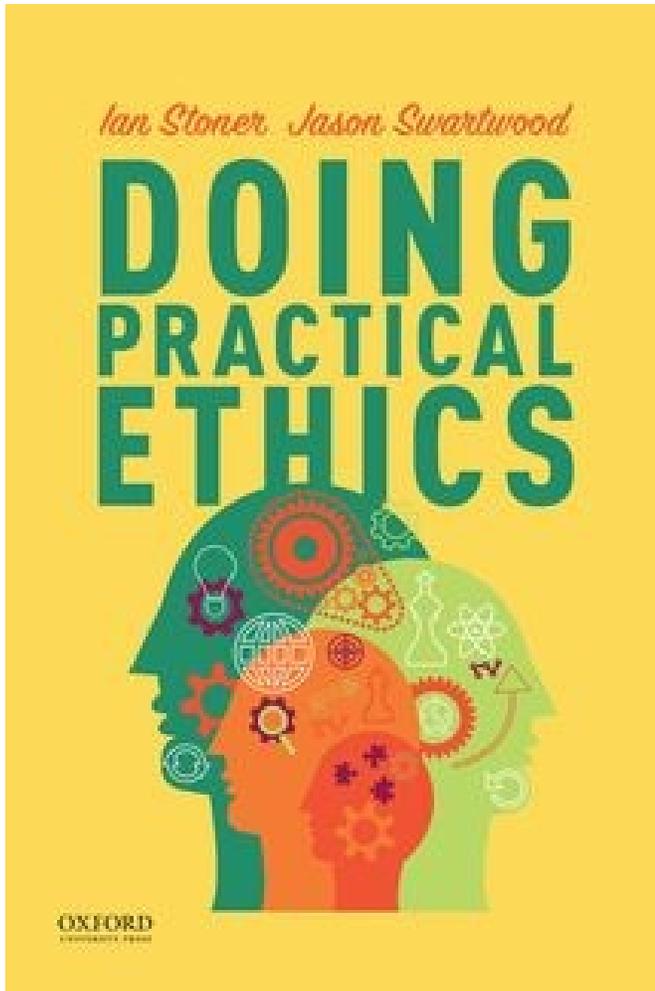


# Doing Practical Ethics

## Sample Packet



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*Pitch:* *Doing Practical Ethics* is the first book to offer a framework for acquiring the skills required to do applied ethics well.

*Blurb:* *Doing Practical Ethics* supports the deliberate practice of component philosophical skills relevant to understanding, evaluating, and developing arguments in forms commonly used in the field of practical ethics. Each chapter includes an explanation of a specific moral reasoning skill, exercise sets, and demonstration exercises with sample solutions that offer students immediate feedback on their practice attempts. The book can be used as a primary text in skills-focused courses or as a supplement to existing anthologies of articles in more traditional courses.

*Bio:* Jason Swartwood and Ian Stoner are instructors of philosophy at Saint Paul College. Friends and colleagues since graduate school at the University of Minnesota, they share a commitment to skills-focused teaching. Between them they have published papers in a wide range of journals, including among others the *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, *Journal of Moral Education*, *Metaphilosophy*, *Think: Philosophy for Everyone*, and *Teaching Philosophy*. Jason's teaching has been recognized with a nomination for the Minnesota State Educator of the Year, and Ian's writing has been recognized with obscure awards.

This sample packet includes early page proofs of:

- Introduction
- Table of Contents
- Chapter 5: Analyzing Arguments from Principle

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## 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

**P**hilosophers 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 5



# Analyzing Arguments from Principle

### CHAPTER GOALS

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

Represent an Argument from Principle in standard form using the General Form of Argument from Principle.

Recognize and articulate implicit premises in an Argument from Principle.

Distinguish premises from the supplementary information that supports them.

### ANALYZING ARGUMENTS FROM PRINCIPLE

Arguments that appeal to general moral principles pervade public debates about moral and political controversies, and philosophers writing about practical ethics often use this argument form. This chapter demonstrates how to understand Arguments from Principle by representing them in standard form. Only after you have *understood* an Argument from Principle can you undertake to *evaluate* it, which is the subject of the next chapter.

### MORAL JUDGMENTS AND MORAL PRINCIPLES

We sometimes make moral judgments about specific cases, such as: “It was wrong of Dan to lie to Ryoka,” or “the Federal mandatory minimum sentence for crack possession is unjust.” Moral principles, by contrast, are claims about a *range of cases*. Instead of making a claim merely about the rightness or wrongness of a single case, a moral principle is a claim about what *kinds* of things are right or wrong, good or bad.

You have probably heard people endorse at least a few of the principles from this list of examples:

- a. Lying is always wrong.
- b. Lying is only permissible in cases where it clearly does more good than harm.

- c. There is nothing morally wrong with lying—though it's best not to get caught.
- d. It is never morally permissible to force an adult to do something against their will.
- e. Helping other people achieve their goals is morally good.
- f. Torture is always morally wrong.
- g. Torture is morally permissible if it is necessary to protect the homeland.
- h. Torture is morally permissible if it is necessary to achieve some important end.
- i. Legal punishment is only morally justified when it will deter future crimes.
- j. Legal punishment is only morally justified when it is deserved.
- k. Gratitude is the morally appropriate response to a sincerely given gift.
- l. Children should obey the explicit commands of their parents.
- m. Children should obey the explicit commands of their parents unless they have good reason to think their parents are wrong.
- n. Character traits that help you get along with others are morally good.
- o. Aesthetic preferences for degrading art are morally bad.
- p. A law is only morally defensible if it promotes the well-being of the people it covers.
- q. A law is only morally defensible if it increases the liberty of the people it covers.

