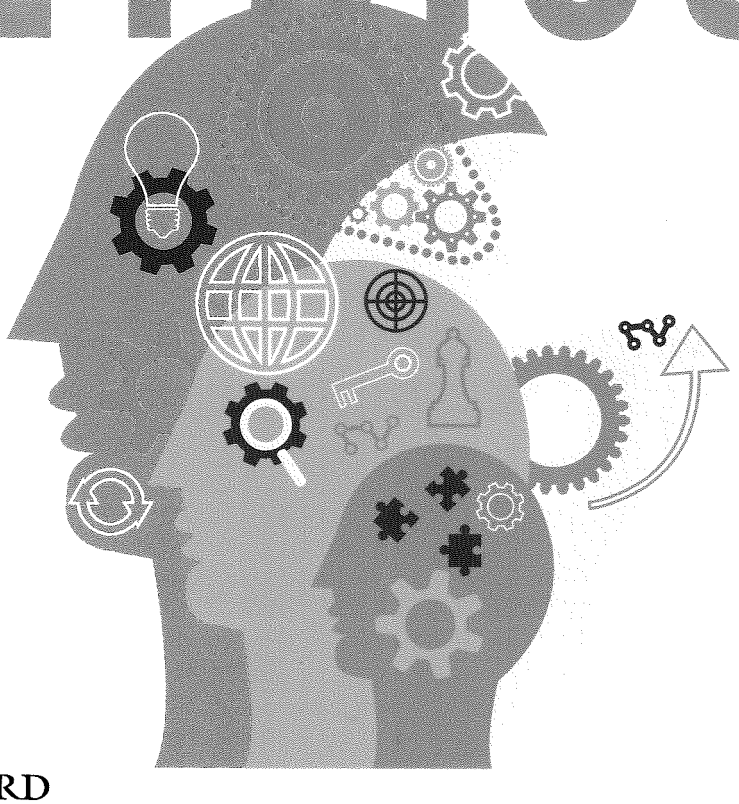
Ian Stoner Jason Swartwood

DOING PRACTICAL ETHICS



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Doing Practical Ethics

A Skills-Based Approach to Moral Reasoning

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PREFACE

None of us has only true beliefs. No matter where we were born, how we were raised, or what we have learned, none of us is infallible. We all *know* that some of our beliefs—about chemistry, astronomy, psychology, history, politics, religion, ethics, etc.—must be false; the challenge is that we don't know which beliefs are true and which are beliefs we should revise or abandon.

We wrote this book to help you meet this challenge when it comes to your beliefs about questions of practical ethics. Our goal is neither to advocate for a particular ethical view nor to describe common professional or legal standards for behavior. Instead, we hope to help you develop several of the critical thinking skills and techniques philosophers use to refine their own moral beliefs and to productively discuss moral controversies with others.

You'll practice these skills using many arguments on a variety of topics. Some of these practice arguments are good and some are not. Some argue for conclusions you endorse and others for conclusions you reject. The goal, throughout, is to use this material to practice techniques for understanding, evaluating, and articulating ethical arguments in a clear and careful way.

We know from experience that some students enjoy debating ethical controversies and others dread it. We are excited to share these techniques with all of you. Those of you who dread ethical debate will find these philosophical techniques can make moral disagreement more illuminating and less painful. Those of you who thrive on disagreement will find these techniques improve the quality of your debates. We believe you will find the experience of doing practical ethics rewarding, even empowering; we hope you will find it fun.

INTRODUCTION

How and Why to Use *Doing Practical Ethics*

If people want to raise a mahogany tree from a sapling that could fit in your hands, they know how to care for it. But when it comes to their own selves, they do not know how to care for them. Could it be that they do not love their own selves as much as they love a mahogany tree? It is simply because they do not reflect upon it.

—MENGZI, *MENGZI* 6A13

Philosophers typically divide ethical questions into three areas of study.

Meta-ethics concerns the meanings of moral terms and judgements. For example: what are we doing when we say, "What he did was morally wrong"? Are we expressing disapproval of his action? Are we making a factual claim about it? Are we commanding others not to do that type of thing?

Normative ethics (sometimes called ethical theory) concerns the general justification of our moral judgements. For example: what feature do all right actions share that makes them right actions? Is it that they promote the best consequences? Or that they are characteristic of virtuous people? Or that they treat people with respect?

Practical ethics (sometimes called applied ethics) concerns specific real-world ethical controversies. For example: is euthanasia morally permissible? Do corporations have moral obligations to people other than their shareholders? Is it wrong to farm animals for meat? What are our obligations to people living in extreme poverty? Under what circumstances is civil disobedience morally permissible?

This book is intended to help you participate in philosophical debates about real-world ethical controversies; it is designed to help you learn to *do* practical ethics.

HOW THE BOOK CAN HELP

When you pick up your first assigned article on a topic in practical ethics, you can be confident of two things. First, it is an article your instructor judges to be an important contribution to an ongoing conversation about an ethical

controversy. Second, it will contain an argument written by a philosopher who has a great deal of experience arguing with other philosophers.

Your first glimpses of these philosophical conversations are likely to be . . . confusing. Part of the challenge is that philosophers use techniques and argument forms they've mastered after years of practice. When you listen in on a philosophical conversation as a newcomer, not yet familiar with their methods, the conversation can be difficult to follow.

This book will introduce you to several of the techniques and argument forms used in the articles you will read in your practical ethics class. Developing these skills will allow you to respond more effectively to those articles: to better understand them, to critically evaluate them, to decide if you should be persuaded by them.

The methods philosophers use will be helpful to you outside the classroom, too. At some point, we all face ethical decisions in our personal lives, in our communities, and in our places of work. As citizens of democracies, we are all called on to participate in crafting public policies that have moral ramifications. It is never easy to reflect deeply about the ethical questions that matter most to us, but the methods introduced here will make it a little bit easier.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

Martial arts such as Tae Kwon Do are complex skills made up of many integrated component skills. Students of Tae Kwon Do do not begin their studies by fighting. They begin, instead, by practicing component skills: balancing, breathing, specific kicks and strikes, and so on. Only after they have mastered basic component skills can students begin to integrate them into the complex skill of Tae Kwon Do.

Philosophizing about practical ethics is also a complex skill made up of many integrated component skills. Each chapter of this book identifies, explains, and invites practice of a particular component skill. As you read the articles and complete the tasks your instructors assign, you will begin to integrate these component skills into the complex skill of philosophizing well about practical ethics.

Each chapter is divided into three main sections.

Introductory Explanation. Chapters begin with our explanation of the component skill, illustrated with examples of that skill in action. These sections are relatively short, and you might need to read portions of them more than once. When you are confident that you understand the examples, move on to the next section.

Demonstration Exercises. Explanations alone are never sufficient for skill-building; you must attempt to *use* a skill in order to develop it. Imagine trying to learn to ride a bicycle by reading an explanation of how to ride. No matter how clear the explanation, you do not begin to develop bike-riding skill until you climb on a bike and attempt it.

Demonstration exercises are practice problems that come with solutions. They are the beating heart of each chapter, for this is where you begin to develop skill through practice attempts. Demonstration exercises are most effective as learning tools if you approach them in several steps.

1. Write up your attempt at answers for *all* the demonstration exercises in the chapter.
2. Once you think you've got all of them right, then check your answer to the *first* demonstration exercise. Resist the urge to peek ahead. If you got the first one right, then check your answer to the second. If you got the second one right, check your answer to the third, and so on.
3. When you find an answer you got wrong, review the relevant Introductory Explanation portions of the chapter. Re-read the examples and work until you understand *why* you got the answer wrong. When you've figured it out, review and if necessary revise your answers to the remaining demonstration exercises. *Return to step two.*
4. When you consistently and confidently complete the demonstration exercises correctly, you are ready to take on Practice Exercises.

Practice Exercises: Practice exercises are your opportunity to further hone your skill. Your instructors may assign these as in-class activities or homework and might give you feedback on your performance. If not, practice exercises can be used effectively by study groups. If you and a few classmates work problems and compare answers, you will almost always be able to check your own work.

Our final recommendation to get the most not just from this book, but from every aspect of your practical ethics class: every step of the way, work with your peers. Take every opportunity to talk through examples, to offer and critique arguments, to ask for help when you need it and offer help when you can. Practical ethics is a serious subject that can improve the way you approach difficult decisions in your own life. It can also be fun. Collaboration promotes both good outcomes.

CHAPTER 1

Recognizing Moral Arguments

CHAPTER GOALS

By reading this chapter and completing the exercises, you will learn how to:

- Distinguish moral claims from descriptive claims.
- Explain what an argument is.
- Determine if an argument is a moral argument.
- Identify at least one reason the distinction between moral claims and descriptive claims is important.

MORAL REASONING AND MORAL ARGUMENTS

In public debates, in discussions with friends and colleagues, and in quiet moments of personal reflection, we all face questions about how we ought to live. We all face questions about what is right or wrong, good or bad. These are *moral* questions.

Although we all face moral questions, there is no guarantee that we will answer them well. Reasoning about moral questions is a critical thinking skill. As with any other skill, it can be done poorly. And as with any other skill, it can be improved through practice. The goal of this book is to help you improve your moral reasoning skills through practice.

This chapter begins by characterizing the difference between moral claims and other kinds of claims. It also introduces the central tool that philosophers and others use to clarify and communicate their moral reasoning: moral arguments. Later chapters introduce specific skills and strategies for understanding, evaluating, and developing moral arguments.

MORAL CLAIMS AND DESCRIPTIVE CLAIMS

Claims are the basic building blocks of arguments. *Claims* (or, equivalently, *statements*), are simply declarative sentences—sentences that must be either true or false, or correct or incorrect.

Consider the following sentences:

A. Don't steal things!
B. Is stealing always wrong?
C. Stealing is morally wrong.
D. Stealing is illegal.
E. Dogs are mammals.

Sentences C, D, and E are claims because they are either true or false, or correct or incorrect. Sentences A and B are not claims, because they are not the kinds of sentences that could be true or false. (It would make no sense for someone to say "False!" or "True!" in response to the question posed in sentence B. Nor would it make sense to say "True!" in response to the command delivered in sentence A.)

Claims may be either *moral* or *descriptive*. Consider a selection of claims people have made about abortion:

F. Abortion terminates the life of a developing human organism.
G. Abortion causes breast cancer.
H. There will be fewer abortions in 2050 than there were in 2020.
I. Abortion is morally permissible.
J. Having a first-trimester abortion usually does not harm the well-being of the person who has it.
K. Assassinating abortion doctors should be legal.
L. You ought not get an abortion.

Moral claims are claims that evaluate something as *right, wrong, good* or *bad,* or prescribe something as a thing we *should* or *may* do.[1] I and J are moral claims because they assert evaluations; K and L are moral claims because they assert prescriptions. *Descriptive claims*, in contrast, assert something about how the world actually is or tends to be. Claims F, G, and H are descriptive claims, because they assert something about how the world actually *is* (or *was*, or *will be*) without saying anything about what's right, wrong, good, bad or what we should or shouldn't do.

Note two aspects of this distinction between descriptive and moral claims. First, our definition of a moral claim is broad; claims that prescribe or evaluate the morality of individual conduct (such as I and L), claims that evaluate individual well-being (such as J), and claims about what laws we ought to have (such as K) all count as *moral* claims in our sense.

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[1]Philosophers generally call these *normative* claims; other disciplines (such as psychology) use the term "normative" to mean something else, which can be a source of terminological confusion.

Second, note that establishing whether a claim is true or false, justified or unjustified, plausible or implausible, has nothing at all to do with classifying it as a moral or descriptive claim. Claim F is true, claim G is false, claim H is unknowable until sometime after 2050, but they are all descriptive claims. Claims I and L are controversial, claim J is plausible, and claim K is implausible, but they are all moral claims. We classify claims as moral or descriptive based on the kind of assertion they make, not whether we have good reason to believe them.

ARGUMENTS

An *argument* is a chain of reasoning in which a set of claims—the premises—are intended to give us reason to accept a further claim—the conclusion.

For instance, drivers in the United States have probably seen a billboard that makes this claim:

M. Abortion takes human life.

Sentence M is a claim, because it can be true or false, or correct or incorrect. More specifically, Sentence M is a descriptive claim, not a moral claim, because it aims to describe how the world is; it attempts to characterize the outcome of abortion, but it does not evaluate or prescribe that outcome.

Still, if you're familiar with public discussions of abortion in the United States, you'll be well aware that the person who wrote the billboard assumes that you already believe an unstated moral claim: that taking human life is wrong. Furthermore, the author of the billboard thinks that these two claims, taken together, imply that you should accept an additional claim: that abortion is wrong. The billboard implicitly offers an *argument*:

1. Abortion takes human life.
2. Taking human life is wrong.

Therefore, abortion is wrong.

Claims (1) and (2) are the *premises* of the argument. Taken together, they constitute a chain of reasoning in support of the *conclusion* that abortion is wrong.

Here's another example. At protests of abortion restrictions, protesters sometimes carry signs that say "my uterus, my rules." These signs implicitly offer an argument. The text of the sign is a pithy expression of something like the following claim:

N. A person should be allowed to do what they want with their own body.

This is a moral claim because it asserts something about what people *should* be allowed to do. As it is written, the protest sign does not mention abortion. But if you're familiar with abortion debates, you'll be well aware that the protestor who wrote the sign assumes that you already believe an unstated descriptive claim: abortion is a procedure performed on a pregnant person's body. These

two claims, taken together, imply that people should be allowed to choose abortion. The protest sign implicitly offers this argument:

1. A person should be allowed to do what they want with their own body.
2. Abortion is an action that concerns a pregnant person's own body.

Therefore, a pregnant person should be allowed to choose an abortion.

Claims (1) and (2) are the *premises* of the argument. Taken together, they constitute a chain of reasoning in support of the *conclusion* that people should be allowed to choose an abortion.

