

PHILOSOPHY 1100 – INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS

POSSIBLE EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

As is indicated in the Final Exam Handout, the final examination will be divided into three sections, and you will be asked to answer a total of three questions, one from each section. The examination will contain at least 12 questions, with at least 4 questions from each of the three sections listed below. Finally, there will be at least one question from each of the topics listed.

SECTION 1: SEXUAL MORALITY, HOMOSEXUALITY, AND PORNOGRAPHY

Topic III: Sexual Morality

1. People embrace a number of quite different, and conflicting, general views on sexual morality. Some maintain that sex is only justified if the aim is reproduction. Others hold that sex is only justified if the purpose involves the expression of certain higher feelings, such as love. Others hold that whether sex is permissible depends upon the nature of the relationship. Still others hold that sex should be viewed as simply a form of recreation, and not as needing some deeper meaning or purpose.

Carefully set out the general position on sexual morality that seems to you to be correct. What reasons can you offer in support of that view? What are the most important objections to your position, and how would you respond to them?

2. What are the most important arguments that might be offered in support of the view that all sexual activity before marriage is morally wrong? Carefully set out those arguments, and then offer a critical evaluation of them, indicating why you think that they are, or are not, correct, and then considering objections to your own views.

3. "The first thing that needs to be said is that sex is fun. But unfortunately, that's not the last thing. For sex is also potentially very dangerous. And while it's true that the dangers would be minimal if people behaved responsibly, the fact is that a very large proportion of people - and especially young teenagers - are **not** going to behave responsibly. Therefore, while the idea that premarital sex is **wrong in itself** doesn't seem very plausible, the sad conclusion is that society must nevertheless strongly discourage people from engaging in sex outside of marriage, since if society does not do this, the **likely consequences** will be disastrous."

Is this a good argument or not? If you think that it is a good argument, set out what you take to be the strongest objection to it, and then indicate in detail how you would respond to that objection. If you think that it is not a good argument, carefully set out your objection (or objections) to the argument, and then consider how a defender of the argument might respond.

4. Is prostitution morally wrong? What are the most important arguments that might be offered in support of the view that it is? What are the most important arguments that might be offered against that view? Which position would you defend, and why? What is

the most important objection (or objections) to your own view, and how would you respond?

Topic IV: Homosexuality

1. Is homosexual sex morally wrong? If you think that it is not morally wrong, set out in a careful step-by-step argument the best reason that someone who disagreed with you might offer for the view that it is wrong, and then indicate why you think that argument is unsound. If, on the other hand, you think that homosexual sex is morally wrong, offer a careful step-by-step argument in support of that view, and then discuss what you take to be the most important objection to your argument.

2. "It is difficult to think about homosexuality in a dispassionate way, given the level of emotion on both sides. To clear the air, then, let us begin by setting aside the claim that homosexuality is an abomination - a claim that, whether it is true or not, makes any calm discussion of the issues very difficult. When that is done, there are surely a number of points that can be seen, upon reflection, to be very reasonable. Thus, for example, it is surely true that it is better to be a heterosexual, than to be a gay or a lesbian. Secondly, not only is a homosexual orientation inferior to a normal, heterosexual orientation, it is undesirable. If one's child were to become gay or lesbian, that would undoubtedly be a very sad outcome. Finally, and because it is undesirable, a homosexual orientation should be strongly discouraged, although this needs to be done in a sensitive way, given that it may turn out to be true, as some scientists have suggested, that there is, in some cases, a genetic predisposition towards homosexuality."

Discuss the view that is expressed in this passage. If you think that it is fundamentally sound, offer support, and defend it against important objections. If you disagree with all or part of it, indicate why, and consider objections to your own view.

Topic V: Pornography

1. What view would you defend concerning the moral status of pornography? Is the enjoyment of pornography morally wrong or not? After setting out your own view, and indicating why you think it is correct, discuss at least one important objection to your view.

2. "The enjoyment of pornography is morally wrong because pornography degrades women." What reasons might be offered in support of this claim, and what objections might be raised against it? What view would you defend, and why?

SECTION 2: SUICIDE AND EUTHANASIA

Topic VI: Suicide and Euthanasia

1. The following argument has been offered for the view that suicide is *prima facie* morally wrong:

(1) It is *prima facie* morally wrong to destroy something that belongs to someone else, unless that person has given one permission to do so.

(2) Our lives are not our own: they belong to God.