Although these are all examples of moral principles that real people endorse, not all of them can be true. Principles (a) and (b) can't both be true. Principles (f) and (h) can't both be true. What makes these things moral principles is not their truth, but rather that they are general claims about what *types* of choices, behaviors, traits, policies, and laws are forbidden, required, or permissible.

## THE GENERAL FORM OF ARGUMENTS FROM PRINCIPLE

An Argument from Principle is an argument that applies a moral principle to a particular case in order to generate a conclusion about that case. In their most basic form, Arguments from Principle are two-premise arguments: they assert a moral principle, and they assert that the case under discussion is of the type governed by the principle.

### General Form of Arguments from Principle

1. Cases of type *A* have moral status *S*.
2. Case *x* is of type *A*.

Therefore, case *x* has moral status *S*.

We've already seen an example of an Argument from Principle in Chapter 4: Peter Singer's give-to-charities argument. We represented the argument in standard form this way:

1. If you are able to prevent terrible suffering at very little cost to yourself, then you ought, morally, to do that. (PRINCIPLE)

2. Donating 1 percent of your total income to effective charities would prevent terrible suffering at very little cost to yourself. (CASE)

Therefore, you ought to donate 1 percent of your income to effective charities. (CONCLUSION)

The first premise asserts a moral principle: it says that actions of a certain *type* (those that prevent terrible suffering at little cost to you) have a particular moral status (they are morally required or ought to be done). The second premise asserts that modest charitable giving is an action of the type that prevents terrible suffering at little cost to you. If these two premises are true, then Singer's conclusion has to be true as well: you are morally required to donate to effective charities.

### REPRESENTING ARGUMENTS FROM PRINCIPLE IN STANDARD FORM

The process of faithfully representing any argument in standard form involves three phases. First, identify the *conclusion* the author is arguing for. Second, articulate the key claims the author appeals to in order to justify that conclusion; that is, articulate the argument's *premises*. Third, reread both your standard-form representation and the author's original passage to confirm that you have accurately and charitably represented the author's argument. (For a more detailed discussion of standard form, see Chapter 4.)

If you have recognized that you are working with an Argument from Principle, phase two of this process becomes easier, because you know exactly what key claims you need to find. First, you must articulate the principle the argument relies on. Second, you must articulate the author's claim about the relationship between the principle and the case at hand.

#### **Example: The no-immoral-laws argument for voluntary active euthanasia**

"Voluntary active euthanasia" is a term describing situations in which a doctor, at the request of a terminally ill patient, directly causes a patient's death by, for example, administering an overdose of pain medication. Most states in the United States ban doctors from administering life-ending drugs to patients who have requested help in dying. The following argument makes the case that laws and policies banning voluntary active euthanasia ought to be changed.

Laws and policies should be arranged in such a way that they do not regularly require people to act immorally. The Fugitive Slave Act in America required people to turn escaped slaves over to slave hunters. Laws in Nazi Germany required neighbors to notify authorities of the presence of suspected Jews. These are two of the many possible illustrations of shameful, despicable laws. They were shameful and despicable laws *because* they required their subjects to act immorally.

But think, now, about what laws banning voluntary active euthanasia require of doctors. In cases of terminal illness, it is sometimes the case that patients choose to die, and so request the cessation of treatment. In some of those cases, patients will suffer for weeks or months before they finally die. In those cases, voluntary active euthanasia (VAE) would support and promote patient self-determination by allowing them to choose their time and circumstances of their own death. VAE would also improve patient well-being by saving the patient from pointless and unwanted suffering. VAE, in other words, promotes the very values doctors have a moral obligation to promote. Laws and policies *banning* voluntary active euthanasia thus prevent doctors from promoting patient autonomy and well-being; which is to say, laws banning VAE require doctors to act immorally. That's why laws and policies banning VAE should be scrapped in favor of policies that permit it under certain carefully regulated circumstances.

First, what is the conclusion the author argues for? In this case, it's clearly flagged, right at the end of the passage: "laws and policies banning VAE should be scrapped in favor of policies that permit it under certain carefully regulated circumstances."

Second, what premises are essential to make the case for this conclusion? Because this is an Argument from Principle, you can be confident that there will be two key premises. The moral principle, explained in the first paragraph, asserts that laws that require people to act immorally should be changed. This should stand out to you as a moral principle. It isn't a claim about any specific law—rather, it is a general claim about what *types* of laws morally ought to be changed. The second premise, defended in some detail in the second paragraph, asserts that laws banning voluntary active euthanasia require doctors to act immorally.

In standard form for Argument from Principle:

1. Laws that require people to act immorally should be changed. (PRINCIPLE)
2. Laws banning voluntary active euthanasia require doctors to act immorally. (CASE)

So, laws banning voluntary active euthanasia should be changed. (CONCLUSION)

Would the author of the original passage approve of this standard-form representation of the argument? We think so.

### **Example: The protect-vulnerable-people argument against voluntary active euthanasia**

Proponents of voluntary active euthanasia too often have a skewed view of the fundamental purpose of laws and policies. What laws and policies ought to do is to protect vulnerable people from harm. That's the fundamental reason why

voluntary active euthanasia should be illegal: making it illegal would protect the vulnerable from harm.