In later chapters you'll learn how to evaluate arguments such as these. For now, our goal is simply to recognize the relationship between claims and arguments. An argument is a chain of reasoning in which a set of claims—the premises—is offered as evidence or justification in support of a further claim—the conclusion.

MORAL ARGUMENTS

This book is especially concerned with *moral arguments*, and not all arguments are moral arguments. You can determine whether an argument is a moral argument by classifying its conclusion. An argument is a moral argument when its conclusion makes a moral claim.

The following arguments are *not* moral arguments:

O:

1. Geological examination of the rocks from the moon have concluded that they are made of the same minerals as rocks on Earth.
2. The Earth is not made of green cheese.

So, the moon is not made of green cheese.

P:

1. People tend to be more likely to help others when they're not in a hurry.
2. Ayan is not in a hurry but Erin is.

Therefore, Ayan is probably more likely to help than Erin is.

Neither O nor P is a moral argument, because their conclusions describe the world without prescribing or evaluating any aspect of their subject matter. The descriptive nature of the conclusion in example O is obvious. But example P is about helping behaviors, and people associate helping with morality. Nevertheless, P's conclusion merely describes Ayan and Erin's likely behaviors. It says nothing about whose behavior is morally better, or what Ayan and Erin ought to do. P's conclusion is descriptive, so P is not a moral argument.

In contrast, the following examples are moral arguments:

Q:

1. Keeping animals in zoos greatly reduces those animals' well-being merely for human enjoyment.
2. It's wrong to treat animals in ways that greatly reduce their well-being merely for human enjoyment.

Thus, it's wrong to keep animals in zoos.

R:

1. White lies—that is, lies intended to save someone unhappiness, discomfort, or awkwardness—treat a person like a mere thing to be manipulated.
2. It's wrong to treat someone like a mere thing to be manipulated.

So, white lies are wrong.

The conclusions of Q and R are claims about how things ought to be or what's right, wrong, good or bad. Because their conclusions are moral claims, they are moral arguments.

THE PROCESS OF THINKING ABOUT MORAL ARGUMENTS

Identifying moral arguments, and distinguishing them from arguments with descriptive conclusions, is the first step in moral reasoning. In later chapters, you'll learn additional skills:

Analyzing a moral argument involves understanding an argument's component parts and how they fit together.

Evaluating a moral argument involves determining whether or not an argument actually gives us good reason to accept its conclusion.

Developing a moral argument involves generating, structuring, and explaining your own moral argument.

When we read or hear an argument offered by someone else, our first step must always be to take care that we have charitably and accurately understood the author's reasoning. Only then can we proceed to evaluating the argument. This order—understand first, then evaluate—is especially important when we examine an argument whose conclusion we would like to reject. In our rush to find problems with an argument we disagree with, it can be tempting to skip a charitable and complete analysis. But it wastes everyone's time to present criticisms—even devastating, blistering criticisms—of an argument that is not actually the argument the author intended to offer. Yielding to the temptation to rush straight to evaluation sacrifices truth and understanding in exchange for unearned self-satisfaction.

THE VALUE AND LIMITATIONS OF SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

We've seen that one reason the distinction between moral and descriptive claims is important is that it helps us *identify* when we're looking at a moral argument and when we're not.[2] Distinguishing descriptive claims from moral claims is also important for *evaluating* arguments, because descriptive claims require a different kind of evidence than moral claims. While empirical scientific evidence is often useful or necessary for evaluating descriptive claims, scientific evidence cannot by itself give us any verdict on moral claims.

Consider, for example, this moral claim: you ought not drive while intoxicated. Is this claim true? You might feel the urge to support this claim by appeal to empirical evidence: driving while intoxicated undoubtedly puts you and others at increased risk of injury or death. This would give us the following simple argument:

1. Driving while intoxicated puts you and others at increased risk of injury or death.

Therefore, you should not drive while intoxicated.

This argument is incomplete. The claim that driving while intoxicated risks injury or death is a descriptive claim, but the conclusion of the argument is a moral claim. The argument needs an additional premise to connect the well-documented effects of intoxicated driving to a moral claim about how we ought to behave. A moral claim about the kinds of effects that *should* be avoided can bridge that gap:

1. Driving while intoxicated puts others and oneself at increased risk of injury or death.
2. *You should not put yourself and others at increased risk of injury or death.*

Therefore, you should not drive while intoxicated.

This argument now expresses a complete chain of reasoning: if the premises are true, then they give us good reason to believe the conclusion is true, too. Note that, in the complete argument, its moral conclusion is no longer supported by purely descriptive premises. The argument now relies on one descriptive claim (premise 1) and one moral claim (premise 2). For a complete argument for a moral claim, we need at least one moral claim as a premise. The conclusion does not follow from a descriptive claim (premise 1) alone.

Arguments for other moral claims work similarly. Consider, for example, an argument in support of moral claim I: having a first-trimester abortion usually does not harm the well-being of the person who has it. There is empirical evidence that supports this claim. According to the American Psychological Association, "the

[2]This section is adapted from Jason D. Swartwood and Valerie Tiberius, "Philosophical Foundations of Wisdom," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Wisdom*, ed. Robert J. Sternberg and Judith Glück (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 10–39.

prevalence of mental health problems observed among women in the United States who had a single, legal, first-trimester abortion for non-therapeutic reasons was consistent with normative rates of comparable mental health problems in the general population of women in the United States."[3] In other words, women who have a single, legal, first-trimester abortion tend not to be more prone to mental illnesses like depression and anxiety than the general population of women. Suppose it is also true that most women who have abortions of this type don't suffer any significant physical health problems. Someone might suggest that these descriptive facts by themselves imply a conclusion about the prudential goodness or badness of abortions:

1. Usually, having a legal, first-trimester abortion doesn't make a person more prone to mental illness or significant physical injury.

   So, usually, having a legal, first-trimester abortion is not bad for the person who has it.

This argument, like the first version of the intoxicated driving argument, is incomplete. The claim that first-trimester abortions do not usually cause physical injury or mental illness is a descriptive claim, but the conclusion of the argument is a moral claim. The argument needs an additional premise to connect these well-documented effects of first-trimester abortions to a moral claim about the well-being of people who have had an abortion. A moral claim about the kinds of effects that promote or harm a person's well-being (what sorts of things are good or bad for them) can bridge that gap:

1. Usually, having a legal, first-trimester abortion doesn't make a person more prone to mental illness or significant physical injury.
2. *A thing does not harm the well-being of a person if it doesn't make the person more prone to mental illness or significant injury.*

   So, usually, having a legal, first-trimester abortion does not harm the well-being of the person who has it.

The addition of premise 2 makes the argument complete: if the premises are true, then that gives us good reason to think the conclusion is true, too. But the completed argument does not rely exclusively on descriptive premises; fixing the argument required adding a *moral* claim that connects its descriptive first premise to its moral conclusion.

The point of the last two examples (about drunk driving and the effects of abortion) is that the descriptive premises of these arguments are not by themselves enough to establish their moral conclusions. Most moral philosophers believe this point generalizes: empirical research alone cannot ever establish a moral conclusion. If empirical research shows that donating 10% of your income to effective

[3]See the APA statement on "Mental Health and Abortion." http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/abortion/

charities saves the lives of strangers, this does not by itself establish that you *ought* to donate 10 percent of your income; it could only establish that it were also true that saving these strangers' lives is the sort of thing we *ought* to do. If empirical research shows that zoo animals suffer terribly from confinement, this does not itself establish that you *ought* to stop visiting zoos; it could only establish that if it were also true that contributing to institutions that cause animal suffering is the sort of thing we *ought not* do. If empirical research shows that marriages survive longer when spouses hide their infidelities from each other, this does not itself establish that you *ought* to hide your own infidelity; it could only establish that if it were also true that extending the length of these marriages is the sort of thing we *ought* to do.

Empirical research can tell us many important things about the features and consequences of our choices. But empirical research alone cannot tell us which features or consequences are good or bad, or which consequences ought to be pursued and which ought to be avoided.

The lesson to draw from this brief discussion: scientific evidence will often be relevant to assessing the truth of descriptive claims included in moral arguments, *but scientific evidence alone cannot help us assess the truth of moral claims.* To evaluate a moral claim requires figuring out not only how things *are* but also figuring out what *matters*. Science helps us describe the world as it actually is, but it cannot by itself tell us what we should value or what we should do.

REVIEW

Claims may be descriptive or moral.

Claim: a declarative sentence that must be true or false, correct or incorrect.
Descriptive claim: a claim about the way the world *is* (or *was* or *will be*).
Moral claim: a claim that either *prescribes* (by saying what *ought* or *ought not* be) or *evaluates* (by saying what's *good* or *bad*, or *right* or *wrong*).

It is important to distinguish descriptive claims and moral claims because they require different kinds of evidence to evaluate. Scientific or other empirical evidence can often establish whether a descriptive claim is true or false, but scientific evidence alone cannot ever establish whether a moral claim is true or false.

When we disagree with each other about a moral claim, we should do our best to explain the reasons why we believe the claim we do. Philosophers typically explain their reason for believing a moral claim by offering a moral argument in support of it.

Argument: a chain of reasoning in which a set of claims (the **premises**) is offered in support of a further claim (the **conclusion**).
Moral argument: an argument with a conclusion that is a moral claim.

Practicing the philosophical skills of understanding, evaluating, and developing moral arguments can help us all improve our ability to think carefully about moral questions. The goal of this book is to help you develop those skills.

Demonstration Exercises

Demonstration Exercises are designed to give you immediate feedback on your grasp of the skills introduced in this chapter. To use them effectively, you should attempt answers to all of them, then check your work against our suggested answers, which follow. For a detailed explanation of how best to use Demonstration Exercises, read the book's Introduction.

Demonstration Exercises 1A: Distinguishing Moral and Descriptive Claims

***Exercise Instructions**: For each of the following claims, determine whether it is a moral claim or a descriptive claim.*

1. Spanking children is less effective for producing compliant children than other methods.
2. Physician-assisted suicide ought to be illegal.
3. Keeping gorillas in small urban zoos is cruel.
4. Lying is fairly common.

Demonstration Exercises 1B: Identifying Moral Arguments

***Exercise Instructions**: For each of the following arguments, determine whether or not it is a moral argument, and concisely explain your answer.*

1.
    1. A person has an addiction when they repeatedly engage in risky behavior in ways that significantly impede their own life goals.
    2. Many people repeatedly use social media (such as Twitter) in ways that are risky and significantly impede their life goals.

    Therefore, many people have a social media addiction.[4]

2.
    1. In a study of 1,170 children from six countries, children from religious families were less likely than children from non-religious families to share and were more likely to judge and punish others for bad behavior.[5]
    2. The best explanation of the study results is that a religious upbringing tends to cause people to be less prosocial (that is, less concerned with others' well-being and less concerned with sustaining social relationships).

    So, probably, a religious upbringing tends to cause people to be less prosocial.

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[4]Adapted from Steve Albrecht, "Hi, I'm Steve and I'm a Twitterholic," *Psychology Today*, July 31, 2018. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-act-violence/201807/hi-i-m-steve-and-i-m-twitteraholic

[5]For an overview of this research, see https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/11/151105121916.htm.

3.

1. Drunk driving is wrong.
2. Refusing (without good medical reason) to vaccinate your children is similar in the ways that matter to drunk driving: both put other innocent people at significant risk of harm for no good reason.

   Thus, refusing (without good medical reason) to vaccinate your children is wrong.[6]

4.

1. Trigger warnings (warnings professors give to students about potentially upsetting content in readings or class materials) undermine some students' emotional resilience.[7]
2. Professors should not do things that undermine students' emotional resilience.

   Therefore, professors should not give trigger warnings.

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[6]Adapted from an argument in Sanjeev K. Sriram, "Anti-Vaxxers, Like Drunk Drivers, Are a Danger to Us All," *The Huffington Post*, April 4, 2015. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/sanjeev-k-sriram/dr-america-antivaxxers-ar_b_6587538.html

[7]Adapted from a claim in Katherine Timpf, "Trigger Warnings Might Be Harmful, a Study Concludes," *The National Review*, July 31, 2018. https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/07/study-says-trigger-warnings-might-harm-readers/

Solutions to the Demonstration Exercises

Demonstration Exercises are most useful if you make your best attempt to complete them before you look at the answers. If you haven't yet attempted answers to all the Demonstration Exercises, go back and do that now.

Demonstration Exercises 1A: Distinguishing Moral and Descriptive Claims

1. Spanking children is less effective for producing compliant children than other methods.

This is a descriptive claim and not a moral claim. It is a descriptive claim because it says something about how the world *is* or tends to work (specifically, it focuses on the effects of particular disciplinary strategies on children). It is not a moral claim, because it does not prescribe or evaluate spanking: it does not make any claims about whether we ought to do it or whether it is right or wrong.

2. Physician-assisted suicide ought to be illegal.

This is a moral claim, because it is prescribing rather than just describing. If it had said that physician-assisted suicide *is* illegal, then it would have been a descriptive claim. But, it says that physician-assisted suicide *ought* to be illegal, which means it is prescribing. This makes it a moral claim in our broad sense of the term, though we should distinguish it from the distinct moral claim that "physician-assisted suicide is morally wrong for individuals to perform or take part in."

(*continued*)

3. Keeping gorillas in small urban zoos is cruel.

This is a moral claim, because it evaluates an action rather than merely describing it. To say something is cruel both describes and evaluates it: it says it is wrongfully or viciously showing disregard for someone's well-being. (Philosophers call concepts that both describe and evaluate "thick" concepts.) Because this claim evaluates an action, it is a moral claim.

4. Lying is fairly common.

This is a descriptive claim and not a moral claim, because it describes how the world is without prescribing or evaluating. Specifically, this claim describes how often a particular type of behavior (lying) actually occurs but doesn't say anything about whether we ought to engage in that behavior or whether doing so is right or wrong.

