

Name: _____

Philosophy 1100: Introduction to Ethics

Exercise 6: The Technique of Counterexamples

Due Date: Recitation Section - Friday, October 12

Proportion of Final Grade: 5%

INSTRUCTIONS

1. This is one of the more difficult exercises, and if you would like to review the distinction between absolute moral claims, and *prima facie* ones, or the general idea of a counterexample, or other points related to the technique of counterexamples, you can find the lecture material that is relevant to this exercise on the web at the following address:

<http://spot.Colorado.EDU/~tooley/LectureforExercise6.html>

2. For each of the ten moral statements set out below, describe very briefly what you take to be the most effective counterexample – that is NOT a doomsday-style counterexample - to the moral claim that is being advanced.

3. In arriving at an effective counterexample to a given statement, it is crucial to ask whether the statement in question involves an absolute moral claim, or a *prima facie* moral claim, since good counterexamples to absolute moral claims are often not good counterexamples to *prima facie* moral claims.

4. In some cases, the moral principle in question may be one that you believe is true, and so you may think that there is in fact no sound counterexample to the principle. In such cases, set out what you take to be the best attempt at a good counterexample.

1. "To sterilize someone against his or her will could never be morally right."

2. "Every person has a moral right to encourage others to share his or her beliefs, regardless of whether he or she has evidence for those beliefs."

3. "Even if it turns out that suicide is not absolutely wrong, it is certainly, at the very least, always prima facie wrong."

4. "Though it may be wrong, for various reasons, to treat non-human animals in certain ways, only members of our own species, Homo sapiens, can possibly have any moral rights."

5. "People have a moral right only to what they have earned through their own efforts."

6. "Though it may be wrong, for various reasons, to kill non-human animals, such animals do not in themselves possess a right to life."

7. "No innocent human being should ever be compelled to do something that he or she doesn't want to do, simply because it is in that human being's own interest."

8. "Censorship in the case of adults is never morally justified."

9. "Parents have an absolute right to inculcate their own moral values in their children."

10. "It could never be morally right to disobey the commands of an omniscient and omnipotent being who had created the universe."