Consider the issue from the perspective of someone with a terminal diagnosis who wants—as many, many patients in the real world actually do—to fight on until the end. And consider the additional pressures that would be piled on them were voluntary active euthanasia an available option. They would have to justify to their loved ones why they are continuing to live, even though their suffering puts serious emotional strain on the family. They would have to justify to their community why they are continuing to spend financial resources when there is no hope of recovery. They would have to justify to the doctors why they are taking up a bed in a hospital that could instead be occupied by a patient with a more hopeful prognosis. In such situations, it is likely that many patients would choose euthanasia when that isn't what they themselves actually want. They would, in short, be pressured by their communities into choosing death. There is no more profound harm than that. Laws banning voluntary active euthanasia effectively protect terminal patients—people in one of the most vulnerable positions imaginable—from exactly this harm.

First, what is the conclusion the author argues for? In this case, it's embedded in the first paragraph, but relatively clearly flagged: “voluntary active euthanasia should be illegal.”

Second, what premises are essential to make the case for this conclusion? Because this is an Argument from Principle, you can be confident that there will be two key premises. In this passage, the principle and the case claim are both quickly summarized in the first paragraph. The second paragraph then provides support for the argument's case claim.

Here's how we would represent this argument in standard form for Argument from Principle:

1. We ought to have laws that protect vulnerable people from harm. (PRINCIPLE)
2. Laws banning VAE protect vulnerable people (the terminally ill) from harm. (CASE)

Therefore, VAE ought to be illegal. (CONCLUSION)

Your own standard-form representation of this passage is probably not *exactly* the same as ours. That might be OK. For instance, this is also a perfectly good representation of the passage:

1. If a law would protect vulnerable people, then we ought to pass the law. (PRINCIPLE)
2. Laws banning VAE would protect vulnerable people. (CASE)

So, we ought to pass laws banning VAE. (CONCLUSION)

Alternatively, if you tried to stay as close as possible to the General Form of Argument from Principle, you might have ended up with this:

1. Laws that protect vulnerable people from harm are laws we ought to have. (PRINCIPLE)
2. Laws banning VAE are laws that protect vulnerable people. (CASE)

Therefore, laws banning VAE are laws we ought to have. (CONCLUSION)

All three of these standard-form representations of the passage clearly express the argument; they say the same thing in three different ways. English grammar allows for a wide variety of expressions of the same thought, and the particular approach you choose is, in part, a matter of personal style. Your goal is to represent the argument in a way that would secure the approval of its author, and differences in phrasing and expression are perfectly compatible with that goal as long as they clearly, accurately, and charitably represent the author's thoughts.

## ANALYZING ARGUMENTS WITH IMPLICIT PREMISES

Arguments published in essays or offered in public debates often include *implicit premises* that are crucial to the argument but not explicitly stated by the author and *supplementary information* that supports or clarifies the premises and conclusion. (See Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of implicit premises and supplementary information.) When analyzing arguments, you should identify implicit premises and state them explicitly in your standard-form representation. Understanding the General Form for Arguments from Principle makes this task easier.

### Example: Genetic modification is unnatural

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) include crops, like corn and soybeans, that are genetically engineered to have desirable traits, such as resistance to certain pests. Although GMOs might have some practical benefits, we should not use them. Genetically modifying crops is morally wrong because it is unnatural.

The first sentence of this passage provides a definition of the term “GMO”; this sentence is not a premise or conclusion but rather an explanation of a term used in a premise and the conclusion. The third sentence contains the entire argument, the explicitly stated parts of which we could represent as follows:

1. . . .
2. Genetically modifying crops is unnatural. (CASE)

So, genetically modifying crops is morally wrong. (CONCLUSION)

If we recognize that what we have here is two-thirds of an Argument from Principle, then identifying the implicit premise is easy.

**The Argument**

1. . . .
  2. Genetically modifying crops is unnatural.
- So, genetically modifying crops is wrong.

**General Form of Argument from Principle**

1. Cases of type *A* have moral status *S*.
  2. Case *x* is of type *A*.
- So, case *x* has moral status *S*.

To complete this Argument from Principle we need to supply premise 1: the moral principle that attributes a certain moral status to a range of cases. In this argument, the implicit premise must assert that actions of the type *unnatural* have the moral status *wrong*. Thus, the completed argument goes like this:

1. Unnatural actions are morally wrong. (PRINCIPLE)
2. Genetically modifying crops is unnatural. (CASE)

So, genetically modifying crops is wrong. (CONCLUSION)

It is important to make explicit the implicit premise because it is an essential component of the argument. We have not *understood* the argument until we recognize that it is grounded in the moral principle that unnatural actions are morally wrong. And because this principle is an essential component of the argument, *evaluating* the argument will require evaluating the principle. (The method of counterexample discussed in Chapters 3 and 6 reveals that this implicit principle has serious flaws.) These lessons generalize: identifying and articulating implicit premises is *always* an important part of understanding and evaluating arguments.

**Example: A death-bed lie**

On his deathbed in 2017, Michael Elliott asked his wife, Teresa, if President Donald Trump had been impeached.<sup>1</sup> In response, Teresa lied. She told Michael that Trump had indeed been impeached, because she thought this would make Michael's last moments happier. Teresa's action was wrong, because lying is only permissible when it is the only way to save lives.

