

Philosophy 101 — Five Extra-Credit Problems

04/28/11 (due 5/12/11)

Here are five passages for reconstruction. If you complete (satisfactory) reconstructions of *any* of these five passages, then you will get (*some*) extra-credit. The *total* amount of extra-credit you can get (by giving good reconstructions of *all* 5 of these) is (roughly) equal to one homework assignment. [Note: the last two of these extra-credit problems were distributed before (we HW #6). If you already turned-in solutions to those, you can turn-in new ones now, but your new answers will *supersede* your old ones.]

1. Before anyone gets set-righteous with me and starts pontificating that people who wear furs are not socially responsible, they had better look at all the “socially responsible” choices they are making. For instance, they’d better be wearing no synthetic fibers, because chemicals used to process fibers pollute the atmosphere. And they better be wearing no cotton because it depletes the soil and requires tons of pesticide. And, they had better not own any gold or diamonds because 90% of that stuff comes from South Africa.¹ They’d better wear no leather, use no soap, and wear no silk. Of course, they can’t eat meat, chicken, or fish. So, next winter, if you want to give me a hard time about wearing my fur coat (which I will probably be wearing for 15 years), I promise to be a good listener. But, only if you are dining on roots and wearing something extremely attractive in hemp.
2. It seems to me that the controversy over the rights of smokers *vs.* those of non-smokers is very readily resolved. One need only look to the libertarian viewpoint for the solution: each person has the right to behave in any manner he wishes, so long as his actions do not infringe upon another person’s equal right. Let’s apply the logic to smoking in airplanes (it will also apply in any other circumstance). By paying for a ticket, the individual has purchased the right to act in any manner he chooses, so long as his actions do not infringe upon the rights of those around him. He can read, he can play cards, he can do anything which can be confined to his own “airspace.” He may not stretch himself across two seats; he may not play a trumpet; he may not set off sticks of dynamite. All of these actions infringe upon the rights of those occupying the surrounding space. Smoking falls into this latter category. He may smoke if he wishes, just as long as the smoke is confined to his own “airspace.” As soon as it drifts into the space of other passengers, he is violating their rights.
3. Repeatedly, we have heard President Bush (senior) condemn abortion except in those instances when pregnancies have resulted from rape or incest. To this point, I ask: if abortion is ever murder, then isn’t it always so? To maintain that the destruction of a human fetus is a criminal act in one breath, yet permissible under the circumstances of rape or incest in the next breath, is not logically or morally defensible. If the right to exist is a right that dawns at the moment of conception, every fetus is deserving of this right. If a fetus is an innocent victim when aborted during a pregnancy that arose from “ordinary circumstances,” is it any less innocent if conceived during rape or incest? Apparently, President Bush, and those who share his view, believe the unborn’s inviolable right to life is not inviolable after all. What else explains why some would not be privy to it? With this in mind, one cannot help wonder what basic principle stands behind such a belief. If there is an ideal

¹ This was written in the 1980’s, when *Apartheid* was still in force.

supporting this position, I cannot identify it. It simply represents unsound thinking. Perhaps if those who hold with this empty principle of exceptions were shown its intrinsic fallaciousness, they would be forced to rethink their position. They thus might see that abortion is an issue with no middle ground. There are two sides and between only a dark chasm. Were this issue more frequently painted in its two proper colors, black and white, I believe that a majority of Americans would side with the woman and her right to choose. To most, the “injustice” of a Government forcing the victims of rape and incest to deliver offspring of their assailants would be far less tolerable than the “injustice” of abortion.

4. Cigarette consumption could be easily reduced by simply outlawing tailormade cigarettes. The manufacture of tailor-made cigarettes to American standards is a high-tech industry. It cannot be done in small illicit labs like the processing of PCP, cocaine or heroin. The availability of quality tobacco for hand-rolling would discourage the development of an illegal tailor-made market. Most people would not pay the premium prices demanded by an illicit market for a product of unknown quality. They could roll a highquality product for themselves. Truly addicted persons would continue to smoke no matter how inconvenient. But most would give it up as too much bother before it became a deeply ingrained habit.

5. Boxing is the only sport whose main purpose is to render the opponent unconscious. Indeed it is the only sport in which each player is licensed to injure the other. It must then be the most dangerous of all sports. Various solutions to this problem have been proposed – such as the use of head-guards and changing the gloves – but none of these would solve the problem of the danger of serious injury. So boxing should be banned.