

Philosophy 101 — Homework #6 (My Solutions)

4/25/11

- (1) The argument has been made that to cut down on teenage drunk driving we should increase the federal excise tax on beer. Such a measure, however, would almost certainly fail to achieve its intended result. Teenagers are notoriously insensitive to cost. They gladly accept premium prices for the latest style in clothes or the most popular record albums. And then, those who drink and drive already risk arrest and loss of driving privileges. They would not think twice about paying a little more for a six-pack. Finally, the situation is not as bleak as it has been made to appear. The fatality rate for teenage drivers is lower today than it has been in years.

The conclusion here is:

- (C) Increasing the federal excise tax on beer would not significantly reduce the amount of teenage drunk driving.

There are various stated claims here that are *irrelevant* to the conclusion. For instance, the last two sentences are not relevant, since they do not pertain to the *effect* that increasing the tax on beer would have on the amount of teenage drunk driving, which is what it at issue here. So, these are not included in my reconstruction. Also, the claim that “those who drink and drive already risk arrest and loss of driving privileges” is not relevant to the conclusion either, since the conclusion is about how much money teenagers (specifically, those who are prone to drinking and driving) are willing to pay for beer — not whether they are prone to risky behavior. This leaves only one germane line of argument, which has entirely to do with how much money teenagers are willing to spend on beer.

Here is my reconstruction of the argument in this passage:

1. Most teenagers are willing to pay premium prices for many items that they desire (*e.g.*, clothes and record albums).
2. If (1) is true, then (3) is true. [Implicit.]
3. Most teenagers are (*generally*) insensitive to the costs of things they desire. [(1), (2)]
4. If (3) is true, then (5) is true. [Implicit.]
5. Most teenagers who desire beer would be willing to pay (a little) more for beer. [(3), (4)]
6. If (5) is true, then (7) is true. [Implicit.]
7. Most teenagers who are prone to drinking (beer) & driving would buy (and consume) just as much beer if the federal excise tax on beer were increased. [Implicit, from (5) and (6).]
8. If (7), then (C). [Implicit.]

(C) Increasing the federal excise tax on beer would not significantly reduce the amount of teenage drunk driving.

- (2) The state has a right to intervene on behalf of unborn children, and this right should be implemented immediately. While it may be true that a mere fetus has no rights, surely a born child does have rights, and these rights project backward to the time it was in the womb. This is true because what happens to the child in the womb can have an impact throughout the child's life. It is well known that alcohol and drug abuse by expectant mothers cause birth defects, and these defects are not correctable after birth. Granted, an expectant mother has the right to treat her own body as she chooses, but this right does not extend to her unborn child. Once a pregnant woman decides to give birth, she effectively transfers part of her rights over to her unborn child. Unfortunately, however, the unborn child is incapable of securing these rights for itself. Thus, the intervention of a higher power is justified.

The conclusion of this argument is:

- (C) The state should sometimes intervene on behalf of some unborn children.

Here is my reconstruction of the argument:

1. Alcohol and drug abuse by expectant mothers can cause birth defects which are not correctable after birth.
2. If (1) is true, then (3) is true. [Implicit.]
3. Some things that an expectant mother does to an unborn child in the womb can have harmful effects to the child after it is born.
4. Children have the right not to be harmed by their parents. [Implicit.]
5. The state should sometimes intervene to protect this right (4) of children. [Implicit.]
6. If (4) and (5), then (C). [Implicit.]

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- (C) The state should sometimes intervene on behalf of some unborn children.

Notice how I've omitted various things from the passage. There is no need to talk about "transferring of rights from mother to unborn child" or "rights of children 'reaching back' into the womb". We can just argue directly from the harmful effects on *some* children (*after* they are born) of *some* actions of expectant mothers (*before* the child is born). Note, also, that the conclusion is rather *uncontroversial*. I think everyone would agree that the state should *sometimes* intervene on behalf of *some* unborn children.