The moral argument is contained in the last sentence, where the moral principle and the conclusion are both explicitly stated. We can represent them this way:

1. Lying is only permissible when it is the only way to save lives. (PRINCIPLE)
2. . . .

Therefore, Teresa's lie was not permissible. (CONCLUSION)

Premise 2 is left implicit in the original passage, and should be stated explicitly in our standard form representation. Once we've recognized that the missing piece is a statement of the relationship between the case and the principle, it

<sup>1</sup>This is a hypothetical argument based upon a real life case. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/04/18/she-wanted-her-ex-husband-to-die-with-a-happy-memory-she-told-him-trump-has-been-impeached/?utm\\_term=.a9b16f979563](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/04/18/she-wanted-her-ex-husband-to-die-with-a-happy-memory-she-told-him-trump-has-been-impeached/?utm_term=.a9b16f979563)

is easy to articulate the implicit premise. The author believes that the case in question (Teresa's lie) is of the type the principle says is wrong (it's not necessary for saving lives). Thus, we have the complete representation of the argument:

1. Lying is only permissible when it is the only way to save lives. (PRINCIPLE)
2. Teresa's lie was not necessary to save lives. (CASE)

Therefore, Teresa's lie was not permissible. (CONCLUSION)

If you tried to stay as close as possible to the General Form for Arguments from Principle, you might have ended up with this:

1. Lies that are not necessary to save lives are not morally permissible. (PRINCIPLE)
2. Teresa's lie was a lie that was not necessary to save lives. (CASE)

Therefore, Teresa's lie was not morally permissible. (CONCLUSION)

Both standard-form representations of the passage clearly express the argument; they say the same thing in different ways.

The lesson: understanding the General Form of Arguments from Principle makes it easy to recognize and articulate premises authors have left unstated.

## ANALYZING PASSAGES WITH SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Arguments in the real world typically include supplementary information. This information is usually important to the author's case—it provides support for premises, and it provides context, illustration, or information intended to help the audience understand the argument. A standard-form representation of an argument should sort the premises from the material that supports them, and present only the premises themselves.

When you are first learning to represent arguments in standard form, sorting premises from supplementary information can sometimes feel like digging for fossils in an expansive field. In Chapter 4 we identified several common types of supplementary information; being on the lookout for those types can make it a little bit easier to sift the fossils from the soil. But if you have recognized that the passage you are analyzing contains an Argument from Principle, using the General Form of Argument from Principle as your guide makes it *much* easier to sort premises from the supplementary information that supports them.

### **Example: The necessary protest argument**

On July 6, 2016, Philando Castile was pulled over for a broken taillight by police officer Jeronimo Yanez in Falcon Heights, Minnesota. Within forty seconds, Yanez had shot Castile seven times and the incident had been captured and shortly thereafter broadcast on social media by Castile's fiancé. Many members

of the community and the public were outraged by what they saw as another example of the oppression and violence African Americans face at the hands of the police. When Yanez was later found not guilty of criminal charges in the shooting, people were understandably frustrated and angry. In protest of the verdict, a group of people marched onto Interstate 94, shutting it down for several hours.

This form of protest is unjustifiable. A disruptive method of protest is justified only if it is a necessary means to rectifying injustice. It would not be justifiable, for instance, for sanitation workers upset about their wages to go around throwing garbage in the road to illustrate the importance of their work. This kind of protest would not be justifiable because it isn't necessary for making changes toward fairer wages. The same principle holds here. It was unjustifiable for protesters to shut down I-94 in response to the Yanez verdict, because doing so was not necessary to achieve racial justice in policing.

This passage explicitly states the premises and the conclusion, but it also includes supplementary information. The sentences in the first paragraph provide *background information* to help us understand the context of the moral controversy. The sentence beginning “It would not be justifiable, for instance, for sanitation workers . . .” is an *illustrative example*. None of these sentences is a premise; all are intended to clarify and support the component premises of this Argument from Principle.

The principle the author defends concerns the permissibility of disruptive protests. The specific case in question is the protest that shut down I-94. Represented in standard form, using the General Form as our guide, the argument looks like this:

1. A protest is justified only if it is a necessary means to rectifying injustice. (PRINCIPLE)
2. Shutting down I-94 after the Yanez verdict was not a necessary means to rectifying injustice. (CASE)

So, shutting down I-94 after the Yanez verdict was not justified. (CONCLUSION)

The lesson: understanding the General Form of Arguments from Principle makes it easy to sift premises from the supplementary information that supports them.

### WHY USE ARGUMENTS FROM PRINCIPLE?

Nearly everyone has had to make decisions they recognize as morally difficult. And most of us, when faced with those decisions, have found ourselves searching for principles that might help. When we recognize that a moral principle we accept applies to a situation we're in, it is easier to see what that situation requires of us. But figuring out which moral principles are principles we ought to accept is not easy. Nor is it always clear which moral principles apply in real-life situations. Imagine you find yourself in a situation in which telling the truth will seriously

hurt another person's feelings. Are principles related to truth-telling the relevant ones in that situation? Or are principles related to kindness the relevant ones? It can be difficult to tell.

Arguments from Principle formalize the everyday process of reasoning with moral principles. Articulating a candidate moral principle and the relationship that principle bears to the controversial case clarifies the argument and makes it easier to understand. Keeping those two components distinct makes it easier to evaluate the strength of each claim individually. Analyzing principle-based arguments by representing them in standard form can thus improve discussions, debates, and personal reflection about practical moral controversies.

## REVIEW

Arguments from Principle support a moral conclusion about a specific case by applying a moral principle to that case. Arguments with this structure are common in philosophical writing and in public discourse. Familiarity with the General Form of Arguments from Principle will make it easier to represent these arguments in standard form.

**Moral principle:** a claim about the moral status of a range of cases, such as types of actions, types of traits, types of policies, etc.

### General Form of Arguments from Principle:

1. Cases of type *A* have moral status *S*. (PRINCIPLE)
2. Case *x* is of type *A*. (CASE)

Therefore, case *x* has moral status *S*. (CONCLUSION)

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 5A: Identifying Premises and Conclusions

**Exercise Instructions:** Supply the missing premise or conclusion to make a properly structured Argument from Principle.