- (3) Therefore, to commit suicide is to destroy something that belongs to someone else.
- (4) God has not given humans permission to destroy themselves.
- (5) Therefore, it is *prima facie* wrong to commit suicide.

Is this a good argument or not? If you think that it is a good argument, set out what you take to be the strongest objection to it, and then indicate in detail how you would respond to that objection. If you think that it is not a good argument, carefully set out your objection (or objections) to the argument, and then consider how a defender of the argument might respond.

2. "Though it may be a foolish action, a person doesn't do anything morally wrong by committing suicide. But if it is not morally wrong to commit suicide, then neither can it be morally wrong to ask someone to assist one. Killing someone who asks to be killed is, however, morally on a par with assisting someone to commit suicide. Consequently, it cannot be morally wrong to kill someone who wants to be killed. Therefore, voluntary active euthanasia is not morally wrong."

Discuss the above argument in support of voluntary active euthanasia. Is the argument valid as it stands? If not, are there any missing or implicit premises that could be added, or made explicit, so that the argument would be valid? What about the argument's premises? Are there any controversial ones? If so, what can be said for and against them? What is your overall judgment on the soundness of the above argument? (Be sure to focus upon **the above argument**, and not just upon the general issue that it raises.)

3. What view does J. Gay-Williams defend on euthanasia in his article, and what argument does he offer in support of that view in the section entitled "1. The Argument from Nature"? Carefully set out, and then critically evaluate, that argument. If you think the argument is sound, defend it against an important objection. If you think it is not sound, set out your objection to it.

4. A number of writers - such as James Rachels - have contended that there is no intrinsic difference between intentionally killing and intentionally letting die. Set out what you take to be the most important argument (or arguments) for and/or against this contention, and critically evaluate that argument (or arguments) by carefully setting out and discussing at least one important objection to the argument (or arguments).

5. "Voluntary passive euthanasia is morally acceptable, but voluntary active euthanasia is morally wrong."

What reasons might be offered in support of this claim? What objection (or objections) might be advanced against it? What view would you defend, and why?

6 "Anencephalic infants do not have upper brains, but they are human beings, and they do have souls. As a consequence, they have a serious right to life, and it is therefore seriously wrong to kill such infants."

Is this a good argument or not? If you think that it is a good argument, set out what you take to be the strongest objection to it, and then indicate in detail how you would

respond to that objection. If you think that it is not a good argument, carefully set out your objection (or objections) to the argument, and then consider how a defender of the argument might respond.

SECTION 3. THE MORAL STATUS OF ANIMALS, HUMAN CLONING, AND ABORTION

Topic VII: Animal Rights

1. "Inflicting unnecessary pain upon any sentient being is always *prima facie* wrong. But it is only humans, and any intelligent extra-terrestrials that may happen to exist, and that possess the psychological capacities or potentialities that humans possess, that have a right to life. The painless killing of any non-human animals that one finds here on earth is, accordingly, morally permissible."

Discuss this view, either defending it against objections that might be raised, or showing why it is unsound.

2. In the selection from Peter Singer's book *Animal Liberation* that is contained in the *Applied Ethics* anthology, Singer sets out and defends a "basic principle of equality." What is that principle, and how does Singer argue in support of it? Does that principle of equality entail that all sentient beings have the same rights?

Is Singer's defense of that principle successful or not? Why or why not?

3. Set out, clearly and concisely, the basic argument that Tom Regan offers concerning the moral status of animals. How does Regan's approach differ from that of Peter Singer? Is Regan's argument sound or not? If you think that it is unsound, indicate why that is so. If you think that Regan's argument is sound, defend it against an important objection.

4. What properties do you think are **sufficient** to give an entity a right to life? After briefly outlining the most important alternative answers that might be given to this question, indicate at least one answer that you think is correct, and why, and then defending your answer against possible objections.

Topic VIII: Human Cloning

1. Set out an argument that you think is sound, either for the view that the cloning of human beings should not be allowed, or else for the opposing view that it should be allowed. Defend your view against at least one important objection.

2. "When cloning is done to produce spare body parts, one can object to it on the grounds that it destroys a human embryo, and therefore that it is wrong if abortion is wrong. But when the purpose of cloning is to produce a living person who is genetically the same as another person, it is not really morally problematic in any way."