Demonstration Exercises 1B: Identifying Moral Arguments

1. This is not a moral argument. The conclusion of the argument makes the purely descriptive claim that many social media behaviors match the definition of addictive behavior.
2. This is not a moral argument. The conclusion of the argument makes a purely descriptive, statistical claim about the social behaviors of people with religious upbringings.
3. This is a moral argument. The conclusion *evaluates* vaccine refusals as wrong.
4. This is a moral argument. The conclusion *proscribes* the use of trigger warnings in college classes; that is, it asserts that professors *should not* use them.

To test your understanding of the material introduced in this chapter, complete the Demonstration Exercises and then check your answers against the solutions that follow.

CHAPTER 1 PRACTICE EXERCISES

RECOGNIZING MORAL ARGUMENTS

Exercises 1A: Distinguishing Moral and Descriptive Claims

Exercise Instructions: *For each of the following claims, determine whether it is a moral claim or a descriptive claim.*

1. People tend to do what's in their own best interest.
2. Abortion in the first and second trimesters is legal.
3. Physician-assisted suicide is morally wrong.
4. A nurse has a moral obligation to treat all patients with respect.
5. Genetically modified wheat is an artificial crop.

6. Legalizing recreational drug use produces more total pleasure in society than criminalizing those drugs.
7. People often make sacrifices for their friends and family.
8. Policies that systematically make it harder for racial minorities to vote are unjust.
9. You're morally required to save another person's life if you can do so without risking your own.
10. Students should never cheat on an exam.
11. Physicians who withhold potential risks from patients undermine their community's trust in medical institutions.

Exercises 1B: Identifying Moral Arguments

Exercise Instructions: *For each of the following arguments, determine whether or not it is a moral argument, and concisely explain your answer.*

1.
    1. Voter intimidation (intimidating someone to get them to vote for a particular candidate or to prevent them from voting) is illegal.
    2. Impersonating an election official to falsely convince someone they don't have the right kind of ID to vote is voter intimidation.

    So, impersonating an election official to falsely convince someone they don't have the right kind of ID to vote is illegal.
2.
    1. It is good for teachers to have policies that improve student engagement in the classroom and that improve student comprehension and performance.
    2. Banning laptop and phone use in the classroom improves student engagement, comprehension, and performance.

    Therefore, it is good for teachers to ban laptop and phone use in the classroom.
3.
    1. It is wrong to put your pets at unnecessary risk.
    2. Keeping lilies in a place where they are accessible to your cat is an unnecessary risk to your pet.

    Thus, it is wrong to keep lilies in a place where they are accessible to your cat.
4.
    1. Any practice that exploits vulnerable people ought to be illegal.
    2. Commercial surrogacy exploits vulnerable people.

    So, commercial surrogacy ought to be illegal.
5.
    1. Gene editing technology (like CRISPR) could one day allow us to eliminate genes for serious diseases (such as Huntington's disease, etc.).

2. Eliminating genes for serious diseases would promote longer, healthier lives.

   Therefore, gene editing technology could one day promote longer, healthier lives.

6.

1. People have a moral right to be able to obtain effective means of self-defense.
2. Owning handguns is an effective means of self-defense.

   Thus, people have a moral right to own handguns.

CHAPTER 2

Generating Illustrative Examples

CHAPTER GOALS

By reading this chapter and completing the exercises, you will learn how to:

- Identify the features of a good illustrative example.
- Generate a realistic or fanciful example that illustrates a general claim.

ILLUSTRATING WITH EXAMPLES

People think and talk in abstractions and generalizations. Navigating the world would be more or less impossible if we *couldn't* abstract our specific experiences into general beliefs that can in turn be applied to novel circumstances. For example, you have probably formed the general belief that "fruits and vegetables are nutritious." This is a useful generalization to have come lunchtime. You do not have to wonder, about every new piece of fruit you see, "Is this piece of fruit I see before me nutritious?" Instead, you apply your general belief to this novel circumstance and assume that this banana, being a fruit, is nutritious.

Generalizations, like any other variety of claim, can either be *descriptive* or *moral*. The generalization "fruits and vegetables are nutritious" is a descriptive generalization, because it makes a claim about how the world *actually is* or tends to be. Other generalizations, such as "you *ought to* eat vegetables" or "stealing fruit is *wrong*" are moral generalizations, because they express prescriptive or evaluative claims.

There is nothing wrong with thinking and talking in generalizations, either in philosophical debate or in everyday life. We couldn't avoid using generalizations even if we wanted to. But using generalizations comes with some risks: generalizations can cause miscommunication, and they sometimes masquerade as true even when they are false. This chapter introduces a technique that mitigates these risks: the technique of illustrative example.

THE RISKS OF GENERALIZATIONS

One risk of generalizations is that if we learn them from other people, or absorb them from our community, instead of abstracting them for ourselves, it can be easy to accept them as true without ever checking to confirm that they are. For example: many people in the United States accept the generalization that pit bulls are typically aggressive, dangerous dogs. One of the authors of this book, Jason, assumed this was true until he started working as a veterinary technician. After meeting many pit bulls—even ones rescued from dog-fighting operations—he never met a single one that was aggressive and dangerous. That experience made it impossible to accept the generalization that pit bulls are typically dangerous; he now recognizes pit bulls as tending to be sweet and friendly dogs. When a generalization cannot be illustrated with an example after looking carefully in all the right places, that is evidence that the generalization is not true, no matter how many people believe it.

The same weakness can appear in generalizations we've made for ourselves. If we allow our own generalizations to become too abstract, too disconnected from the kinds of concrete examples that lead us to form them in the first place, they can drift away from the truth. For example: when the other author of this book, Ian, was younger he watched and enjoyed many slasher movies, and so he formed the generalization "I like slasher movies." For most of his adult life he has believed that generalization to be true. But when a friend asked him recently what slasher movies he'd recommend from the last ten years, he couldn't offer a single recommendation because it has been longer than ten years since he saw a slasher movie he enjoyed. Apparently, Ian no longer likes slasher movies. When a generalization cannot be illustrated with an example, that is evidence that the generalization is not true, even if it's a generalization we've made for ourselves.

A different risk of generalizations is that they can introduce miscommunication when two people understand the same generalization differently. In these cases, people think they are talking about the same thing when they aren't. For example, in one of our classrooms, a student made the comment that "men could be pregnant." He intended this generalization to highlight a familiar point about the conceptual difference between sex and gender. He meant that someone who is biologically female, and potentially able to be pregnant, might identify as a man. But several other students misunderstood his intent, and assumed he was making a point about future scientific possibilities. They thought he was claiming that, someday, science will probably allow biologically male people to carry fetuses in artificial wombs. When a generalization isn't illustrated with an example, it risks introducing confusion, rather than clarity, to a conversation.

WHEN TO USE ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

Illustrating generalizations with concrete examples keeps generalizations tied to the sorts of concrete cases that are supposed to ground them. This makes generalizations less risky and more useful in almost every case. Developing the habit of illustrating generalizations with examples will improve your writing, reading, and thinking.

Philosophers often use illustrative examples when they introduce new generalizations. In a famous article about global poverty relief, Peter Singer suggests we should all accept the following moral principle: "If it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it." At first glimpse, this abstract moral principle may not be entirely clear. What, for example, does Singer mean by "sacrificing anything morally significant?" To help make clear what the principle means, Singer immediately offers an illustrative example: "If I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out. This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing."[1] In this case, an illustrative example helps to clarify what might, initially, be unclear.

Illustrative examples are useful in all modes of writing. In the previous section of this chapter, we identified three risks of generalizations:

- Generalizations we absorb from our community are sometimes false.
- Generalizations we abstract from our own experiences are sometimes false.
- Generalizations can introduce miscommunication when different people understand the same generalization in different ways.

After introducing each of these general claims, we immediately offered an illustrative example of it. Even if you understood right away what we were getting at in all three cases, you almost certainly felt more confident in your understanding of what we meant after reading the illustrative examples. Developing the habit of offering illustrative examples will improve the effectiveness of your written and spoken communication.

Generating your own illustrative examples will also improve your reading. Whether or not authors provide illustrative examples of the general claims they make, you should, as an active reader, generate your own illustrative examples as you read. When an author fails to offer illustrative examples, generating at least one for yourself is a necessary part of critically evaluating the author's general claim. But even when authors illustrate their claims, you should generate at least one illustrative example of your own. Is the author's example somehow tricky or unrepresentative? Or is the general claim genuinely plausible? Generating your own examples is the best way to start thinking about those questions.

FEATURES OF A GOOD ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE

Effective illustrative examples have two key features:

1. For (almost) everyone in the intended audience, a good illustrative example is immediately recognizable as a concrete instance of the general claim; it is *broadly accessible.*

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[1]Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1, no. 1 Spring 1972): 229–243. Available online: http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/1972----.htm

2. For (almost) everyone in the intended audience, a good illustrative example will strike them as a case in which the general claim is *uncontroversially true.*

Consider four possible illustrations of the generalization: "Some people do not take proper care of their pets."

Bad illustrative example #1: This generalization is true, because lots of people don't take proper care of their pets.

This is not an illustrative example at all, but rather an endorsement of the generalization. An example that *illustrates* this generalization should identify a specific person who doesn't take proper care of their pets.

Bad illustrative example #2: Anne is a person who doesn't take proper care of her pets.

This is a bad example, because none of you knows who Anne is, and so cannot know whether she is a concrete instance of the claim. Even if it is true that Anne doesn't take proper care of her pets, this cannot function as an effective illustrative example because it is not *broadly accessible.*

Bad illustrative example #3: One of my friends sometimes feeds his dog scraps from the dinner table. He shouldn't do that. It encourages bad habits and risks hurting the dog with food it shouldn't eat. It isn't proper care.

The author of this example clearly believes that feeding dogs from the dinner table constitutes improper pet care. But many people will disagree with that judgment. For most of us, even if we think feeding from the table isn't ideal behavior, it doesn't rise to the level of improper care. This is a bad illustrative example because it fails to offer a concrete case in which the generalization is *uncontroversially true.*

Better illustrative example: In 2013 police took custody of nine dogs from a home in Meeker County, MN. The dogs' owner was financially unable to feed them all, but instead of adopting them out to other people who could feed them, she kept them and fed them a small fraction of what they needed to survive. When the police took custody of the dogs, they were all starved to the brink of death, with associated undernourishment problems including big patches of missing fur. She didn't appear to have any malign intent—she claimed to love the dogs—but she definitely didn't take proper care of them.

This example satisfies both criteria of effective illustrative examples. It fills in enough detail that readers unfamiliar with the case can form a judgment about it for themselves, and nearly everyone who hears the example will form the judgment that it is a case of improper care. This illustrative example, like all good illustrative examples, is *broadly accessible* and *uncontroversial.*

REALISTIC EXAMPLES AND FANCIFUL EXAMPLES

Some illustrative examples are *realistic examples*—they are drawn from real-world events or common situations we've all experienced. Many philosophers also use *fanciful examples*—short, wholly invented scenarios that range from unlikely to wildly imaginative.[2] Each kind of example has its place.

Consider the claim: "In some situations, suicide could be morally required." Either a fanciful example or a realistic example could illustrate this general claim, and each kind of example has advantages and disadvantages.

> **Fanciful illustrative example:** imagine a flying saucer enters orbit of Earth and beams you up onto it. On the ship, the aliens explain that they want to test the limits of the human instinct for self-preservation. They have set up a gallows in a cargo bay, and they tell you that if you hang yourself on the gallows, that will give them the information they need, and they will leave, never to return. If you refuse to hang yourself, they will randomly select one million people on Earth to kill with a death-ray, then they will beam up a different person and run the experiment again. If you found yourself in such a situation, suicide would be morally required.

The advantage of this fanciful example is that it clearly satisfies our two criteria of effective examples: it includes enough detail that everyone can form a judgment about it, and most people who hear it will form the judgment that you *should* kill yourself in order to save a million (or more) other people. The disadvantage of this example is that it so wild that it might not actually tell us much about suicide in the real world. It establishes the conceptual point that it's *possible* for suicide to be morally required, but that conceptual point could still be true even if no circumstances morally requiring suicide have ever happened in the real world. Depending on the context of the debate and the views of people participating in it, this example might shed little light on the question of the permissibility of suicide.

> **Realistic illustrative example:** imagine a group of people undertaking a dangerous mountain climb. They have tied themselves together, which is a standard safety precaution. Imagine that the last person on the line falls over a cliff and, instead of being securely held by the others, his weight is pulling all the others toward the edge of the cliff. If he is able, the right thing to do is to kill himself by cutting himself free of the safety rope. If he doesn't kill himself, then everyone, including him, will die. This is an example of a morally required suicide.

The advantage of this example is that it is drawn from the real world—people who do dangerous climbs have to contemplate possibilities like this when they set off up a mountain. The disadvantage of the example is that it doesn't as clearly

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[2]We defend the use of fanciful examples in Ian Stoner and Jason D. Swartwood, "Fanciful Examples," *Metaphilosophy* 48, no. 3 (2017): 325–344.

satisfy the requirements it is supposed to meet. The trouble: is this definitely an example of *suicide*? A climber in this situation probably does not think: "I should commit suicide, in order that my friends may live." Rather, he presumably thinks, "I must cut this rope to save my friends, even if that is almost certain to result in my own death." There might be people in some potential audiences who think this choice is not the same thing as choosing suicide.

These examples of morally required suicide illustrate a common tension between realistic and fanciful examples. Fanciful examples tend to be clearer in establishing conceptual points, but sometimes those conceptual points aren't obviously applicable to the real world. The clarity of fanciful examples sometimes comes at the cost of applicability. Realistic examples, because they are drawn from the real world, are obviously applicable to the real world. But sometimes realistic examples, like the real world itself, can be harder to make sense of, and harder to achieve consensus about. The applicability of real-world examples sometimes comes at the cost of clarity.

Both kinds of examples have their place in practical ethics, and philosophers use both fanciful and realistic examples in their writing. Philosophers typically choose the kind of illustrative example that best serves their argumentative goals. As you develop the skill of reading and writing with illustrative examples, an easy way to avoid trade-offs between realistic and fanciful examples is always to generate one of each.

