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Moral Problems

Reading Questions for March 16

These questions cover excerpts from a book by David Boonin called *Should Race Matter? Unusual Answers to the Usual Questions.* The answers do not have to be turned in. You will probably have to read more than once to get the answers. The reading is sort of long, but we're reading it over two days and you only have to look at some of the sections.

Background:

> We are now looking at debates regarding racial profiling. Because our class tended to agree that racial profiling is not morally acceptable (almost everyone said this, with the remaining few undecided), I thought it would be helpful to look at some arguments challenging this claim. So we are going to spend Monday and Wednesday examining arguments by Boonin that racial profiling is both rationally acceptable and morally acceptable. In the context of arguing that it is morally acceptable, he surveys a number of arguments, so his piece should be helpful in laying out the terrain, even if you do not ultimately agree with his arguments. In today's section, we are going to look at his argument that racial profiling is rationally acceptable and the very beginning of his argument that racial profiling is morally acceptable. On Wednesday, we'll be continuing to look at his argument that it is morally acceptable.

Questions:

1. In the opening section and the section titled "What Racial Profiling is, and What It Isn't?" (3-8) Boonin makes some points about what he means by "racial profiling" and addresses some potential problems with the way he understands it. What does he mean by the term? What are some potential problems and how does he address them? Is what he has to say in response to the problems plausible?

2. In the section titled "Why Racial Profiling Seems to be Rational" (9-10) Boonin argues that racial profiling is rational. He starts by making a distinction between rationality and morality. What is the distinction? He next offers the "rationality argument." What is this argument?

3. In the section titled "Groups Versus Individuals" (10-13) Boonin considers an objection to the rationality argument and responds to it. What is the objection? What is his response? Is his response plausible?

4. Starting with the section titled "The Elasticity Argument" and continuing to the end of the chapter (17-22), Boonin responds to two more objections, one to do with "elasticity' and one to do with minimizing mistakes. He goes into a fair bit of detail, but you can probably grasp the key points just by reading little bits and skimming the rest. What are the two objections and what are his responses? Are they plausible?

5. What does Boonin try to do in his section titled "Why Rational Racial Profiling Seems to be Morally Acceptable" (23-4) ? Is he successful?