

Appendix

Moral Arguments or Making Moral Decisions

The notorious saying of Oscar Wilde is most appropriate.

I dislike arguments of any kind. They always are vulgar, and often convincing.

The purpose of a moral argument is to reach a moral conclusion or decision concerning a factual occurrence by weighing it against a moral principle. It is by necessity that conclusions to any valid moral argument will be supported by at least two types of premises, at least one empirical premise and at least one normative premise. The empirical premise is a claim about the world, which is a descriptive, verifiable, and possibly contingent fact. The following would be empirical claims:

- The earth is about 4.5 billion years old.
- The human population has reached 5.6 billion worldwide and continues to expand by 200 million every year.
- Cancer is more prevalent today because of the greater prevalence of cancer causing chemicals in our environment.
- Pre-teen aged children living in the United States spend an average of six hours per day in front of a television and ten minutes per week at church.

To be empirical, a claim need not be true, it need only be factual. However, an untrue empirical claim can lead to erroneous moral judgments.

A normative (or evaluative) claim is one that is primarily about what ought or ought not to be done or to have been done. Thus, they are non-quantifiable and hinge upon moral principles. Much like an empirical statement that can be either true or false, normative statements can be understood to be either applicable or inapplicable. Each of the following is normative statement:

- Beethoven's fifth Symphony is delightful.
- Groucho Marx was so funny.
- As consumers we should refuse to use any product that contains CFC's.
- It is wrong to eliminate the only remaining habitat of an endangered species.
- Aunt Mary is much prettier now that the swelling has subsided from her face-lift.
- All white males should be exterminated.
- Corporate rights should supercede the rights of the individual.

David Hume, the 18th century Scottish philosopher, established numerous rules upon which the moral argument is founded. Most important, David Hume declared that no moral conclusion validly follows from a set of purely empirical premises. Thus, to make a moral business decision our decisions cannot be based completely upon the scientific and empirical. Consider the following premise and conclusion:

1. Unless the current rate of expansion of the world population is curtailed by an effective population control policy the world population will exceed the earth's carrying capacity before the year 2020 and 90% of all the people of less developed countries will die from starvation and disease.

Conclusion: People of today should adopt a worldwide population control policy.

The above moral argument is not valid. The conclusion is merely inferred from the empirical premise (1). The argument lacks a normative premise and without it no valid moral conclusion can be reached. To attain the same conclusion the argument should read:

1. Unless the current rate of expansion of the world population is curtailed by an effective population control policy the world population will exceed the earth's carrying capacity before the year 2020 and 90% of all the people of less developed countries will die from starvation and disease.

2. People of today ought not permit the death by starvation and disease of the majority of people of lesser-developed countries.

Conclusion: People of today should adopt a worldwide population control policy.

Despite the fact that the above argument is valid, not every one agrees with the conclusion that the human population should be limited. Upon analysis, whenever there are disagreements between people over the conclusion of a moral argument it must be due to differences in acceptance of either the normative or empirical premise. In many cases when we debate such moral dilemmas, the controversy seems to run in circles and is forever elusive. Such moral controversies arise out of different views of the moral premise; in that, the moral principle may not be equally belief-worthy to everyone involved. In the above moral argument the objection of premise 2 would be that "we must first be concerned with the people of our own country, state, city and family. People of the lesser developed countries will have to regulate themselves just as the people of every other country must do." Such moral disagreements are due to personal differences which are deep seated by cultural and religious differences and cannot be easily changed.

Moral controversies can also arise out of disagreements over the empirical premise. Because the empirical premise is factual and verifiable, such disagreements often can be resolved systematically, either logically or scientifically. It maybe proved that the current rate of population growth will not soon approach the carrying capacity of the earth due to a number of factors such as new technologies may further increase agricultural productivity. One of the major obstacles to economic development is an economical source of energy which may substitute for dwindling stores of fossil fuels. More recently there has been the development of solar powered hydrolytic systems that generate hydrogen and oxygen gases from water. These gases, in turn, can be used to propel the combustion engine.