REVIEW

We often rely on generalizations in thought and communication. Illustrating generalizations with examples allows us to read, think, and communicate more effectively.

Generalization: a claim that is not about an individual case but rather about a range of cases.

Illustrative example: a specific, concrete case of the type identified by a generalization.

A good illustrative example is one that is both broadly accessible and relatively uncontroversial.

Broadly accessible example: an example that nearly everyone in the target audience is able to understand and evaluate.

Uncontroversial example: an example that nearly everyone in the target audience evaluates in the same way.

Depending on the context and the goal of the discussion, you may have reason to prefer either a realistic or a fanciful illustrative example.

Realistic example: an example drawn from real-world events, or from areas of broadly shared experience.

Fanciful example: a short, wholly fictional scenario, invented for the purpose of illustration, which may be unrealistic or even wildly imaginative.

To test your understanding of the material introduced in this chapter, complete the Demonstration Exercises and then check your answers against the solutions that follow.

Demonstration Exercises

Demonstration Exercises are designed to give you immediate feedback on your grasp of the skills introduced in this chapter. To use them effectively, you should attempt answers to all of them, then check your work against our suggested answers, which follow. For a detailed explanation of how best to use Demonstration Exercises, read the book's Introduction.

Demonstration Exercises 2A: Illustrating Simple Descriptive Claims

Exercise Instructions: *Offer an illustrative example for each of the following descriptive generalizations.*

1. Often, a nation's capital city is not its most populous city.
2. Most varieties of wood are flammable.
3. Four-year colleges and universities typically consider the high-school GPA of applicants when making admissions decisions.

Demonstration Exercises 2B: Illustrating Moral Claims

Exercise Instructions: *Offer one fanciful and one realistic example that illustrate each of the following moral claims.*

1. Helping out a frustrated child is sometimes the wrong thing to do.
2. In most cases, doctors should accept the clear medical directives given to them by their patient, even when they disagree with or disapprove of their patient's directives.
3. Defying the orders of a qualified authority figure is sometimes morally required.
4. In some cases, taking someone else's property without their permission is the right thing to do.

Solutions to the Demonstration Exercises

Demonstration Exercises are most useful if you make your best attempt to complete them before you look at the answers. If you haven't yet attempted answers to all the Demonstration Exercises, go back and do that now.

Note: The range of possible good illustrative examples is effectively unlimited. Thus, the illustrative examples we offer here are merely samples. You will have to ask yourself if your own illustrative examples function in the same way as ours. If they do, you're probably in good shape. If our sample answers appear to be doing something different from your own answers, that's evidence that you

(continued)

need to take another pass at the explanation of the skill before attempting the Practice Exercises.

Demonstration Exercises 2A: Illustrating Simple Factual Generalizations

1. Often, a nation's capital city is not its most populous city.

Example: Washington, D.C. is not the most populous city in the United States. (It doesn't even make the top 10.)

2. Most varieties of wood are flammable.

Example: Untreated oak, cedar, apple, and pine are all examples of woods that burn.

3. Four-year colleges and universities typically consider the high-school GPA of applicants when making admissions decisions.

Example: Nearly all famous four-year colleges and universities consider GPA in their admissions decisions, including Harvard, Stanford, the Ohio State University, and UC Berkeley.

Demonstration Exercises 2B: Illustrating Moral Claims

1. Helping out a frustrated child is sometimes the wrong thing to do.

Realistic example: Some degree of frustration is a necessary part of learning. Imagine a math teacher who gave students the answer the moment they started to get frustrated. Those students would never learn how to do it for themselves. That math teacher would do the wrong thing by helping out frustrated students.

Fanciful example: Imagine a child who has grown frustrated with her inability to figure out how to detonate a bomb. Lending a hand would be the wrong thing to do, even though it would ease her frustration.

2. In most cases, doctors should accept the clear medical directives given to them by their patient, even when they disagree with or disapprove of their patient's directives.

Realistic example: Some patients are excessively suspicious of pain-management drugs and refuse to take them even when they're in considerable pain. When a patient has made their refusal clear, doctors should respect that decision, even if they believe it is ill-informed. It would quite obviously be wrong for them to add drugs to the patient's IV in secret, for example.

Fanciful example: Suppose a patient subscribed to an obscure religion that, on its long list of rules for human conduct, requires that any blood drawn *must*, on threat of eternal damnation, be drawn from the right arm. Doctors should respect this request, even if it would be easier to draw blood from the left arm.

3. Defying the orders of a qualified authority figure is sometimes morally required.

Realistic example: Imagine a fourteen-year-old who has taken a job babysitting his neighbors' toddler. He's been given clear and firm instructions that the toddler should be put to bed before 8 p.m. As the evening wears on, the sitter becomes increasingly worried that the child is very sick. At 7:30, he calls his parents for help in taking the toddler to the doctor. In this case, caring for the welfare of the child is morally more important than obeying the order to put the child to bed by 8 p.m., and so defying those orders is morally required.

Fanciful example: Imagine a dystopian future in which a cruel ruler has seized absolute power in your town. He enjoys pitting children against each other in deadly battles for food. If he were to order you to round up a dozen of your town's children, you should refuse. Even though that order came from an authority figure, it is an immoral order, and defying it is morally required.

4. In some cases, taking someone else's property without their permission is the right thing to do.

Realistic example: Suppose you're at a picnic with friends and family, when someone allergic to bee stings gets stung. You know there's an emergency epinephrine injection in your friend's purse, but you have no idea where she has gone, and so you can't ask her permission to use it. The right thing to do is to take your friend's emergency epinephrine injection and save the currently endangered person, even though you don't have your friend's permission to do that.

Fanciful example: The villains in James Bond movies typically have complicated devices intended to foster global destruction. If you have the chance to steal some key component of their doomsday device, thereby thwarting their plans, you should do that.

CHAPTER 2 PRACTICE EXERCISES

GENERATING ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

Exercises 2A: Illustrating Simple Descriptive Claims

Exercise Instructions: *Offer an illustrative example for each of the following descriptive generalizations.*

1. Dogs usually have tails.
2. Many people cannot or will not eat bacon.
3. Large planets sometimes have more than one moon.
4. Some popular hobbies require expensive equipment.
5. It is easy to be misunderstood when communicating through writing.
6. Sometimes, new public policies have unexpected consequences.

Exercises 2B: Illustrating Moral Claims

Exercise Instructions: *Offer one fanciful and one realistic example that illustrates each of the following moral claims.*

1. It is morally wrong to claim credit for work you didn't do.
2. Morally good intentions sometimes result in terrible outcomes.
3. Malicious intentions sometimes result in good outcomes.
4. It is morally permissible to cause someone temporary pain if that is the only way to save them from significant harm.
5. In some cases, it is morally wrong to hold a person responsible for a crime he or she has committed.
6. Death is sometimes a benefit to the person who has died.

7. Telling the truth is sometimes morally required, even if the truth hurts the feelings of the person you're telling it to.
8. There are some situations in which answering a question truthfully is the morally wrong thing to do.
9. In most cases, parents should allow their teenage children to act on the decisions they've made, even when the parents believe the teen's decision was a bad one.
10. In some cases, when parents are sure their teenage children have made a bad decision, they have an obligation to step in and stop their children from acting on that decision.
11. A health care provider ought not unnecessarily harm a patient.
12. A health care provider ought to promote a patient's capacity to freely guide their life according to their own values.
13. A health care provider ought to promote a patient's well-being.
14. We should work to maintain the trust of people who are dependent upon us.
15. Destroying natural resources simply for fun is disrespectful and wrong.
16. Sometimes, when the interests of a person and a non-human animal come into conflict, the interests of the animal should be prioritized.
17. There are situations in which it would be morally wrong to kill a plant.
18. Breaking the law is sometimes the right thing to do.
19. Some disgusting acts are not morally wrong.
20. There are cases in which nurses should refuse to do what doctors order them to do.
21. Sometimes people become convinced they should prefer a social arrangement, even if that arrangement is oppressive for them.
22. Policies that unfairly exclude a social group from work and social life are oppressive.

CHAPTER 3

Generating Counterexamples

CHAPTER GOALS

By reading this chapter and completing the exercises, you will learn how to:

- Identify the features of a good counterexample.
- Generate a counterexample to a universal claim.

THE TECHNIQUE OF COUNTEREXAMPLE

A universal claim is a generalization that purports to hold true of every possible case. "Cats are mammals" and "any practice that puts people at risk of serious harm should be illegal" are examples of universal claims. Philosophers test the plausibility of universal claims using the technique of *counterexample*. A counterexample is a special form of illustrative example intended to show that a universal claim is *not* true. This technique has many philosophical applications, and it will play a central role in Chapters 6 and 12, where we will use counterexamples to evaluate arguments that appeal to moral principles.

COUNTEREXAMPLES TO UNIVERSAL CLAIMS

Universal claims all take some (possibly elaborate) version of the form "All Xs have feature Y." Some universal claims are true:

- All objects that have mass exert a gravitational force.
- Cats are mammals.
- Every US President in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a man.
- Genocide is morally wrong.

Other universal claims are false. Sometimes universal claims (such as "cats are reptiles") are *obviously* false. But some universal claims *often* hold true, even though they don't *always* hold true. Because they *often* hold true, they can be mistaken for true-in-general when, in fact, they are not. A counterexample is a

special form of illustrative example that can be used to prove that a universal claim is false.

In order to generate an effective counterexample to a false universal claim, you must pay attention to its "All Xs have feature Y" structure. All good counterexamples will be concrete examples of things that everyone agrees *are* instances of X that *lack* feature Y.

Example universal claim: All human beings have two feet

To show this claim isn't always true, we need an example of a creature everyone agrees *is* a human being but who *lacks* the feature of having two feet.

Oscar Pistorious, the South African sprinter, is a human being who has no feet.

Example Universal Claim: Mammals Don't Lay Eggs

To show this claim isn't always true, we need an example of an animal that everyone agrees *is* a mammal but *lacks* the feature 'doesn't lay eggs.' In other words, we need an example of a mammal that lays eggs.

The duck-billed platypus and the spiny anteater are both mammals that *do* lay eggs.

Many moral principles take the form of universal claims that purport to hold true in all circumstances. The method of counterexample is useful for revealing the limited nature of some principles that appear, at first blush, to be general principles.

Example Universal Claim: It Is Morally Wrong to Trespass on Someone's Property If They Have Posted Signs Saying "No Trespassing"

To show this claim isn't always true, we need an example of a case that everyone agrees *is* an example of trespassing but that *lacks* the feature of being morally wrong.

Suppose it were like this. You're out in the countryside for a walk and notice that one of the property owners has covered the perimeter of his land with "no trespassing" signs. While looking at this man's house from the public street, you see him fall off his roof and land face-down in a puddle, apparently unconscious. If you do nothing, he will drown. If you run to pull him out of the puddle, you will be trespassing on his property. In this case, it would be morally wrong to let him drown. You morally ought to cross his property line, despite his posted signs, in order to save him.

FEATURES OF A GOOD COUNTEREXAMPLE

The features of a good counterexample are identical to the features of a good illustrative example: a good counterexample is broadly accessible and uncontroversial. As with illustrative examples, you must keep in mind what your audience

probably knows and believes; only then can you attempt to describe a case that nearly everyone in your target audience will agree is an example of an X that lacks feature Y.

Example Universal Claim: You Are under No Obligation to Correct Anyone Else's False Beliefs

To show this claim isn't always true, we need an example that everyone agrees is a case in which a person *does* have an obligation to correct someone else's false belief.

> **Bad counterexample #1:** This claim isn't always true—sometimes you should correct someone else's false beliefs.

This is not a counterexample, but rather a denial of the universal claim. A counterexample would identify a specific case in which someone has an obligation to correct someone else's false belief.

> **Bad counterexample #2:** Lando should have told Han that he was walking into a trap.

This is a bad counterexample, because even if the author of the example is correct about what Lando should have done, most audiences don't know who Lando and Han are, and so the example means nothing to them. This counterexample is ineffective because (except when offered to an audience of *Star Wars* fans) it is *not broadly accessible.*

> **Bad counterexample #3:** Jenny McCarthy understands just how dangerous vaccines are. But most people have accepted the medical establishment's profit-driven propaganda that vaccines are safe and effective. Jenny McCarthy has a moral obligation to use her knowledge and her platform to help correct the false beliefs most people have about the safety of vaccines.

This is a bad counterexample because many (one hopes nearly all) people disagree with the author's judgment about Jenny McCarthy's medical wisdom, as well as her obligations in this case. This counterexample is ineffective because it is *controversial.*

> **Better realistic counterexample:** Last month I was waiting for a train I use routinely. While standing on the platform, I overheard a family standing next to me talking about their travel plans for the day. It was immediately obvious to me that they were from out of town and were confused about how the train platforms are set up. The train they were about to board would have taken them in the wrong direction. In that case, I had a (very easily accomplished) obligation to tell them that they were about to board the wrong train.

> **Better fanciful counterexample:** Suppose you have stored some gasoline in an apple juice bottle in your refrigerator. A friend comes over on a hot day and

pours herself a glass from that bottle. You have an obligation to tell her that it isn't actually apple juice in her glass before she drinks it.

Both better counterexamples include enough information to ensure that anyone can form a judgment about them, and most people in most audiences will form the judgment that the people in these examples do indeed have a moral obligation to correct someone else's false belief.

Like illustrative examples, counterexamples may be either realistic or fanciful, and we find similar tradeoffs between them. Fanciful counterexamples are often useful for clearly and decisively establishing conceptual points, but they are sometimes not applicable to the real world. Realistic counterexamples are obviously applicable to the real world, but they are sometimes more controversial than their fanciful cousins. As with illustrative examples, it is good philosophical practice to develop the habit, when in need of a counterexample, of offering both kinds.

