

Name: _____

Philosophy 1100: Introduction to Ethics
Exercise 7: The Technique of Counterexamples

Due Date: Thursday, October 13

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/LogicLecture-4.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. "If something is morally wrong, then there ought to be a law against it."

2. "The intentional killing of an innocent human being is never morally justifiable."

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

4. "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."

5. "Everyone has an inalienable right to reproduce."

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

7. "Though it may be wrong, for various reasons, to kill non-human animals, there could never be a non-human animal that had a right to life comparable to that of a human being."

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

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

10. "It could never be morally right to disobey the commands of an all-knowing and all-powerful being who had created the universe."
