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24.06J / STS.006J Bioethics
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Recitation 02: Killing *vs.* Letting Die

1. Administrivia

Introductions (again).

Presentation sign up: short (~ 6 minute) talk on a focused topic (possibly connected to a paper you write).

Papers: first topics are out; I have some recommended reading (see separate handout).

2. Philosophical arguments: a review

An argument is *valid* if and only if it is impossible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false.

An argument is *sound* if and only if (a) it is valid, and (b) it has true premises.

Examples.

3. Killing and letting die

The Difference Thesis (DT): there is a morally relevant difference between killing and letting die—the former is always worse than the latter.

- Rachels: DT is false.
- Nesbitt: DT is true (and Rachels's example fails to show it is false).
- Kuhse: Rachels fails to show that DT is false; Nesbitt fails to show that DT is true.

These are their conclusions. What are their arguments? Are they valid? Sound? Persuasive?

4. An argument for active euthanasia (from lecture)

Consider a patient whose future holds unbearable pain with no chance of recovery:

P1. My patient is better off if I kill him now.

P2. Nobody is worse off if I kill him now.

P3. An action that makes someone better off and nobody worse off is not wrong.

C. It is not wrong to kill my patient now.

Do you accept the conclusion of this argument? If not, what premise do you reject and why?

24.06/STS.006 - Bioethics
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Some Resources for Reading and Writing About Philosophy

Online:

“The Pink Guide to Taking Philosophy Classes” (by Helena de Bres, MIT alumna)
<http://web.mit.edu/philos/www/guides/pinkguide.pdf>

“Some Rules of Thumb for Writing Philosophy Papers (by Josh Cohen, formerly of MIT)
http://web.mit.edu/philos/www/guides/cohen_somerulesofthumb.pdf

“Guidelines on Reading Philosophy” (by Jim Pryor, NYU)
<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

“Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper” (by Jim Pryor, NYU)
<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Print:

Bedau, Hugo. *Thinking and Writing About Philosophy*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002.

Martinich, A.P. *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2005.

Seech, Zachary. *Writing Philosophy Papers*. Wadsworth, 2008.

Woodhouse, Mark B. *A Preface to Philosophy*. Wadsworth, 2003.