REVIEW

Philosophers often test universal claims by looking for counterexamples.

Universal claim: a generalization that purports to hold true of every possible case.

Counterexample: a description of a specific case that shows a universal claim is false.

Effective counterexamples, like effective illustrative examples, must be broadly accessible and uncontroversial.

To test your understanding of the material introduced in this chapter, complete the Demonstration Exercises and then check your answers against the solutions that follow.

Demonstration Exercises

Demonstration Exercises are designed to give you immediate feedback on your grasp of the skills introduced in this chapter. To use them effectively, you should attempt answers to all of them, then check your work against our suggested answers, which follow. For a detailed explanation of how best to use Demonstration Exercises, read the book's Introduction.

Demonstration Exercises 3A: Counterexamples to Descriptive Generalizations

***Exercise Instructions**: Offer a counterexample for each of the following universal generalizations.*

1. Birds can fly.
2. Human beings are capable of rational thought.
3. The target audience for animated TV shows is children.

Demonstration Exercises 3B: Counterexamples to Moral Generalizations

***Exercise Instructions**: Offer a counterexample for each of the following moral claims. For additional practice and fun, try offering one fanciful and one realistic counterexample in each case.*

1. Death is the worst thing that could befall the person who has died.
2. You must, morally speaking, return things that have been loaned to you when the person who loaned it asks for it back.
3. No doctor should ever touch a patient without first securing that patient's explicit, voluntary, and informed consent.
4. One must always help one's family first, strangers second.

Solutions to the Demonstration Exercises

Demonstration Exercises are most useful if you make your best attempt to complete them before you look at the answers. If you haven't yet attempted answers to all the Demonstration Exercises, go back and do that now.

Note: the range of possible good counterexamples is effectively unlimited. The solutions we offer here are samples. You will have to ask yourself if your own counterexamples function in the same way as ours. If they do, you're probably in good shape. If our sample answers appear to be doing something different than your own answers, that's evidence that you need to take another pass at the explanation of the skill.

Demonstration Exercises 3A: Counterexamples to Factual Generalizations

1. Birds can fly.

To show this claim isn't always true, we need an example of an animal that *is* a bird, but which lacks the ability to fly.

Penguins and ostriches are two examples of birds that can't fly.

2. Human beings are capable of rational thought.

To show this claim isn't always true, we need an example of a human being who is not capable of rational thought.

Babies are human beings, but are not capable of rational thought. Elderly people deep in the grip of dementia are human beings who are not capable of rational thought.

3. The target audience for animated TV shows is children.

To show this claim isn't always true, we need an example of an animated TV show whose target audience is not children.

The Simpsons, *Rick and Morty*, and *Archer* are all animated TV shows intended for adults.

Demonstration Exercises 3B: Counterexamples to Moral Generalizations

1. Death is the worst thing that could befall the person who has died.

To show this claim isn't always true, we need an example of a person who has died, and dying was *not* the worst thing that could have happened to them.

(*continued*)

Fanciful counterexample: Imagine a soldier in World War II who is wounded on the battlefield and dies just before he is found by the Nazis. If he'd survived any longer, the Nazis would have captured him, run gruesome and painful medical experiments on him, and then killed him when he was no longer useful. In this case, it was better for him to die before capture than to survive to be captured. Death, in this case, was *not* the worst thing that could befall him.

Realistic counterexample: Imagine an elderly woman dying of terminal cancer. She has, at most, a few months to live and is in such terrible pain that she cannot enjoy time with her family or do any of the activities that used to bring her joy. She hopes she will die sooner rather than later. Now imagine two stories branching from this point. In one, she has a heart attack during the night and dies peacefully in her sleep. In the other, she has a heart attack, but her doctors notice soon enough that they resuscitate her, and she lives for another three months of painful loneliness before her cancer kills her. The first version of the story shows that a peaceful death in her sleep was not the worst thing that could befall her.

2. You must, morally speaking, return things that have been loaned to you when the person who loaned it asks for it back.

To show this claim isn't always true, we need an example of a case in which returning borrowed property would be the *wrong* thing to do.

Fanciful counterexample: Imagine that you have borrowed a chainsaw from your neighbor to trim an overgrown tree in your backyard. The next morning he knocks on your door with a manic look in his eyes, wearing a leather butcher's apron. He says he spotted some teens in a van down the street and needs his chainsaw so he can go carve them to pieces. In this case, you should not return his property to him when he asks for it.[1]

Realistic counterexample: Suppose your best friend is a recovering alcoholic, sober for nearly two years. You recently borrowed $20 from her and have every intention of paying her back. One afternoon she calls, and you sense she's upset. She asks to stop by and pick up the $20 you owe her. She tells you she has just been fired, and plans to buy and drink a bottle of gin. In this case you should provide whatever support you can to your friend in this time of crisis, but you should not enable her return to drinking by repaying the money you owe her.

3. No doctor should ever touch a patient without first securing that patient's explicit, voluntary, and informed consent.

To show this claim isn't always true, we need an example that *is* a case of a doctor touching a patient without that patient's consent, but is *not* morally wrong.

Realistic counterexample: Emergency room doctors do this all the time. When a patient comes in injured and unconscious, doctors must begin treating the injuries while the patient is still unconscious. Providing that emergency treatment is morally required even though informed consent is impossible.

Fanciful counterexample: Suppose a prankster spikes the Senior Prom punchbowl with a powerful hallucinogen. While in the grip of hallucinations, one of the attendees cuts herself badly enough to need medical attention. Suppose she is calm and perfectly happy for the doctor to clean and bandage her wound, but because she is hallucinating she cannot understand her situation well enough to give her informed consent. In this case, it is morally permissible for the doctor to

[1]Adapted from Plato's *Republic*, Book I (331c).

clean and bandage her wound even though she is temporarily incapable of consenting to treatment.

4. One must always help one's family first, strangers second.

To show this claim isn't always true, we need an example of a case in which helping family first, strangers second, is the morally wrong thing to do.

Realistic counterexample: In situations in which a family member might like a little help and a stranger desperately needs help, the needs of the stranger can uncontroversially outweigh the needs of your family member. Suppose, for example, that your brother has asked for your help in moving an old sofa to the alley for trash pickup, and on your way over to his house you see a person collapse on the sidewalk. In that situation, you should help the seriously needy stranger before you help your mildly needy brother.

Fanciful counterexample: If your family were very, very bad, they might not deserve any of your help at all. Suppose, for example, that you come from a family of bank robbers who has asked for your help driving a getaway car. You shouldn't help them. If there are less awful strangers around who need your help, you should help them instead.

CHAPTER 3 PRACTICE EXERCISES

GENERATING COUNTEREXAMPLES

Exercises 3A: Counterexamples to Descriptive Generalizations

Exercise Instructions: *Offer a counterexample for each of the following universal generalizations.*

1. Cats are domesticated animals.
2. Everyone likes to eat peanuts.
3. Every planet has at least one moon.
4. Television shows are half an hour long.
5. Everyone pays income taxes.
6. Everyone likes to be hugged.
7. No one has ever offered to help someone without expecting something in return.

Exercises 3B: Counterexamples to Moral Generalizations

Exercise Instructions: *Offer a counterexample for each of the following moral claims. For additional practice and fun, try offering one fanciful and one realistic counterexample in each case.*

1. Physically hurting a child is always morally wrong.
2. If it's a non-human animal, there's nothing morally wrong with eating it.
3. People should be held morally responsible for all of the consequences of their voluntary choices.
4. It's never OK to call the police on your neighbors.
5. You should stand by your spouse through thick and thin.

6. You should always do what your parents tell you to do.
7. You should choose the career path that will bring you the most joy.
8. Parents should never lie to their children.
9. One ought never loan money to a friend.
10. A health care provider ought never upset a patient.
11. A health care provider ought always do the procedure or treatment a patient has freely and voluntarily decided to do.
12. A health care provider ought always do the treatment that would most benefit a patient's health or well-being.
13. You should always treat people the way they want to be treated.
14. The right thing to do in a situation is always to treat another person in the way you would want to be treated in that situation.
15. You should always keep your promises.
16. Intentionally doing something that you know could result in harm to your partner or spouse is wrong.
17. Teachers should never do anything that offends their students.
18. The duty of a psychologist to maintain client confidentiality is without exception..
19. Within the limits of the law, the morally obligatory choice for a CEO of a big business is whatever choice will maximize the business's profits.
20. Because they are not sentient, there could never be a *moral* reason not to eat a plant.
21. Using someone's property without their permission is always morally wrong.
22. It's always wrong to destroy natural resources.
23. Any policy that excludes a whole group from work or social life is oppressive.
24. If women are in charge of performing an activity and view it as important, then that activity is not gender oppressive.

CHAPTER 4

Representing Arguments in Standard Form

CHAPTER GOALS

By reading this chapter and completing the exercises, you will learn how to:

- Represent in standard form a simple argument from a passage.
- Represent in standard form complex arguments with implicit content or supplementary information.

STANDARD FORM: A TOOL FOR ANALYZING ARGUMENTS

Arguments are at the heart of nearly all philosophical writing. When philosophers offer arguments, they make clear the chain of reasoning that has led them to accept a conclusion. That conclusion might be challenging, controversial, or surprising, but if the argument in favor of it is a good one, it gives us all reason to believe the conclusion is true.

Before we, as readers, can evaluate whether or not an argument is a good one—the kind of argument that gives us reason to believe the conclusion is true—we must first *understand* it. Philosophers commonly check their understanding of arguments by representing them in standard form. Using this presentation technique allows us to confirm that we have identified all the component parts of an argument and understood how they fit together.

This chapter introduces the technique of representing arguments in standard form. Careful practice of this technique will pay dividends, as every chapter in the remainder of the book makes use of standard form.

REPRESENTING ARGUMENTS IN STANDARD FORM: THREE STEPS

An argument is a chain of reasoning in which a set of claims (the premises) is offered in support of a further claim (the conclusion). Written and spoken arguments typically include supplemental material intended to make them clearer or more convincing to the audience. Such material might include digressions, asides, or rhetorical flair. A *standard form* representation of an argument is a minimalist representation of the argument in which each crucial premise is placed on its own numbered line and any supplemental, supporting, extraneous, or stylistic material is stripped away. An argument's standard form representation is, in effect, the argument's skeleton.

Example: Singer's give-to-charities argument

A number of global poverty relief agencies have programs that are proven to prevent suffering and death at very low cost.[1] De-worming treatments for schoolchildren, for example, cost less than $1/child/year. Programs that support the distribution and effective use of mosquito nets cost as little as $50 per net. If you were to donate 1 percent of your total income to programs like these, you would undoubtedly save lives and prevent serious suffering at very little cost to yourself.

It is true that donating 1 percent of your income to effective relief agencies would require you to make *some* sacrifices—you might have to eat at restaurants less often or wait to upgrade your phone. But compared to suffering and death, these sacrifices are incredibly small. We all acknowledge that, in general, we have a moral obligation to prevent suffering and death when we can do so at little cost to ourselves. Since charitable giving does that, it follows that we all have an obligation to donate 1 percent of our total income to effective relief organizations.

A standard-form representation of the argument in this passage looks like this:

1. We could prevent serious suffering at little cost to ourselves by donating 1 percent of our total income to effective relief agencies. (PREMISE)
2. We have a moral obligation to prevent serious suffering when we could do so at little cost to ourselves. (PREMISE)

Therefore, we have a moral obligation to donate 1 percent of our total income to effective relief agencies. (CONCLUSION)

This minimalist representation of the argument clearly states the conclusion and numbers the premises the author offers in support of that conclusion. These are the premises we must evaluate in order to determine whether we should accept the argument's conclusion.

How do we get from the original passage to its standard-form representation? There is no mechanical method. We have to read carefully to sort examples, evidence, and commentary from the essential bones of the argument. We have to

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[1]Adapted from an argument in Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save: How to Do Your Part to End World Poverty* (Random House Incorporated, 2010).

understand the passage well enough to recognize the premises essential to the argument the passage makes.

Even though there is no mechanical method for properly representing an argument in standard form, the process always involves three phases.

FIRST: Identify the conclusion of the argument.

Ask yourself: what is the claim the author is trying to persuade me to accept? That point is the conclusion, the claim that all other claims support. If you are ever in doubt about which claim is the conclusion, ask: does the author make this claim in support of a different claim? Or is this the claim that all the other claims support? In the example above, the claims about the effectiveness of relief organizations and about our moral obligation to prevent suffering are both intended to support the claim that we *should* give 1 percent of our income to charity. That is this argument's conclusion.

SECOND: Articulate the premises that are essential to the author's case for that conclusion.

Ask yourself: what are the key claims the author offers in support of the conclusion? For the passage above, that means asking what claims would have to be true to show that we have a moral obligation to donate 1 percent of our total income to effective aid agencies. One reason offered in the passage is that by donating 1 percent of our total income we could prevent serious suffering at little cost to ourselves. This is the point of the first paragraph, and we represent that claim as our first premise:

1. We could prevent serious suffering at little cost to ourselves by donating 1 percent of our total income to effective aid agencies.

But this premise, alone, does not establish the conclusion that we ought to donate 1 percent of our income. To connect the author's first premise to the conclusion, we must pay attention to the second paragraph. There, the author makes claim about our moral obligations to prevent serious suffering when we can. That is the second premise of the argument:

2. We have a moral obligation to prevent serious suffering when we could do so at little cost to ourselves.

These two premises, taken together, entail the conclusion that we ought to donate 1 percent of our income.

THIRD: Check that your standard form representation is clear, accurate, and charitable.

Reread the original passage and your standard-form representation of it. Ask yourself: Would the author accept my standard-form representation of this argument? A standard-form representation that an author would not embrace as a fair and accurate representation of the argument's skeleton is probably not a good representation. In this case, after reviewing the original passage and our standard form representation of it, we think the author would approve of our work.