1.
  1. It is wrong for doctors to enter into agreements that pressure them to make decisions that are not in the best interest of their patients.

(continued)

## 2. ...

So, it's wrong for doctors to become paid spokespeople for pharmaceutical companies.

## 2.

## 1. ...

2. Illegally downloading movies uses the fruits of someone's labor without their permission.

Therefore, illegally downloading movies is wrong.

### **Demonstration Exercises 5B: Representing Arguments from Principle in Standard Form**

**Exercise Instructions:** Represent the following arguments in standard form using the General Form of Argument from Principle.

#### **1. In favor of affirmative action**

There's nothing wrong with colleges using affirmative action policies to give admission preference to members of disadvantaged minorities over equally qualified white students. Policies that promote a diverse range of perspectives in the incoming group of students are morally permissible. Affirmative action policies do that.

#### **2. Against affirmative action**

Any policy that treats people differently based upon their gender is oppressive. So, using affirmative action policies that favor a woman over an equally qualified male candidate is oppressive.

#### **3. Against the permissibility of suicide<sup>2</sup>**

Life is God's gift to us. And it is wrong to destroy or discard a gift you have been so lovingly given. That's why it is wrong to commit suicide.

#### **4. For the permissibility of suicide**

As long as you are not seriously harming anyone else, you are not doing anything wrong. Thus, it is not wrong to commit suicide as long as you are not seriously harming anyone else.

#### **5. Coretta Scott King on Jefferson Sessions**

This is the first paragraph of the 1986 letter Coretta Scott King (who was married to Martin Luther King, Jr.) sent to Strom Thurmond (who was Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee) opposing the nomination of Jefferson Sessions to a judgeship in the Federal Court.

I write to express my sincere opposition to the confirmation of Jefferson B. Sessions as a federal district court judge for the Southern District of Alabama. My professional and personal roots in Alabama are deep and lasting. Anyone who has used the power of his office as United States Attorney to intimidate and chill the free exercise of the ballot by citizens should *not* be elevated to our

<sup>2</sup>Adapted from an argument made by Saint Thomas, Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* Q64, 5.

courts. Mr. Sessions has used the awesome powers of his office in a shabby attempt to intimidate and frighten elderly black voters. For this reprehensible conduct, he should not be rewarded with a federal judgeship.<sup>3</sup>

## 6. The best consequences protest argument

On July 6, 2016, Philando Castile was pulled over for a broken taillight by police officer Jeronimo Yanez in Falcon Heights, Minnesota. Within forty seconds, Yanez had shot Castile seven times and the incident had been captured and shortly thereafter broadcast on social media by Castile's fiancé. Many members of the community and the public were outraged by what they saw as another example of the oppression and violence African Americans face at the hands of the police.

When Jeronimo Yanez was acquitted of the shooting of Philando Castile, those members of the community committed to racial justice had several options. They could channel their anger by filing for a permit to engage in a public protest march, they could focus their energies solely on using the typical legal channels to support changes to problematic laws or police training procedures, or they do all of that but also engage in direct, disruptive protest. Many protesters undertook the latter: they engaged in a predominantly peaceful march to shut down I-94 in order to force people to pay attention to the problem of racial injustice. This surely disrupted people's lives, but that's the point: no other method of protest would be as likely to result in progress towards eliminating racial injustice in policing. For that reason, the protest was morally justified.

*Background for demonstration arguments #7 and #8.* What follows are paraphrases of two arguments that were common in the early days of the availability of sex reassignment surgery (SRS) for transgender people. "Sex reassignment surgery" (also sometimes known as "gender confirmation surgery") is an umbrella term for a variety of surgeries intended to bring a transgender person's physical sex characteristics more closely in line with their gender identity.<sup>4</sup> When modern techniques became available in the 1980s, these surgeries were controversial in the medical community. So imagine that it's 1984, you work at a hospital, and you're listening in on arguments about whether or not your hospital should begin offering SRS to patients who want it.

## 7. The medical necessity argument against SRS

Patients who request SRS are requesting a surgical alteration of their bodies for reasons that have nothing to do with promoting the physical health of their body. The tissues the surgeon is asked to remove or modify are not damaged or diseased. In SRS, it is *healthy* tissues that go under the knife. But any surgery that fits that description is almost certainly morally wrong; surgery should *only* be used when it is necessary to promote the physical health of the body.

Imagine that a patient walked into a hospital and requested to have his ring fingers surgically removed, not because there was anything wrong with them,

<sup>3</sup><https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3259988-Scott-King-1986-Letter-and-Testimony-Signed.html>

<sup>4</sup>For an overview of terminology, and a bit more information on SRS, start here: <http://www.transequality.org/issues/resources/transgender-terminology>

(continued)

but because he really didn't want to have ring fingers. Any surgeon who performed that surgery would be doing something morally wrong, because they would be violating the principle that surgery should only be used to promote the health of the patient's body. Sex reassignment surgery violates the same principle, and so is always morally wrong.

### 8. The well-being argument in favor of SRS

There is more to human well-being than just the health of bodily tissues, and surgical techniques can promote human well-being even in cases where the patient's body is not damaged or diseased. Consider a few examples. Surgical correction of a cleft lip does not promote the physical health of a child's body; the surgery is entirely cosmetic. But such surgeries make it easier for a child to navigate the horrible, superficial, and judgmental world of other children, and so surgeons ought to do them. The same is true of surgeries to correct crossed eyes. It's a surgery that has no effect on the physical health of a person's tissues, but it makes social integration easier, and so promotes well-being. Women who have undergone successful mastectomies to treat breast cancer often choose to have their breasts surgically reconstructed. Breast reconstruction doesn't promote the physical health of their bodies—it was the mastectomy that did that. But it does promote their well-being by restoring their physical body to something similar to what they have lived with their entire life.

