

# **Take Home Final: Biomedical Ethics**

## **Guidelines**

- You are responsible for reading and following these guidelines!
- Exams are due by midnight on the 16th of December, 2004.
- Exams can be submitted in the following formats: the text of an email, Microsoft Word format (.doc), OpenOffice format (.swx), PDF (.pdf), or the plaintext format (.txt).
- You are responsible for ensuring that you are able to send me an exam in one of the accepted formats. If you're concerned about this, you're welcome to send me something as a test. Do this ahead of time if you're going to do it.
- Late exams will be penalized a third of a letter grade for every day that they are late. Only a valid and documented medical excuse will be accepted for a late exam.
- When I receive your exam, I will reply with an email letting you know that I received it and was able to open the attachment. Keep my response. It is your proof that I received your exam. If I don't respond within a day, try again.
- You may discuss your exam with other students in the class, but you must ensure that all work submitted is your own original work. If you do study with other students in the class, you should make sure that your answers on the exam don't resemble each other's too closely. Feel free to notify me of any possible concerns you might have about this.
- If you have any questions about the exam, please feel free to email me. I will try to post all my responses on the class website, so also be sure to monitor it in case I post anything of use to you.
- Please, please, please cite the authors you are discussing when you make claims about their views. Think of this as a form of intellectual self-defense. I'll be better able to follow your point, and to see that you're right, if I can check references when our interpretations of the course readings differ. Nothing fancy is required here. Just make sure I can find it. E.g., "Blah, blah, blah, and as Peter Singer says, there is absolutely no blah, blah, blah required for blah, blah, blah (Singer, p. 67)." No bibliography is necessary.
- To prepare for the exam, I would do the following:
  - a) pick your questions;
  - b) read carefully through the relevant texts (more than once), making notes. Remember to record page references when you're making notes so that it's easier for you to cite the material when you actually write your answers;
  - c) organize the material in the way that seems best;
  - d) then, and only then, begin to write.
- Think of the exam as an opportunity to show off how much you've learned over the course of the

semester. When you're answering a question, think of how best to demonstrate a mastery of the course material. Please remember my joke about the dog. When it comes to demonstrating that you understand a point consider yourself guilty until proven innocent. I will always assume that you **don't** understand the point you're trying to explain, and your job is to convince me that I'm wrong about that.

- Your answers can be as long as you like, but please don't repeat yourself. Each answer should be 3 or 4 pages in length, double-spaced, regular sized margins.

## The Questions

Answer **2** of the following 5 questions.

1. In Thomson's paper "A defense of Abortion," she argues for the view that consensual sex does not constitute tacit consent to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term. Both Warren and Singer comment on Thomson's argument - Warren to dispute it, and Singer to express qualified support for it. We also discussed this issue at length in class.

Explain the views of these three authors on this issue. What do they believe? And, just as important, *why* do they take the various positions they do? What is your own view on this question? And, more important, *why* do you think your own view is correct? Can you think of a convincing thought experiment of your own, or a decent argument, or a plausible parallel that might help persuade someone that your view is correct?

2. One of the themes of our course has been the moral relevance of the distinction between doing and allowing. Discuss this issue in connection with the issue of euthanasia in the texts we've read over the course of the semester.

You'll want to look at Dworkin, Frey and Bok's book, at Peter Singer's various discussions of the issue, and at the Philosopher's Brief. You will probably also find Kagan's discussion of the distinction useful as well.

Explain what each of these authors thinks about the moral relevance of the distinction between doing and allowing as it pertains to euthanasia. Why do they take the positions they take on these issues? What do you think? Why? (Don't just tell me what your view is. Give me good reasons for accepting it.)

3. Peter Singer discusses the difference between the total and prior existence versions of utilitarianism in both his discussion of euthanasia and his discussion of animal testing. Singer is aware that there is a tension in his views about these two versions of utilitarianism: In his discussion of euthanasia he is attracted to the total version; in his discussion of animal testing, to the prior existence version. And he describes how he's changed his own opinion since the first edition of his book.

Explain what the difference is between these versions of utilitarianism. What difference does it make in discussions of euthanasia and animal testing? What is the tension in Singer's views on the two versions of utilitarianism? How does he resolve this tension? Which version of utilitarianism do you find most plausible? Why?

4. We spent a lot of time in class discussing various slippery slope arguments, especially as they come up in the debate about euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. What is a slippery slope argument? How do each of the authors we've read handle slippery slope arguments in the debate about euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide? Do you find any of the various slippery slope arguments discussed plausible? If so, why? If not, why not? Have the authors we've read missed anything?

5. Both the issue of abortion and the issue of animal testing put pressure on the criteria we use to determine whether a being of a given sort is morally entitled to certain kinds of protection. Recall that Warren sets out a series of criteria by which to determine whether a being of a given sort is a person. Against philosophers like Noonan, Warren argues that what matters is not the biological category of "human," but rather the possession of certain characteristics. Singer takes an approach which is in some respects similar, arguing that biological humanity is irrelevant, and supplies his own list of characteristics, in virtue of which a being of a given sort has interests (and so is entitled to have them taken into consideration).

But spelling out these criteria can lead to some rather sticky questions. One serious question for both Warren and Singer is whether their views can adequately account for the fairly common intuition that infanticide is morally wrong. (On this question, Warren seems ambivalent, and Singer (typically) goes ahead and merrily bites the bullet.) But if we insist on a less restrictive set of characteristics, we seem to be led to the conclusion that certain animals have far more right to have their interests taken into account than our current practices (eating meat; medical research) allow.

How do Warren and Singer deal with these questions? What are the differences and similarities in their approaches? How *should* they deal with these questions? Do they have the right criteria? Or can you do better? Do they apply the criteria properly in the various moral issues they discuss? (Warren mostly focuses on abortion, of course, though she does mention a few of the other problems. Singer's views on abortion, euthanasia and animal testing are all relevant here.)