Example: Phillips's restrict-access-to-guns argument

> [The point of gun legislation should be to reduce the number of gun deaths. The case for laws restricting access to guns thus emerges from the answer to a simple question:] "Would more guns prevent gun deaths? The data would seem to suggest it would not. The United States already has the highest gun-ownership rate in the world—an average 88.8 guns owned per 100 people . . . (The No. 2 gun-owning-country is Yemen, at 54.8.) We don't have the highest crime rate among developed nations . . . but we do have the highest firearm-homicide rate . . . In other words: Lots of guns don't seem to have prevented us from becoming top in the world in gun deaths. So why do we believe more guns would change that?"[2] [We ought to change course and pass laws that restrict access to guns.]

We use the same three-step process to analyze the argument in this passage. Ask first: what is the conclusion? Then: what are the premises that are supposed to justify that conclusion? Finally: would the author approve of our representation?

Here is our representation of the Phillips's argument:

1. We ought to pass laws concerning access to guns that reduce the number of gun deaths.
2. Laws *restricting* access to guns would reduce the number of gun deaths.

Therefore, we ought to pass laws that restrict access to guns.

Is this a fair, accurate, and charitable representation of the original passage? You might be concerned that the author was careful to include statistics about global gun-ownership rates and gun-homicide rates, and those statistics do not appear in our standard-form representation. That is how it should be. She included those statistics as empirical evidence in support of her belief, expressed in premise 2, that laws restricting access to guns reduce the number of gun deaths. It is only the premise itself that should appear in a standard-form representation, and that is what we have done here.

This argument illustrates one reason philosophers are careful to clearly distinguish the premises intended to support the conclusion. Public debates about gun control often fail to do this, which can lead to frustrating and unproductive disagreement. The author of this passage endorses *two* premises: one about what laws ought to do, and one about the expected effects of gun restrictions. It is certainly possible that someone who disagrees with her *conclusion* about gun control might agree with *one* of these premises. Someone might, for example, accept the proffered evidence that gun restrictions reduce the number of gun deaths, but disagree that reducing the number of gun deaths should be the goal of gun

[2]Quoted from Amber Phillips's column "The Gun Control Debate, Explained in 5 Questions" for *The Fix*, Dec. 3, 2015. Online: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/10/08/how-to-argue-about-gun-control/

policy. Putting the argument in standard form allows us to pinpoint the location of our disagreements, which helps participants in the discussion avoid talking past each other or arguing in circles.

Learning to represent even straightforward arguments, such as the previous two examples, takes practice. But many arguments include complicating factors that make them even more challenging to analyze. Two especially common complicating factors are *implicit content* and *supplementary information.*

ANALYZING ARGUMENTS WITH IMPLICIT CONTENT

Implicit premises and conclusions are claims, critical to an argument's structure, that an author leaves unstated. Authors sometimes leave the conclusion of an argument unstated, trusting readers to gather from context what the conclusion of the passage is supposed to be. More commonly, an author will leave a premise implicit: they will assume but not explicitly state a claim essential to their argument.

In some cases, an author believes a claim is so obvious that it isn't worth stating explicitly. In some cases, an author simply hasn't noticed that the argument depends on an unstated claim. Whatever the reason, when representing an argument in standard form, you should explicitly state all claims, including any the author has left implicit.

Example: Davis's vegetarians-are-hypocrites argument

> Many vegetarians argue that god's creatures shouldn't be sacrificed simply to appease our craving for a thick, juicy rib eye. While there may be some merit to their arguments, their rationale also reeks of hypocrisy. Although vegetarians openly decry the slaughter of animals, they think nothing of tearing carrots and spuds out of the earth or of sticking a zucchini into a high-speed blender. Like it or not, plants are also living organisms that respond to stimuli like light, gravity, and touch.[3] [This argument will convince even the most self-righteous vegetarians that they are hypocrites.]

What is the conclusion? The author's ultimate point seems to be that vegetarians are hypocrites.

What premises does the author appeal to in order to convince us to accept that conclusion? The author clearly asserts that vegetarians eat living things: plants. That appears to be a premise of the argument. But what claim is supposed to connect the fact that vegetarians eat living plants to the conclusion that vegetarians are hypocrites? The author has left that premise implicit, so we have, essentially, this:

1. Vegetarians eat plants, which are living things.
2. ????

Therefore, vegetarians are hypocrites.

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[3]Quoted from Lyle Davis's column "How To: Argue Against Vegetarians," for askmen.com, publication date unclear: http://www.askmen.com/money/how_to_400/477_how-to-argue-against-vegetarians.html

Implicit in the original passage is the claim that non-hypocritical vegetarianism requires vegetarians to refuse to eat any living thing. When we make the implicit premise explicit, we get the following standard form representation:

1. Vegetarians eat plants, which are living things.
2. If vegetarians eat any living things, then they are hypocrites.

Therefore, vegetarians are hypocrites.

Would the author accept this representation of his argument? We see no grounds for complaint.

Representing arguments in standard form lays the groundwork for a careful discussion of their strengths and weaknesses. But sometimes a standard form representation can, all on its own, expose a weak argument. In this case, premise 2, once stated explicitly, is obviously implausible. Most ethical vegetarians believe it is wrong to cause *unnecessary suffering.* Plants cannot suffer, which is why most ethical vegetarians believe there's no moral problem with eating them. The implausibility of premise 2 might have been obscured by the pugilistic tone of the original passage; once we have the argument properly represented in standard form, its weakness is obvious.

ANALYZING ARGUMENTS WITH SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

In addition to implicit premises, many real-world arguments include *supplementary information,* which is information intended to support or clarify an argument's premises or conclusion. Learning to recognize supplementary information makes it easier to represent arguments in standard form.

Example: No-platforming is morally wrong

Consider this excessively minimalist passage about controversial speech on college campuses:

> It has happened several times now that student groups have no-platformed controversial speakers. It is morally wrong for students to do this. No-platforming undermines productive democratic discourse, and that is something we ought not do.

This passage contains a complete argument. Even without understanding what the author means by any single sentence here, you could still recognize the premises and conclusion and represent them in standard form, like so:

1. It's morally wrong to undermine productive democratic discourse.
2. No-platforming undermines productive democratic discourse.

Therefore, no-platforming is morally wrong.

Both the original passage and its standard form representation are so succinct that, to many readers, they will not make sense. To effectively convey the argument, the author of the passage should include additional information to help readers understand the context of the debate and the meanings of important terms. Given that this is an area of significant controversy and high personal stakes, the author should make some effort to show why the premises are plausible, and they should take special care not to be misunderstood. This expanded passage takes a step in that direction:

> A recent student movement on college campuses advocates the 'no-platforming' (also known as 'de-platforming') of certain speakers. To no-platform a speaker means to prevent them from speaking on campus, either by physically blocking their access to the stage or by shouting them down once they're there. Although no-platforming is often motivated by the noble goal of protecting vulnerable students, it is wrong because it undermines productive democratic discourse.
>
> Democratic societies depend on the free discussion of diverse viewpoints on issues affecting the community. Taking diverse viewpoints seriously is the best way to overturn old, misguided dogmas. Remember: lots of people used to believe racial slavery was morally permissible. No one believes that now. It was the free and open exchange of ideas—productive democratic discourse—that changed people's minds.
>
> To no-platform speakers—even bigoted and offensive ones—undermines productive democratic discourse. Even when a speaker is completely, offensively wrong—even if they are anti-Muslim bigots, racists, or homophobes—it promotes productive democratic discourse to allow them to speak. There are at least two reasons that this is so. First, if someone has mistaken views, there is no chance of them ever changing their mind if they don't talk about them. Second, it is important for all of us to maintain our ability to respond to mistaken views. If we shout them down instead of explaining our objections, we risk losing the ability to explain why they're wrong.
>
> My argument is that no-platforming speakers is wrong because it undermines productive democratic discourse. This argument does not imply that there is something valuable or true in the *content* of the speech of people with stupid or offensive views. The benefit to society is in maintaining our ability to *refute* those views. And further, allowing speakers with offensive views to speak is compatible with doing everything we can to support the people who are the targets of their speech. For example, if an anti-Muslim bigot is scheduled to speak on campus, student groups could band together to celebrate the Muslim students and publicly refute the views of the speaker. That would be much more effective than no-platforming the speaker.[4]

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[4]Adapted from an argument in John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Electric Book Company London, 2001).

The argument contained in this longer passage is fundamentally the same as the minimalist original; we would represent both passages in standard form the same way. But the second, extended presentation of the argument adds supplementary information that makes the argument easier to understand. Some of the information is *background information*: it defines unfamiliar terms and provides context for understanding the topic. For instance, the first paragraph explains what the word "no-platforming" means, and the second explains what "productive democratic discourse" means. Some of the information is aimed at *illustration or justification* of premises. For instance, the second paragraph supports premise 1, and the third paragraph supports premise 2. Finally, the passage includes *clarifying explanation* that aims to avoid misunderstanding. For instance, the last paragraph clarifies the conclusion by explaining what it is *not* saying. Effective presentations of arguments typically include some or all of these types of supplementary information.

The lesson: supplementary information makes arguments more accessible by supporting, clarifying, and contextualizing the premises and conclusion. When you work to represent an argument in standard form, be sensitive to the distinction between premises and the supplementary information that supports them. At the outset, it can be helpful to be on the lookout for common types of supplementary information, such as background information, illustrative examples, justifications of premises, and clarifying explanations.

STOP HERE

Example: Shambley's unfair trauma argument

The following passage contains an argument. As you read it, pay special attention to sorting supplementary information from the argument:

> During an undergraduate honors course titled "Scholar Citizen" at Augsburg University in Minneapolis, Minnesota, students were asked to read James Baldwin's book *The Fire Next Time* (1963). In the book, Baldwin explores themes related to race in America. During class, professor Phillip Adamo asked students to take turns reading passages. The class was shocked when a student read a particular quotation: "You can really only be destroyed by believing that you really are what the white world calls a n-----." In response, Adamo tried to open a discussion of how the class should use the slur word when reading the text, but in the process he said the word himself.
>
> This led to a serious discussion on campus: Should a professor (or students) say words that are used as racial epithets, even if the words are part of legitimate course texts? A number of students were outraged that a White teacher would speak that word in class, and they began to mount a campaign for various campus reforms, including having Adamo removed or sanctioned. In his defense, Adamo stated that he was only mentioning the word as it was stated in the course text, not using the word as a slur.
>
> Many students were not convinced by this defense. One, Terrence Shambley, Jr., argued: "If you have to evoke trauma in your students to teach them

something, it seems counterproductive to me . . . It's not a fair situation, especially because other students in class don't have to feel that trauma. That trauma is only evoked for the black students in the room.[5] [So, professor Adamo should not have said the N-word in class.]"

The first two paragraphs of the passage describe a controversy in some detail. Those paragraphs don't make an argument; instead, they offer the context we need to understand the argument.

The last paragraph contains an argument about the controversy. Once we recognize that we are reading an argument, we can use the same three-step process to represent it in standard form.

First, what is the conclusion? The student intends to persuade us that "the professor should not have said the N-word in class." That is the claim all the other claims support; it is the conclusion of the argument.

Second, what are the premises? What claims would have to be true to show that the professor should not have used the N-word in class? In this case, there are two. The argument makes the descriptive claim that the N-word evoked trauma in some students but not others. It also makes the moral claim that evoking trauma in some students but not others is unfair, and (this is implied) professors should not do that. Together, these claims are necessary to establish the conclusion that professor Adamo should not have said the N-word in class. We thus get this representation of the argument in standard form:

Trauma Argument:

1. When the professor said the N-word in class it evoked trauma in some students but not others.
2. Professors shouldn't do things that evoke trauma in some students but not others.

So, the professor should not have said the N-word in class.

Third, is our representation of the argument clear, accurate, and charitable? Would the author accept our representation of their argument?

We have emphasized that representing arguments in standard form is not a mechanical process—there is an element of art to it. In some cases, there are multiple defensible ways to represent a single passage. Comparably good representations can even have different numbers of premises. That is true of this example. Note that the student making the argument explicitly appeals to the value of fairness, and we have not mentioned fairness in our standard-form representation. An alternative approach would include the student's claim about fairness.

Trauma Argument (Fairness Version):

1. Using the N-word in class evoked trauma for black students that it did not evoke for other students.

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[5]This quotation is from Osei, Zipporah, "Do Racial Epithets Have Any Place in the Classroom? A Professor's Suspension Fuels that Debate," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Feb. 8, 2019. https://www.chronicle.com/article/Do-Racial-Epithets-Have-Any/245662

2. It is unfair to treat students in a way that evokes trauma for some but not others.
3. It's morally wrong for professors to treat their students unfairly.

Therefore, using the N-word in class was morally wrong.

The main difference between these representations is that the three-premise version treats the claim about fairness as a distinct step in the argument, while the original two-premise version treats the discussion of fairness as supplemental information in support of the moral claim about how professors should behave. You should proceed with the version of the argument that you believe most clearly and charitably represents the author's reasoning. That is a judgment call.

THE VALUE OF REPRESENTING ARGUMENTS IN STANDARD FORM

If arguments typically require supplementary information to be clear and persuasive, then why do we strip all that out when we put the argument into standard form? What is the point of representing an argument in a form that is so skeletal that it isn't, on its own, clear and persuasive?

The primary reason to represent arguments in standard form is that doing so successfully requires us to identify all the essential components of the argument and to understand how those components fit together. Representing an argument in standard form is thus an effective way of confirming that we have charitably and accurately *understood* it. Before we can ask if an argument is a *good* argument, we must understand it, and the technique of standard form helps ensure that we get this order right: understand first, then evaluate.

