just in the short term).

Parfit says: no.

Success Theory

What would be best for someone is what would best fulfill their desires about their own life (overall, not just in the short term).

ANSWER 3: OBJECTIVE LIST THEORIES

Certain things are good/bad for someone independent of their making them happy/unhappy or fulfilling or not fulfilling their desires. What would be best for someone is what would give them the most goods and the least bads on the objective list.

- Examples of goods: moral goodness, development of one's abilities, having knowledge, being aware of true beauty
- Examples of bads: being deceived; being deprived of liberty/dignity; enjoying sadistic pleasures.

ANSWER 4: COMBINATION THEORY

Someone's life goes well to the extent that they engage in activities that are valuable-in-combination and they strongly want to be engaged in them.

OPACITY ARGUMENT AGAINST PREFERENCE HEDONISM

Premise 1: If Preference Hedonism were true, then preferences that, unknown to you, are satisfied, don't make your life go better and preferences that, unknown to you, are not satisfied, don't make your life go worse.

Premise 2: Preferences that, unknown to you, are satisfied, can make your life go better – e.g. after one's death, it becoming true that one is a successful parent – and preferences that, unknown to you, are not satisfied, can make your life go worse – e.g. unknown deception.

Conclusion 1: Preference Hedonism is false.

OPACITY ARGUMENT AGAINST PREFERENCE HEDONISM: A POSSIBLE OBJECTION

Premise 1: If Preference Hedonism were true, then preferences that, unknown to you, are satisfied, don't make your life go better and preferences that, unknown to you, are not satisfied, don't make your life go worse.

Premise 2: Preferences that, unknown to you, are satisfied, can make your life go better – e.g. after one's death, it becoming true that one is a successful parent – and preferences that, unknown to you, are not satisfied, can make your life go worse – e.g. unknown deception.

- **Objection:** How can your life go better after your life is over?

Conclusion 1: Preference Hedonism is false.

OPACITY ARGUMENT AGAINST PREFERENCE HEDONISM: THE STRENGTH OF THIS POSSIBLE OBJECTION

Premise 2: Preferences that, unknown to you, are satisfied, can make your life go better – e.g. after one's death, it becoming true that one is a successful parent – and preferences that, unknown to you, are not satisfied, can make your life go worse – e.g. unknown deception.

- **Objection:** How can your life go better after your life is over?

Is this strong?

- How hard is it to criticize this criticism? **Not as hard as it could be – should give more of a justification.**
- How hard would it be to revise the argument to avoid the criticism? **Not as hard as it could be – could remove postmortem clause.**

PART-WHOLE ARGUMENT AGAINST OBJECTIVE LIST THEORIES

Premise 1: If a person in states of mind like having knowledge, engaging in rational activity, and being aware of true beauty preferred these states of mind, these states of mind would have value.

Premise 2: If a person in states of mind like having knowledge, engaging in rational activity, and being aware of true beauty did not prefer these states of mind, these states of mind would not have value.

Premise 3: If one part of a valuable combination of things is removed and the remainder of the combination has no value, the value of the combination is fully explained by the value of the removed part.

Conclusion 1: The value of states of mind like having knowledge, etc. is fully explained by their satisfying a person's preferences.

Conclusion 2: Objective list theories are false (and – if we argue against other theories, too – preference hedonism is true).

PART-WHOLE ARGUMENT AGAINST OBJECTIVE LIST THEORIES: PARFIT'S OBJECTION

Premise 1: If a person in states of mind like having knowledge, engaging in rational activity, and being aware of true beauty preferred these states of mind, these states of mind would have value.

Premise 2: If a person in states of mind like having knowledge, engaging in rational activity, and being aware of true beauty did not prefer these states of mind, these states of mind would not have value.

Premise 3: If one part of a valuable combination of things is removed and the remainder of the combination has no value, the value of the combination is fully explained by the value of the removed part.

- **Objection:** This assumption is not defended.

Conclusion 1: The value of states of mind like having knowledge, etc. is fully explained by their satisfying a person's preferences.

Conclusion 2: Objective list theories are false (and – if we argue against other theories, too – preference hedonism is true).

PART-WHOLE ARGUMENT AGAINST OBJECTIVE LIST THEORIES: THE STRENGTH OF PARFIT'S OBJECTION

Premise 3: If one part of a valuable combination of things is removed and the remainder of the combination has no value, the value of the combination is fully explained by the value of the removed part.

- **Objection:** This assumption is not defended.

Is this strong?

- How hard is it to criticize Parfit's criticism? **Not as hard as it could be – should give more of a justification.**
- How hard would it be to revise the argument to avoid the criticism? **Pretty hard.**

ARGUMENTS AGAINST DESIRE FULFILLMENT THEORIES?

UPCOMING ASSIGNMENTS

Guided Reading Quiz 3 (due before 5/17 Lecture) – *Check out the ‘how to read philosophy’ handout on the canvas files page for tips on reading philosophy and reach out to me if you’d like even more resources on reading philosophy!*

Reconstruction and Objection Assignment (due 5/20) – *I encourage you to come to office hours (Thurs. 12-2 PM), make an appointment, email me, etc.!*