All of these examples make the point that surgery is a good, morally justifiable choice not only in cases in which it promotes the physical health of a patient's body, but also in cases in which it promotes the general well-being of the patient. Does SRS promote the well-being of the people who choose it? The data on that is clear: in the overwhelming majority of cases, transgender people who seek SRS are happier after they receive it. SRS is thus morally permissible because it promotes the well-being of the patients who receive it.

## Solutions to Demonstration Exercises 5

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 5A: Identifying Premises and Conclusions

1.
  1. It is wrong for doctors to enter into agreements that pressures them to make decisions that are not in the best interest of their patients.
  2. *Working as paid spokespeople for pharmaceutical companies puts pressure on doctors to make decisions that are not in the best interest of their patients.*

So, it's wrong for doctors to become paid spokespeople for pharmaceutical companies.

2.

1. *It is morally wrong to use the fruits of someone's labor without their permission.*
2. Illegally downloading movies uses the fruits of someone's labor without their permission.

Therefore, illegally downloading movies is wrong.

### **Demonstration Exercises 5B: Representing Arguments from Principle in Standard Form**

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

#### **1. In favor of affirmative action**

1. Policies that promote a diverse range of perspectives are morally permissible. (PRINCIPLE)
2. Affirmative action policies promote a diverse range of perspectives. (CASE)

Therefore, affirmative action policies are morally permissible. (CONCLUSION)

#### **2. Against affirmative action**

1. Policies that treat people differently based on their gender are oppressive. (PRINCIPLE)
2. Affirmative action policies treat people differently based on their gender. (CASE)

Thus, affirmative action policies are oppressive. (CONCLUSION)

#### **3. Against the permissibility of suicide**

1. It is wrong to destroy a gift you have been lovingly given. (PRINCIPLE)
2. Suicide destroys a gift (life) you've been lovingly given (by God). (CASE)

So, suicide is wrong. (CONCLUSION)

#### **4. For the permissibility of suicide**

1. Actions that don't seriously harm anyone else are morally permissible. (PRINCIPLE)
2. Some instances of suicide don't seriously harm anyone else. (CASE)

Therefore, some instances of suicide are morally permissible. (CONCLUSION)

#### **5. Coretta Scott King on Jefferson Sessions**

1. No one who has used their political powers to intimidate voters should be allowed to serve as a federal judge. (PRINCIPLE)
2. Jeff Sessions used his political powers to intimidate voters. (CASE)

Thus, Jeff Sessions should not be allowed to serve as a federal judge. (CONCLUSION)

*(continued)*

**6. The best consequences protest argument**

1. A method of protest is justified if it is the method most likely to result in progress towards eliminating an injustice. (PRINCIPLE)
2. Shutting down I-94 was the method of protest most likely to result in progress towards racial injustice in policing. (CASE)

So, shutting down I-94 was justified. (CONCLUSION)

**7. The medical necessity argument against SRS**

1. Surgery is only morally permissible when it is necessary to promote the physical health of the body. (PRINCIPLE)
2. SRS is *not* necessary to promote the physical health of the body. (CASE)

Therefore, SRS is *not* morally permissible. (CONCLUSION)

**8. The well-being argument in favor of SRS**

1. Surgery is morally permissible when it promotes the well-being of the patient. (PRINCIPLE)
2. SRS promotes the well-being of transgender people who request it. (CASE)

Thus, SRS is morally permissible. (CONCLUSION)

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**CHAPTER 5 PRACTICE EXERCISES**  
**ANALYZING ARGUMENTS FROM PRINCIPLE**

**PRACTICE EXERCISES 5A: IDENTIFYING PREMISES  
AND CONCLUSIONS**

**Exercise Instructions:** *supply the missing premise or conclusion to make a properly structured Argument from Principle.*

1.
  1. You ought to minimize the amount of pollution you generate.
  2. . . .

So, you ought to recycle your bottles and cans.

2.
  1. Lying is always wrong.
  2. . . .

So, intentionally misrepresenting your finances on your tax forms is wrong.

3.
  1. A person's personal preferences are morally objectionable if those preferences place a disproportionate psychological burden on a subgroup of people.<sup>5</sup>
  2. The personal preference of some white men to date or marry Asian women places a disproportionate psychological burden on Asian and Asian-American women.

Therefore, . . .

4.
  1. An action is racist only if it is based upon harmful and false stereotypes about people of a particular race.<sup>6</sup>
  2. At least some white men who prefer to date Asian women are not acting based upon harmful and false stereotypes about people of a particular race.

Therefore, . . .

5.
  1. . . .
  2. Cheating on an exam gives a student an unfair advantage over others in the job market.

Thus, it's wrong for a student to cheat on an exam.

6.
  1. A practice should be illegal if it encourages desperate people to do potentially harmful or degrading things.
  2. . . .

So, prostitution should be illegal.

7.
  1. It's wrong to do things that make serious problems worse.<sup>7</sup>
  2. . . .

Therefore, driving a gas-guzzling car is wrong.

8.
  1. . . .
  2. Illegally downloading movies doesn't take anything physical from anyone else.

Thus, illegally downloading movies is not wrong.

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<sup>5</sup>Adapted from an argument in Robin Zheng, "Why Yellow Fever Isn't Flattering: A Case Against Racial Fetishes," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, 2, no. 3 (2016): 400–419.