In addition to the foundational benefit of requiring understanding before evaluation, representing arguments in standard form improves philosophical discussion in the following ways:

- Clearly identifying the essential components of the argument can, itself, highlight weaknesses of an argument. (We saw this in the vegetarians-are-hypocrites argument.)
- Standard form facilitates focused discussion by clearly separating the conclusion from the reasoning that supports it. (When we disagree with each other, we should focus our attention not on each other's conclusions, but rather on each other's reasons for accepting those conclusions.)
- Clearly identifying and labeling the essential components of the argument is a convenience that makes discussion easier. (As we saw in the restrict-access-to-guns argument, a single argument can have multiple controversial premises. Having the premises clearly distinguished and numbered allows us to focus on areas of potential disagreement more precisely: "I think premise 2 is false because . . . ")

You will probably find that working with arguments in standard form improves your work in other classes. Many students report that drafting in standard

form improves the clarity and organization of their writing in all their courses. Beyond the classroom, skill in representing arguments in standard form will help you understand quickly and deeply the arguments you find in the wild.

REVIEW

An argument is a chain of reasoning in which a set of claims (the premises) supports a further claim (the conclusion). Philosophers commonly represent arguments in standard form.

Standard form: a style of argument presentation in which each essential premise is placed on its own numbered line, followed by the conclusion.

Arguments in real-world discussions, articles, books, and newspapers often include implicit content and supplementary information. One key reason to use standard form is that presenting arguments in that format forces us to state explicitly every component piece of the argument and to sort its premises from the material intended to support them. Representing an argument in standard form thus helps ensure that we have *understood* it; only after we have understood an argument can we evaluate it.

Implicit content: a premise or conclusion that is essential to an argument but not explicitly stated by the argument's author.

Supplementary information: information beyond the main premises and conclusion that is intended to help audiences better understand the argument.

To test your understanding of the material introduced in this chapter, complete the Demonstration Exercises and then check your answers against the solutions that follow.

Demonstration Exercises

Demonstration Exercises are designed to give you immediate feedback on your grasp of the skills introduced in this chapter. To use them effectively, you should attempt answers to all of them, then check your work against our suggested answers, which follow. For a detailed explanation of how best to use Demonstration Exercises, read the book's Introduction.

Demonstration Exercises 4A: Representing Simpler Arguments in Standard Form

***Exercise Instructions**: The following passages contain simple arguments, some of which are moral arguments and some of which are non-moral arguments. Represent each argument in standard form.*

1. Spanking your children is wrong if there are other less painful and humiliating forms of discipline that are at least as effective at shaping children's behavior. Since there are indeed more effective methods—such as using positive reinforcement, holding to clear expectations, and encouraging collaborative communication—it is therefore wrong to spank your children.

(*continued*)

2. A person would be a good US president if they're a successful business person. Therefore, Ms. Chambley would be a good president, because she runs a very successful business.
3. Being a good business person is not enough to make you a good US president, because being a good business person is enough to make you a good president only if presidents don't need to focus on anything but economic success. But, clearly, presidents do need to focus on additional things, such as justice and people's well-being.
4. Some people claim that we should never judge the morality of practices from other cultures. This is plainly false. If it were so, then it would be wrong to condemn genocide when it is practiced by another culture. Condemning genocide, however, is not only morally permissible but morally required. It follows that it is not always wrong to condemn the practices of other cultures.

Demonstration Exercises 4B: Representing Arguments with Implicit Content

Exercise Instructions: *The following passages contain arguments with implicit premises and/or conclusions. Represent each argument in standard form, and be sure to make explicit any content the author of the passage has left implicit.*

1. Routinely playing video games by yourself all day prevents you from developing your social and intellectual capacities, so it's clearly bad for you.
2. David is great at magic tricks, and people who are great at magic tricks are the life of the party. So, . . .
3. People who are fair, thoughtful, socially skilled, and courageous would be good candidates for the CEO position. That's why Fardosa would clearly be a good candidate.
4. Since war is morally unjustified when most of the casualties are civilians, most wars are morally unjustified.

Demonstration Exercises 4C: Representing More Complex Arguments in Standard Form

Exercise Instructions: *The following passages make arguments that are somewhat more challenging to analyze, either because they make complicated claims or because they contain a lot of supplementary information. Represent each argument in standard form.*

1. The mystery is solved

Only three people had keys to the vault with the jewels: Alice, Bob, and Charlie. It must have been one of those three who stole them. But on the night of the theft, Alice was overseas, more than 1,000 miles away from the room. She couldn't possibly have stolen them. That same night, Bob was locked up in a county jail for an unrelated crime. So it couldn't have been Bob, either. Therefore, it must have been Charlie who stole the jewels.

Hint: arguments can have one, two, three, or more premises. The most straightforward way to represent "The mystery is solved" is with three premises.

2. In favor of fifteen-minute passing periods

Saint Paul College should switch to fifteen-minute passing periods. The reason is simple: the school ought to choose policies that best support student learning, and longer passing periods would support student learning better than the current five-minute policy. There are at least three reasons that longer passing periods are better. First, studies show that reflecting on new information and new skills

immediately after being introduced to them significantly improves learning. When students only have five minutes to get to class, they have no time to pause and think about what they've just learned. Second, the time immediately after class is an ideal time for students to talk to their professors about that day's new material. Or rather, it *would* be an ideal time if students and professors had more than five minutes before they had to be at their next class. Third, for students who have to cross the building, or stop at the restroom between classes, the rush to arrive on time at the next class introduces needless stress to what should be a routine process. Students who arrive at class flustered, having had to run through the halls, or skip going to the bathroom, arrive in no condition to start learning right away.

3. Star Trek versus Star Wars

There are many ways to evaluate the quality of television shows and movies. Some shows have excellent actors, or excellent writing, or excellent directors of photography, or excellent sound design. Some shows have all these things. But at the end of the day, what really matters, when evaluating the quality of shows that meet a certain threshold of competence with respect to craft, is the effect they have on the world. The best TV shows and movies make the world a better place; they teach their audiences something important or invite them to think hard about what changes would make the world better. Judged by this standard, *Star Trek* is clearly superior to *Star Wars*. *Star Trek* is a story told in a world much like our own, in which tolerance and diplomacy are almost always the right tools to deal with the conflicts that inevitably arise between basically good people with different understandings of the good life. *Star Wars*, with its cartoonishly good and evil characters, teaches a comic-book version of morality, and actually makes the world a worse place by reinforcing the idea that some groups of people are rotten to the core and must be exterminated. Give me *Star Trek* any day of the week.

4. The problem of evil[6]

God (at least god understood as an all-powerful, all-knowing, benevolent entity in the sky) definitely doesn't exist. If such a god did exist, then there would be no pointless suffering on Earth, because god would foresee it and, out of kindness, act to prevent it. (Just as you would act to prevent a toddler from wandering accidentally into traffic, god would prevent the rest of us from accidentally being hurt in terrible and pointless ways.) But the world is jam-packed with pointless suffering. People are trapped in war zones through no fault of their own. Kids are born into families with abusive parents. Entire cities are devastated by hurricanes, earthquakes, and tidal waves. Since no benevolent supernatural being steps in to stop this pointless suffering, we can confidently conclude that no benevolent supernatural being exists.

5. A cosmological argument[7]

Here's an easy argument that something (or someone) caused the universe to exist. Think of every object you have interacted with today. Think of the books you've touched, the chairs, cars, walls, roads, air, dirt, water, and so on. Not a

[6]Adapted from David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (William Blackwood, 1907), pt. X.

[7]Adapted from arguments advanced by Medieval Islamic theologians Al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd. Today it is sometimes called the Kalām Cosmological Argument, and it is typically used as the first half of an argument for the existence of god.

(*continued*)

single one of those things has existed forever—they all began to exist at some point. Some artifacts, like books and cars, began to exist because they were caused to exist by workers in factories. Others, like buildings and roads, began to exist because they were caused to exist by construction workers. Living parts of the natural world, like plants and animals, began to exist because they were caused to exist by natural processes of reproduction and growth. Nonliving parts of the world, like rocks and air, began to exist because they were caused to exist by inorganic natural causes, including geologic processes and stellar evolution. These are all individual illustrations of a general point that is obviously true: if something *began* to exist, then it was *caused* to exist.

But science tells us that the universe itself has not always existed. At some point, the universe itself *began* to exist. Therefore, the universe was *caused* to exist.

6. Bodily resurrection[8]

Many religions teach that at some point in the future, everyone who has previously died will be bodily resurrected and restored to the healthiest form of their original bodies. But when we think through some of the puzzles that this teaching presents, it becomes clear that such bodily resurrection is conceptually incoherent, which is to say it is impossible.

When a person dies, their body eventually dissolves into a multitude of particles that are scattered to the soil, air, and water. Could those particles be gathered and re-formed to restore the person's body at some later date? Perhaps an omnipotent god could do that.

Some of those scattered particles are absorbed by the roots of plants, and eventually eaten by beasts or fish. In this case, the component parts of the dead person's body have been entirely transformed and transmuted by the processes of growth and digestion. Could those particles be gathered, untransmuted, and re-formed to restore the body at some later date? Perhaps an omnipotent god could do that.

Here is where things get especially tricky. Some of a dead person's scattered particles are absorbed by plants that are eaten by *people*. Or those scattered parts are eaten by animals that are eaten by *people*. Or in the case of cannibals, the parts of the dead person's body are directly devoured by *people*. In short: over time, the same material particles can be component parts of the bodies of *many different people*.

If it were possible for everyone to be bodily resurrected, then it must be possible for everyone to have all their own particles restored to them. But if it were possible for everyone to have all their own particles restored to them, then it must be possible for a single participle to be part of many different bodies at the same time. This cannot be. Even an omnipotent god could not place a single particle in many places at a single time. Bodily resurrection of *everyone*, as promised by many religions, is therefore impossible.

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[8]Adapted from Robert Boyle, *Some Physico-Theological Considerations about the Possibility of the Resurrection* (Herringman, 1961). Boyle's project in this essay is to critically engage the argument paraphrased here.

Solutions to Demonstration Exercises

Demonstration Exercises are most useful if you make your best attempt to complete them before you look at the answers. If you haven't yet attempted answers to all the Demonstration Exercises, go back and do that now.

Note: your standard-form representations should identify the same premises and conclusions as we have, but variation in wording or expression is perfectly fine.

Solutions to Demonstration Exercises 4A

1.

1. Spanking children is wrong if there are less painful and humiliating forms of discipline that are at least as effective at shaping children's behavior.
2. There are forms of discipline that are less painful and humiliating than spanking but just as effective at shaping children's behavior.

Therefore, spanking children is wrong.

2.

1. A person would be a good US president if they're a good business person.
2. Ms. Chambley is a good business person.

Thus, Ms. Chambley would be a good US president.

3.

1. Being a good business person is enough to make you a good US president only if presidents only need to focus on economic success.
2. Presidents don't need to focus only on economic success.

So, being a good business person is not enough to make you a good US president.

4.

1. If people should never judge the morality of practices in other cultures, then it's wrong to condemn genocide committed by another culture.
2. It's not wrong to condemn genocide committed by another culture.

Thus, it's not true that people should never judge the morality of practices in other cultures.

Solutions to Demonstration Exercises 4B

1.

1. Something is bad for you if it prevents you from developing your social and intellectual capacities. [IMPLICIT PREMISE]
2. Routinely playing video games by yourself all day prevents you from developing your social and intellectual capacities.

Therefore, routinely playing video games by yourself all day is bad for you.

(*continued*)

2.
   1. People who are good at magic tricks are the life of the party.
   2. David is good at magic tricks.

   Thus, David is the life of the party. [IMPLICIT CONCLUSION]

3.
   1. People who are fair, thoughtful, socially skilled, and courageous would be good candidates for the CEO position.
   2. Fardosa is fair, thoughtful, socially skilled, and courageous. [IMPLICIT PREMISE]

   So, Fardosa would be a good candidate for the CEO position.

4.
   1. War is morally unjustified when most of the casualties are civilians.
   2. In most wars, most of the casualties are civilians. [IMPLICIT PREMISE]

   Thus, most wars are morally unjustified.

Solutions to Demonstration Exercises 4C

1. **The mystery is solved**
   1. Only Alice, Bob, or Charlie could have stolen the jewels.
   2. Alice didn't steal them.
   3. Bob didn't steal them.

   Therefore, Charlie stole the jewels.
2. **In favor of fifteen-minute passing periods**
   1. Saint Paul College should choose school policies that best promote student learning.
   2. Fifteen-minute passing periods would better support student learning than five-minute passing periods.

   Thus, Saint Paul College should switch to fifteen-minute passing periods
3. **Star Trek versus Star Wars**
   1. Good TV shows and movies make the world a better place, while bad TV shows and movies make the world worse.
   2. *Star Trek* makes the world a better place, while *Star Wars* makes it worse.

   So, *Star Trek* is better than *Star Wars*.
4. **The problem of evil**
   1. If God exists, then there would be no pointless suffering in the world.
   2. There is pointless suffering in the world.

   Therefore, God doesn't exist.
5. **A cosmological argument**
   1. Everything that begins to exist was caused to exist.

2. The universe began to exist.

   Thus, the universe was caused to exist.

6. **Bodily resurrection**
   1. If bodily resurrection of everyone is possible, then it's possible for everyone to have all their original particles restored to them.
   2. If it's possible for everyone to have all their original particles restored to them, then it's possible for a particle to be in many places at the same time.
   3. It is impossible for one particle to be in many places at the same time.

   So, bodily resurrection of everyone is impossible.