Discuss the view expressed in the above passage. What reasons might be offered for thinking that cloning that is done with the purpose of producing a living person is morally problematic? Of those reasons, which reason (or reasons) do you think is the strongest? Do you think that any of those reasons shows that such cloning is morally

wrong or not? What objection might be directed against your view, and how would you reply?

Topic IX: Abortion

1. Many people maintain that both an extreme pro-choice position on abortion and an extreme pro-life position must be mistaken, and they advocate some sort of moderate view. Carefully set out the moderate position that strikes you as the most plausible, and then critically evaluate that position. If it seems to you sound, defend it against some important objections. If it seems to you unsound, explain clearly what is wrong with it.
2. "Abortion is always in itself very seriously wrong, because it is the killing of an innocent member of our own species."

After expanding this capsule argument into a more explicit argument, critically evaluate the argument. If it seems to you sound, defend it against the most important objection (or objections). If it seems to you unsound, explain clearly what is wrong with it.

3. What do you think is one of the more promising arguments that can be offered in defense of the view that abortion is always morally wrong in itself? After carefully setting out that argument, outline a worthwhile objection to that argument. Can that objection be sustained, or does the defender of the argument have a satisfactory reply to the objection?
4. "Though rape is certainly seriously wrong, that fact does not make it right to have an abortion. For if a woman who has become pregnant because of rape chooses to have an abortion, what she is doing then is punishing an innocent party - namely, the unborn baby. Accordingly, if abortion should not be allowed in other cases, then neither should it be allowed in the case of rape."

Discuss this argument. What is the most important objection to it? Does the argument succeed in showing that if an anti-abortion view is correct in cases where pregnancy is not due to rape, then no exception should be made in the case where pregnancy has resulted from rape?

5. Some philosophers have offered the following argument against abortion:
 - (1) Almost all human embryos and fetuses are potential persons - that is, entities that have the potential for acquiring the capacities for thought and self-consciousness if they are not destroyed.
 - (2) Being a potential person gives one a serious right to life.

Therefore

- (3) Abortion is almost always wrong

In response, Mary Anne Warren argued that if potentialities gave something a right to life, then every cell in a human being's body would have a right to life, since cloning is in principle possible, which shows that every cell is a potential person.

Is Mary Anne Warren's response to the above potentiality argument a good response or not? If you think that it is a good response, set out what you take to be the

strongest objection to it, and then indicate in detail how you would respond to that objection. If you think that it is not a good response, carefully set out your objection to her response, and then consider how a defender of the Mary Anne Warren's argument might respond.

6. Carefully set out, and then critically evaluate, **both** the best argument in support of the claim that the potentiality for thought and self-consciousness gives an entity a serious right to life, **and** the best argument against that claim. If you think an argument is sound, defend it against a crucial objection. If you think an argument is unsound, carefully set out your objection to the argument.

7. Set out, and then carefully evaluate, **either** the strongest argument in support of the view that potentialities suffice to endow human fetuses with a serious right to life, **or** the strongest argument against that view. If you think the argument is sound, defend it against a crucial objection. If you think the argument is unsound, carefully set out your objection to the argument.

8. What can be said for and against the claim that the following is a **correct, basic** moral principle: "Every innocent organism belonging to our own, biologically defined species, *Homo sapiens*, possesses a serious right to life"? Is the claim correct, or not? Carefully defend your view against objections.

9. Is abortion morally wrong? What are the most important arguments that might be offered in support of the view that it is? What are the most important arguments that might be offered against that view? Which position would you defend, and why? What is the most important objection (or objections) to your own view, and how would you respond?

10. Defenders of the view that abortion is always (at least prima facie) seriously wrong offer different grounds for thinking that it is prima facie seriously wrong to kill any innocent member of our species. Four of the more important reasons offered are as follows:

(a) Being an innocent **member of the biologically defined species *Homo sapiens*** is in itself sufficient to endow something a right to life.

(b) All human beings, from the moment of conception, have **immaterial, rational souls**, and any innocent being with a rational soul has a right to life.

(c) All human beings, from the moment of conception, have **the capacities for consciousness, thought, and self-consciousness**, and any innocent being with those capacities has a right to life.

(d) All human beings, from the moment of conception, have **the potential** of acquiring the capacities for consciousness, thought, and self-consciousness, and any innocent being with those potentialities has a right to life.

(1) Which of the above four answers do you think is the most promising?

(2) For each of the other three answers, describe briefly one reason for thinking that that answer is problematic.

(3) In the case of the answer that you think is the most promising, set out and discuss one important objection to it.