One of the best examples of the resolution of moral argument over the clarification of the empirical claim arose during the 1980's as the AIDS epidemic seemed to be exploding beyond our means of control. People were responding out of fear of their

own ignorance. Initially, it was thought that HIV infection was acquired only through homosexual contact. Shortly thereafter, the relationship was expanded to include blood transfusions, and the use of drugs and unclean hypodermic needles. When incidences of HIV infection were linked to heterosexual activity, questions of casual contact led to the claim that all AIDS patients ought to be removed from society, and if need be, they should be incarcerated. The moral argument could be stated as follows:

1. People with AIDS can infect other people with their fatal viral disease by blood transfusions, sexual contact and casual physical contact.

2. It is wrong to permit people with fatal consequences to remain as a part of society and they should be incarcerated.

Conclusion: People with AIDS should be removed from society and if need be incarcerated.

This disagreement of the 1980's scare was solved by the recognition that the HIV agent is not communicable through casual contact. The empirical statement above is not true even though the argument is logically valid. Scientifically, it has been proven that HIV must be transmitted in bodily fluids (blood, serum, or semen) which reinfects only after gaining direct access to another's blood. There should be no fear of personal contact with people that harbor HIV. Furthermore, AIDS patients should not be removed from society based upon these grounds.

Detecting Fallacious Moral Arguments

In professional dealings you will invariably come across statements and arguments with moral implications. The science of philosophical logic helps us to detect these fallacies. It is important to recognize the major fallacious arguments, as well as, to avoid these ideas as we develop our personal and professional ethic. Furthermore, to understand why an argument is fallacious will help you understand the nature of good reasoning. Familiarize yourself with each of the following types of fallacies. (1) If you see that they are ever used, it will invalidate the normative premise of a moral argument.

Subjective Fallacies are committed whenever we hold that something is true merely because we believe or want it to be true. When a subjective fallacy is committed it assumes that this view is infallible without prejudices or biases. Consider the following statement:

I don't buy into this ozone hole and ultraviolet light stuff. At the absolute worst, more ultraviolet light will give us better body tans. I don't even think that ultraviolet light causes cancer.

The Appeal to the Majority uses the subjective proof that whatever the majority believes to be true is true. This view assumes that the opinion of the majority is infallible.

Consider the statement:

Every other progressive nation has already adopted a program of government provided health care, so to should the United States.

In the Appeal to Emotions, the argument instills of such feelings as outrage, fear, pity or guilt in order to bias the argument. One should suspect an appeal to emotions whenever rhetoric seems to be replacing logic. Consider the following appeal.

The chances for a nuclear holocaust increases with every new missile. As I stare at the button, I see our children skinned alive by a flash of fire, San Francisco a mass of twisted steel; I hear the dying groan as their arteries burst. Then, the victors march in; thousands of rats and an army of cockroaches.

The Appeal to Force persuades by means of threats and unfair treatment. The validity of such arguments is reasoned through a fist, a club, a gun, or even a grade in a college course.

Teacher to student: "... and finally, in reconsidering your position, you might remember who gives the grades in this course."

The Appeal to Authority is fallacious when the authorities supporting your argument are not credible or not objective. Mark Furhman of the O.J. Simpson trial lost his credibility to the jury as an investigating police officer and witness to the material evidence. Much of his testimony lost its validity once his perjury was disclosed. We see appeals to authority whenever television advertisers endorse orange juice with a basketball celebrity.

Ad Hominem is the fallacious argument which attacks the person of the counter argument rather than the argument, itself. We often fall prey to such fallacies, especially during the election years. Consider the following examples

Bill Clinton's health care plan must be defeated because his extramarital affairs proves that he can't be trusted.

Patient to doctor: ..." You have no right to tell me to loose weight and get my blood pressure down while you are every bit as fat as I am."

The best candidate for President of the United States is Steve Forbes because he is already rich while every one else is doing it for the money.

Circular Arguments do not reach a logical conclusion based upon the premises. They often are no more than restatements of the premise, as in the following example:

Society has an obligation to support the needy, because people who cannot provide for themselves have a right to the resources of the community.

Circular arguments may occur whenever the premises merely lead to each other, as in the following:

I believe that God exists because the Bible says so. The Bible is trustworthy because it is the Word of God.

This argument assumes the existence of God, which is not supported by the argument.