

Reading Questions for January 20th

These questions cover parts of two different texts. The first is an encyclopedia article titled “Ethics” – this is by James Fieser. The second is a book chapter by Alan Wertheimer titled “Liberty, Coercion, and the Limits of the State.” The answers do not have to be turned in and you only have to read enough of the text to answer the questions. You will probably have to read more than once to get the answers.

*Background:*

In the first two weeks of this course, we are going to do a couple of different things. One of these is to briefly survey the field of ethics as a whole. The second is to discuss the question: should you be allowed to do what you want, so long as it doesn’t harm anyone? Today we’ll start on both of these projects.

*Questions:*

1. *Note: to answer this question, you only need to look at the introduction to Fieser’s article (by the “introduction” I mean the part before the table of contents).* How does Fieser define “ethics”? What are some examples of topics in ethics?
2. *Note: on pages 38-41 Wertheimer introduces a bunch of examples that he references by name later on, so you might want to skim those.* On pages 44-5, Wertheimer discusses the harm principle, which says that the state is justified in limiting A’s liberty, to prevent A from harming others. In discussing the principle, Wertheimer raises the question: what is harm to *others*? What issues does he raise related to this? What do you think about the issues he raises? Why?
3. On page 45, in the paragraph starting “What is *harm* to others”, Wertheimer raises a first issue connected with the question: what is *harm* to others? What is this issue and what do you think about it? Why?