<sup>6</sup>Adapted from an argument discussed in Raja Halwani, "Racial Sexual Desires," in *The Philosophy of Sex*, 7th Ed (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

<sup>7</sup>Adapted from an argument discussed in Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "It's Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations," *Perspectives on Climate Change: Science, Economics, Politics, Ethics*, (Bingley: Emerald, 2005): 293–315.

## PRACTICE EXERCISES 5B: REPRESENTING ARGUMENTS FROM PRINCIPLE IN STANDARD FORM

**Exercise Instructions:** *Represent the following arguments in standard form using the General Form of Argument from Principle.*

1. It's always wrong to end a human life. Abortion ends a human life. So, abortion is always wrong.
2. Abortion should clearly be legal. It is, after all, health care.
3. Suicide is always wrong, because it is always wrong to kill an innocent human being, and suicide does that.
4. Killing is only wrong when the thing killed wants not to be killed. (Bacteria, for example, have no desire to live, which is why it's perfectly fine to kill them.) First-trimester fetuses have no desires at all, so they do not have the desire not to be killed. That is why abortion is not morally wrong.
5. There's nothing wrong with using other people's property as long as your use doesn't cause them any unhappiness. Since using your neighbor's Wi-Fi internet without their permission doesn't cause them any unhappiness, it isn't wrong.
6. A person is morally required to aid others only if doing so doesn't require using their own hard-earned money. So, we're not obligated to donate 1 percent of our income to effective poverty relief agencies, because doing so would require using our own hard-earned money.
7. It's always wrong to do things that cause harm, however indirect, to other people. Driving a gas-guzzling car (a car that gets far lower gas mileage than the average car) harms other people by contributing to global warming. So, it's wrong to drive a gas-guzzling car.<sup>8</sup>
8. There's nothing wrong with driving a gas-guzzling car just for fun—tons of people do it.
9. Obviously, no one deserves blame for doing something that's perfectly legal. It therefore follows that we're totally misguided if we blame people for driving gas-guzzling cars.
10. Why do some people believe it is wrong to eat animals? It isn't! Non-human animals eat each other all the time!
11. There's nothing wrong with eating animals. Do you really think that, if given half a chance, those animals wouldn't eat you?
12. I can't believe you tattled on Heather for cheating on the chemistry midterm. That was so wrong of you to do that to her. It's not like she killed someone.
13. It was completely wrong of your chemistry professor to fail you just because you didn't turn in any of the work. She *knows* you need that class to graduate.
14. Does the pornography industry wrongfully exploit women, or is a job in porn just another job like any other? I think it is clear that the pornography industry

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<sup>8</sup>Adapted from an argument discussed in Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "It's Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations," *Perspectives on Climate Change: Science, Economics, Politics, Ethics*, (Bingley: Emerald, 2005): 293–315.

wrongfully exploits women. Many of the women who work in the industry would leave it if they had good alternatives for well-paid work. That means the pornography industry makes money off of people doing things they wouldn't otherwise do if they had other options. Any industry that does that is a wrongfully exploitative industry.

15. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is a response to racial disparities in policing. BLM protesters hope to raise awareness about, among other things, the inordinate violence African Americans and other people of color suffer in the United States at the hands of the police. BLM uses various actions to try to achieve their goals, including organized marches and protests. Sometimes, however, they're met with counter-protesters. In some encounters, these (mostly White) counter-protesters have shouted "All lives matter!" in response to BLM's chant of "Black lives matter." The counter-protestors' aim seems to be to counter what they see as an unfair focus on one group's needs.

The "All lives matter!" chant has itself become controversial, with some people claiming that it is racist for white people to shout "All lives matter!" at a BLM demonstration. Regardless of the merits of the counter-protesters' views, chanting "All lives matter" is not racist. After all, an action is racist only if it is based upon feelings of hatred for a racial group, and chanting "All lives matter" doesn't express hatred for anyone.

16. It's always wrong to deprive an animal of the ability to do things that are natural for its species. For that reason, keeping animals in zoos is wrong. I mean, look at how animals live in zoos. Polar bears pace back and forth around concrete pools and get no chance to hunt on the ice as they would in the wild. Penguins wait by the door for zookeepers to bring in buckets of fish instead of exercising their natural skill at catching prey in the water. Clearly, zoo animals' lives are a pale imitation of those their wild counterparts live.
17. Many medical treatments and procedures are tested out on non-human animals. For instance, cancer drugs and pacemaker implants are tested out on dogs, monkeys, or mice to see if they are safe. Sometimes, the animals end up being harmed or killed by the procedures. Some people claim this is morally wrong, because those animals have rights. But that's nonsense. A being has the right not to have potentially unsafe medical experiments performed on them only if it is capable of the sort of complex thought that you and I can do. But dogs, monkeys, and mice are not capable of that—they can't read novels, do algebra, or discuss the merits of different political policies. Thus, dogs, monkeys, and mice don't have a right not to have potentially unsafe medical experiments performed on them.
18. The Makah Tribe is a culture indigenous to the Pacific Northwest. Among many practices special to the Makah is an annual whale hunt, in which men of the tribe set out in cedar canoes to hunt, and hopefully kill, a gray whale. The returning hunters are met with ceremonies and songs, and precise rules govern how the whale is divided up between the families who make up the tribe.

Many American and European environmentalists are especially protective of whales. This has led some environmentalists to criticize the Makah

culture for its annual whale hunt. In criticizing Makah whale hunts, environmentalists go too far.

