

Assessment BA Thesis Philosophy

Student: Dimitri van Cappeleveen

Assessor 1: dr. J.J.W. Wieland

| <i>Assessment criteria</i> | <i>Weight</i> | <i>Grade</i> | <i>Explanatory notes</i> |
|------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|--|
| 1. Research question and structure | 15% | 9 | Your question: how to make decisions under normative uncertainty? Application: should we spend our resources on wild animal suffering (rather than other things)? In the thesis, you answer this question in a step-wise way by considering two theories from the literature, i.e. My Favourite Theory and Maximize Expected Choice-Worthiness. |
| 2. Literature | 30% | 10 | This is one of the best aspects of your thesis. You're very careful about the contributions of others (including MacAskill's difficult paper in <i>Mind</i>), and make your own points only after you've presented the debate in detail. |
| 3. Argumentation | 30% | 8,5 | Overall, your reasoning is persuasive, and you're aware of its restrictions. Yet, you make quite a few moves throughout your thesis, and your conclusion doesn't make one central point, but is rather nuanced (and the non-nuanced conclusion, as stated in the abstract, is kind of trivial). If you narrow down your topic (you could have written a thesis on just one theory, or just one problem, such as the Dominance Principle), you've space to deepen your arguments, and direct them towards one main point. |
| 4. Language use and style | 10% | 9 | Your writing style is analytic and technical, though still attractive, and nice to read. You're using quite a few abbreviations that readers have to keep in mind. Here too, if you narrow down your topic, it may be possible to write with less abbreviations. |
| 5. Process | 5% | 9 | You've executed your own plan, worked hard to rewrite many versions, and to reduce your text to the essentials. |
| 6. Originality | 10% | 10 | Your thesis is original in two ways. Your own applications make the rather abstract philosophical theories intelligible. I consider this important philosophical work. And: by carefully following the debate, you make a few points of your own (e.g. a counterexample to My Favourite Theory). |
| Grade: | 9,3 | | <i>Really excellent thesis!</i> |

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| | | <i>I can only say: more of this. (E.g. first-order normative theories could use your input too.)</i> |
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Assessor 2: dr. B.R. Ferguson

Grade: 8,5

In short: the content and analysis is superb, but the presentation needs some work. More particularly:

- (i) I find the EA assumption odd--it is fair enough that he's writing for them, but EA is a prior normative commitment in a thesis on metanormativity, which is problematic. I don't see what would really be lost if he simply abandoned EA.
- (ii) The WAS position is wildly controversial and distracts from the main point. Why not use, e.g., vegetarianism? There's normative uncertainty there, indeed, most think Kantianism does not entail vegetarianism, while consequentialism seems to.
- (iii) The use of acronyms, signposting, and the clarity of the summaries of various positions are all problematic.

I mention these aspects only because it was otherwise a superb thesis. Its flaws are flaws of someone who isn't yet practiced enough to put their most elegant foot forward, so to speak. The good making features are obvious.