

Reading Questions for January 27th

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.” There are also some optional readings that will help you with the second reading question. 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 doing 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 finish both of these projects.

Questions:

1. In his third section, Fieser discusses applied ethics. How does Fieser define “applied ethics”? What are some examples of questions from applied ethics? Which questions in applied ethics interest you the most?
Note: for this question, you should try to get the main ideas, but it’s fine to skim a bit and you don’t have to know every little detail.
2. Today is the last day we’re reading that encyclopedia article on ethics, and so it’s time to start picking topics for class. So I’d like you to pick one or two topics that you’re interested in exploring. These topics can come from the encyclopedia article we read. They can also come from the various optional readings for today. (Some of the optional readings are simply links to descriptions of books; if you click on the table of contents (and make sure to expand it), you can see some suggestions of issues.) Or they can come from questions you yourself already have. (If you’re not sure if a question counts as an ethical one, let me know!)

3. On page 43, Wertheimer raises some other principles besides the harm principle. This starts in the middle of the large paragraph, with “The Offense Principle ...”. What are these other principles? Do you think any of them are plausible? Why? If you do find some of them plausible, does this show that it’s ok to interfere with someone even if they’re not harming others?