CHAPTER 4 PRACTICE EXERCISES

REPRESENTING ARGUMENTS IN STANDARD FORM

Exercises 4A: Representing Simpler Arguments in Standard Form

Exercise Instructions: *The following passages contain simple arguments, some of which are moral arguments and some of which are non-moral arguments. Represent each argument in standard form.*

1. Is death bad for the one who dies? No. After all, something is bad for you only if you exist when it happens. But you do not exist when you are dead.[9]
2. A being has moral rights only if it makes sense to hold it accountable for its choices and praise or blame it, in moral terms, for those choices. Thus, non-human animals do not have moral rights, since it makes no sense to hold them morally accountable for the things they do.
3. Parkinson's Disease, like every other disease, must be caused either by inherited genetic factors or by environmental factors. Examples of inherited diseases are sickle cell anemia, cystic fibrosis, and Huntington's disease. Examples of environmentally caused diseases are skin cancer and lead poisoning. The evidence is strong that there is, in most cases, no inherited cause of Parkinson's. (One especially strong piece of evidence: it appears to be the case that the children of parents with Parkinson's are no more at risk of developing the disease than are people in the general population.) Given this evidence, we can conclude that Parkinson's is caused by environmental factors.
4. If something doesn't care about its own interests, then there is no reason for the rest of us to extend it moral consideration. So non-conscious organisms (such as plants, mushrooms, microbes, and oysters) don't deserve our moral consideration, since they don't care about their own interests.
5. If something exhibits goal-directed behaviors, then it is possible to benefit or harm it. And if it is possible to benefit or harm something, then its interests

[9]Adapted from Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus."

deserve moral consideration. Furthermore, all living things exhibit goal-directed behavior. (Every living thing strives, grows, procreates, and so on. All these behaviors count as goal-directed behaviors.) That's why all living things deserve moral consideration.[10]

6. It's possible to care about the well-being of something for its own sake only if that thing has interests. And something has interests only if it exhibits goal-directed behavior. Ecosystems do not exhibit goal-directed behavior. Therefore, an ecosystem is not the kind of thing whose well-being we can possibly care about for its own sake.[11]
7. It is incredible to me that people continue to tolerate such an obviously rights-violating institution as the modern system of taxation. No clear-thinking person could deny that taxation violates our rights. After all, taxation is a form of slavery. Lest you think I'm speaking metaphorically, allow me to disabuse you of that confusion. Slavery is forcing someone to work for no pay; taxation confiscates the pay people would have received if there were no taxation. It's literally the same thing. Slavery, obviously, is a rights violation. So, too, is taxation.
8. Some people claim that the institution of taxation is the same thing as the institution of slavery. These people are wrong. Slavery is, fundamentally, the claim of one person or group to own another person or group of people as property. A system of taxation does not involve anyone claiming another person or group as property—it claims that people should contribute some portion of their income to the common good. Institutions that are based on fundamentally different claims cannot be the same institution.

Exercises 4B: Representing Arguments with Implicit Content

Exercise Instructions: *The following passages contain arguments with implicit premises and/or conclusions. Represent each argument in standard form, and be sure to make explicit any content the author of the passage has left implicit.*

1. Women aren't oppressed in America today, since men are subject to serious burdens that are often more significant than those women face: for instance, many more men are in prison, are killed by street or combat violence, and are hurt or killed doing dangerous jobs.[12]
2. You should always eat locally grown food, because eating locally grown food uses resources in a less environmentally damaging way than imported food.
3. All actors are self-involved narcissists. Will Ferrell is an actor. Need I say more?
4. Creatures with central nervous systems are sentient, and therefore dogs are sentient.

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[10]Adapted from an argument in Paul W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

[11]Adapted from an argument in Harley Cahen, "Against the Moral Considerability of Ecosystems," *Environmental Ethics* 10, no. 3 (1988): 195–216.

[12]Adapted from an argument in http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2013/02/05/to-be-happy-must-admit-women-and-men-arent-equal.html.

5. God has commanded us not to steal, and therefore stealing is morally wrong.
6. There are objective moral values only if God exists. Therefore, God exists.
7. God's commanding something is not what makes it right or wrong. If it were, then it would be right to torture a baby for fun if God had commanded us to do that.
8. People act like it's obvious that there are objective moral facts: that there are at least some things that are right or wrong independently of what anyone happens to think or feel about the matter.

   Some simple reflection, however, shows that this belief is false. If there's substantial disagreement about a topic even after it has been extensively discussed for millennia, then that's evidence that there are no objective facts about that topic. Given what we know about people's views of morality, it follows that there are no objective moral facts.
9. Some people believe that the rightness or wrongness of a person's actions depends on that person's culture. On this view, whether arranged child marriages (for instance) are actually right or wrong for a person just depends on whether their culture endorses or frowns upon the practice. But the idea that what's right or wrong depends on cultural attitudes is highly implausible. If what's actually right for you depends on what your culture says, then committing rape would be right for you if your culture endorsed rape as a wholesome practice.
10. [The idea that there are objective values is unlikely to be true.] If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else.[13]

Exercises 4C: Representing More Complex Arguments in Standard Form

Exercise Instructions: *The following passages make arguments that are somewhat more challenging to analyze, either because they make complicated claims or because they contain a lot of supplementary information. Represent each argument in standard form.*

1. There is no afterlife. To see why, consider the following: if the soul does not consist of something physical, then it cannot interact with the body. But, the soul *does* interact with the body. And, if the soul consists of something physical, then it decays with the body after death. Furthermore, if the soul decays with the body after death, then there is no afterlife.
2. If we look at the historical record, we can find *many* cases of non-resistant disbelief in a personal, loving God—that is, we can find many examples of people who despite genuine openness to the possibility, lacked any good reason

[13]Quoted from J. L. Mackie (2015), "The Subjectivity of Values," in *The Ethical Life*, 2nd Edition, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford University Press), 177.

to think a personal, loving God exists. But, if there really was a personal, loving God, then there would not be any non-resistant disbelief. A relationship with a loving, personal God would be very important and beneficial, and a loving and personal God would have the power and motivation to ensure that we would have no reason to doubt we could have such a relationship. Thus, there is not a personal, loving God.[14]

3. The choices I make and the things I do might, some of the time, be noticed by the people who live around me right now. That gives some of those choices the illusory feel of meaningfulness. But with very few exceptions, the choices I make and the things I do right now will soon be forgotten by me and everyone else. This fact remains true whether I am kind or callous, generous or self-absorbed, hard-working or lazy. No matter what I do with my life, the choices I make, the things I do, all will be quickly forgotten.

   It is almost certainly true that in 100 years, I will be completely forgotten. And it is undoubtedly true that I will be completely forgotten in a million years. Why should I invest time and effort in choices and activities that will, ultimately, be completely forgotten? To invest such time and effort would be absurd. To invest such time and effort would be to behave as if my life is meaningful when the perspective of a million years into the future reveals this inescapable conclusion: life is meaningless.
4. Elementary schools across the nation have ceased instruction in cursive penmanship. This is a bad choice that should be reversed. Here's why. Surely we can all agree to this general principle of curriculum design: useful skills that benefit students in a variety of ways throughout their lives ought to have a place in the elementary school curriculum. The skill of writing in cursive benefits students in so many ways that it's hard to count them all. Here is but a small sampling. For children, writing in cursive develops fine motor skills faster than typing, and gives them an achievable challenge they can enjoy meeting. For adults, the ability to read cursive gives them access to letters, journals, and other historical documents written by people in previous generations. For adults, the ability to write in cursive allows them to write more meaningful personal letters—handwritten letters that don't look like they were written by a child. These are a few of the many ways that cursive is a useful skill that benefits students throughout their lives. Cursive should be restored to the elementary school curriculum.
5. In the past, a common definition used to determine whether someone was dead was this: a person is dead if, but only if, they were not respirating and their blood was not circulating. Call this *the cardiopulmonary definition* of death. It turns out that this definition of death is implausible. This becomes clear when we contemplate cases where a person's brain is irreversibly damaged so that it no longer functions at all. A patient in this condition could be put on an artificial respirator and thus would be respirating. The cardiopulmonary definition classifies a person whose brain is entirely non-functional as *not*

[14]Adapted from an argument in John L. Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to Belief in God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

dead. The cardiopulmonary definition is therefore implausible, since a person with no brain function clearly should be classified as dead.[15]

6. When we think about living things in general (from microbes and plants to humans and other animals), we can see that an organism is alive if, and only if, it is functioning as an integrated whole. Certain parts of an organism can stop working and it will still count as being alive because it is still a distinct individual that maintains its own structure and functioning: a plant can still be alive even if one of its leaves dies, and a person can still be alive even if they have poor liver function. Furthermore, because a human organism functions as an integrated whole if, but only if, its brain has not entirely and irreversibly ceased to function, we can conclude that a human is dead if, and only if, their entire brain has irreversibly ceased to function.
7. Eben Alexander, a neurosurgeon, has described his own near-death experience. During an acute bout of meningitis, Alexander fell into a coma. When he eventually emerged from the coma he described some vivid experiences he had had: he traveled through a meadow with a beautiful woman who telepathically revealed spiritual truths, such as the existence of heaven and God, that Alexander had abandoned earlier in his life. Years later, Alexander discovered a photo of a sister he never knew he had—a sister who had died many years before. The woman Alexander had seen in his coma strongly resembled the photograph of his long-dead sister.

   Doctors insisted that Alexander's neocortex was not functioning during his coma. If we are purely physical beings, then how could Alexander have such vivid experiences when his brain was supposedly shut down? And how could he have had such a profound conversation with a woman whom he later found out so strongly resembled his dead sister if he wasn't actually experiencing something real and true? Either we are purely physical beings, or we have an immaterial soul. Alexander's experiences, being incompatible with the former, show that the latter must be true.[16]
8. Philosopher René Descartes argues that human persons are made up of two things: an immaterial (non-physical) mind and a material (physical) body. He also believed that the mind and the body causally interact, meaning that they each cause changes in the other. For instance, my mind (by thinking and desiring) causes my hand to reach out and pick up a book. Or my hand, burned by fire, causes my mind to have the conscious experience of pain.

   However, it is unclear how the mind and body could causally interact if one is immaterial and the other is material. Physical things cause changes in other things only through physical contact: a car is stopped through contact with another car's bumper, an arm is burned through contact with fire, and so on. But, if the mind is immaterial, then it cannot physically contact anything,

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[15]Adapted from an argument discussed in David DeGrazia, "The Definition of Death," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/death-definition/>

[16]Adapted from the argument in Eben Alexander, *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey in the Afterlife* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

including the body. So, if the mind is immaterial and the body material, then the mind and body cannot causally interact.[17]

9. Without God, life [would have no] purpose. For man and the universe would then be simple accidents of chance, thrust into existence for no reason. Without God, the universe is the result of a cosmic accident, a chance explosion There is no reason for which it exists. As for man, he is a freak of nature—blind product of matter plus time plus chance. Man is just a lump of slime that evolved rationality. As one philosopher has put it: "Human life is mounted upon a subhuman pedestal and must shift for itself alone in the heart of a silent and mindless universe."

   What is true of the universe and of the human race is also true of us as individuals. If God does not exist, then you are just a miscarriage of nature, thrust into a purposeless universe to live a purposeless life.[18]

10. . . . God, if we are to believe an orthodox story, has prescribed eternal torment [in Hell] as a punishment for insubordination . . . The orthodox story is explicit about the temporal scale of the punishment: it is to go on forever. Many of those who tell the orthodox story are also concerned to emphasize the quality of the punishment. The agonies to be endured by the damned intensify, in unimaginable ways, the sufferings we undergo in our earthly lives . . . Although those who elaborate the orthodox account are sometimes concerned with the fit between crime and punishment, there is no possibility of a genuine balance. For the punishment of the damned is infinitely disproportionate to their crimes. [Therefore, God could never be justified in condemning anyone to Hell.][19]

11. According to the Medical Model of disability, a disability is an impairment that inherently causes a person to face significant personal and social limitations. The Medical Model doesn't imply that disabled people matter less or that people with disabilities don't have lives worth living. The Medical Model does, however, imply that their disabilities make their lives worse, no matter where they live. For example, the Medical Model says that, regardless of the society ir which they live, a Deaf person's hearing impairment causes communication challenges, which in turn cause significant personal and social limitations.

    A thought experiment can show that the Medical Model doesn't stand up to scrutiny. Suppose you wake up one morning having been magically transported to another planet, where there are humans who have evolved the ability to communicate telepathically. You lack this ability. Relative to them, you are

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[17]Adapted from an argument by Elisabeth of Bohemia, offered in personal correspondence with Descartes. See *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: The Correspondence*, vol, 3, ed. John Cottingham, Dugald Murdoch, Robert Stoothoff, and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[18]Quoted from William Lane Craig, "The Absurdity of Life without God." Available online: http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-absurdity-of-life-without-god

[19]Quoted from David Lewis (2007), "Divine Evil," in *Philosophers Without Gods*, ed. Louise Antony (Oxford University Press), 232.

telepathically impaired. But is your lack of telepathy a disability? Will your lack of telepathy cause you to face significant limitations?

Importantly, this depends on the details of the society you find yourself in. If much of their business, communication, and entertainment relies on their ability to communicate telepathically, then lacking this ability would make you worse off. And if they stigmatize people who don't have telepathy—if they treat you with pity or scorn—then you would be worse off. In these kinds of conditions, a lack of telepathy is disabling. But suppose this mostly telepathic society was set up to accommodate those who lack telepathy. Suppose that everyone is able and willing to use verbal communication instead of telepathy so no one is excluded from social interaction. Suppose that a lack of telepathy is valued as a form of diversity and is thus not stigmatized. In that society, you wouldn't be disabled by lacking telepathy, even if it was an ability others tended to have.

The point of this hypothetical example is that social arrangements play a key role in determining whether or not this impairment makes you worse off. The same point can be made about real-world impairments. Just as with telepathic impairment, the effects of hearing impairment, vision impairment, mobility impairment, and so on all depend on social arrangements. If deafness, for example, were accommodated and not stigmatized, then the social limitations most Deaf people currently face would be eliminated. This shows the Medical Model is implausible because it totally ignores society's role in turning an impairment into a disability.[20]

12. In Chapter 1 of this book, in the section entitled "The Value and Limitations of Scientific Evidence," we argue that empirical research alone cannot provide answers to moral questions. Put the argument for that conclusion into standard form.

[20]Adapted from arguments in Amundson, R., "Disability, Handicap, and the Environment," *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 23, no. (1992): 105–119. See also William Vicars, http://www.lifeprint.com/asl101/topics/disability-deafness.htm