Makah culture views whale hunts as spiritually important and good, and when Makah people head out on a whale hunt, they are doing something their own culture endorses. It is always wrong for a person from one culture to criticize the culturally sanctioned practices of a person from another culture. It is therefore morally wrong for environmentalists—who are not Makah themselves—to criticize a Makah person for hunting gray whales.

19. Placebos are pills or other substances that look like medications, but are designed to have no medical effect. Sugar pills, which look like prescription pills but are actually made of a small amount of sugar, are a classic example of a placebo. Doctors have known for a long time that if they offer patients placebos and tell them the pills are effective medication, placebos often do help. When patients *mistakenly believe* they are taking medically effective drugs, they often see improvement in their symptoms.

Some doctors believe it is morally permissible to use placebos. These doctors are wrong. Even if placebos are sometimes effective, it is always wrong for doctors to use placebos on patients, because it is always wrong for health care professionals to deceive their patients.

20. Physicians are bound by the principle of non-maleficence: they ought never harm. But physician-assisted suicide harms the patient—it ends their life. Thus, physician-assisted suicide is morally impermissible.
21. Physicians ought to respect patient autonomy. This is why voluntarily chosen physician assisted suicide is permissible: when a person has autonomously chosen to end their life, respecting the patient's autonomy requires assisting them in carrying out this decision.
22. I think you'll agree that it's always wrong to destroy someone else's property. But that's what you're doing when you commit suicide. Your life is the property of God, your creator. So, killing yourself is wrong.<sup>9</sup>
23. Everything naturally loves itself, and therefore it naturally seeks to preserve itself and to resist what would injure it as much as it can. Suicide, then, is contrary to a natural human inclination. So, suicide is wrong, because we should always act in conformity with natural human inclinations.<sup>10</sup>
24. Several Christian wedding-cake bakers have refused to bake cakes for same-sex weddings, citing their personal religious conviction that same-sex relationships are offensive to God. Some members and allies of the LGBTQ community have called for these Christian bakers to be fired, or sued, or otherwise penalized. These calls for punishment are misguided. No one should ever be penalized for acting according to their personal religious convictions.
25. Some Christian wedding-cake bakers believe that same-sex relationships are morally wrong. They are free to believe that, but they still have a moral obligation to bake wedding cakes for same-sex couples, and if they refuse to serve

<sup>9</sup>Adapted from an argument made by Saint Thomas Aquinas, in *Summa Theologiae* Q64, 5.

<sup>10</sup>Adapted from an argument by Saint Thomas Aquinas, in *Summa Theologica*, II-II.

same-sex couples they should be penalized. A business owner only has a right to refuse a customer if refusing is necessary to protect employees or other customers from harm.

26. Our hospital has an emergency situation: two patients are in the Emergency Department (ED) who need a ventilator due to severe cases of Covid-19. (We can't refer patients elsewhere, because all regional hospitals are similarly overloaded.) Unfortunately, there's only one ventilator left, and we need to decide whom to give it to.

The first patient to arrive in the ED was Paul. Paul is an otherwise healthy single 56-year-old man who works in the human resources department for a large retail company. If we give the ventilator to Paul, doctors anticipate he will make a full recovery and have an estimated life expectancy of 80 years. The second patient, Lin, arrived and was assessed about fifteen minutes after Paul. Lin is a 30-year-old nurse and parent of two children who works at a local nursing home. If we give Lin the ventilator, doctors expect she will recover and have a life expectancy of at least 80 years.

People in the hospital are acting like this is a tough choice. But, there's clearly only one fair way to make decisions like this. When medical resources are scarce, they should be distributed on a first-come, first-serve basis. For that reason, we should give the ventilator to Paul.

27. Look inside the mouth of a human being. You'll find canine teeth and incisors. These teeth are adapted for eating flesh, not vegetables. It isn't just our teeth—the general biological evidence is overwhelming: the human body is by nature able to eat meat. Look to the earliest cave paintings: they show humans hunting animals. It isn't just the cave paintings—the general archaeological evidence is also overwhelming: from our earliest days on Earth, human beings have eaten meat.

In short, the scientific evidence from multiple disciplines proves that eating meat is natural for human beings. And surely behaviors that are *natural* for human beings are *morally permissible* for human beings—it would be absurd to claim otherwise. Therefore, eating meat is morally permissible for human beings.

28. In recent years, more school children have begun to identify as trans and to request accommodation of a gender identity that is not the identity they were assigned at birth. In practice, these accommodations usually amount to a request to be referred to using different pronouns, and a request to use the bathroom that corresponds to their gender identity. For example, a student who began elementary school as a boy might prefer to express the gender of a girl, and so request to be referred to with feminine pronouns and to be allowed to use the girls' bathroom.

These requests for accommodation in pronouns and bathrooms have caused controversy, especially in conservative religious communities. But all too often, the argument against respecting a child's gender identity does nothing more than appeal to a religious text or edict. Public schools cannot avoid setting rules governing the behavior of the children who attend them—that is

part of their job. But public schools should never set those rules based solely on highly contested religious premises, and it appears that the only way to argue against accommodating the requests of trans kids is to appeal to highly contested religious premises. That's why public schools should accommodate children's preferences about how they express their gender identity.

29. After asking and receiving assurance of confidentiality, a new client, full of remorse, tells his psychologist that two months earlier he gave his 73-year-old wife sleeping pills to end her life peacefully, and then he staged a bathtub drowning that resulted in an accidental death ruling by the medical examiner. His wife, he says, suffered from advanced Alzheimer's disease and was suffering greatly as the disease progressed. What should the psychologist do here? Should she report the client?

She most certainly should not. The right action in a situation is the one that could be expected to produce the most total happiness when you weigh up the effects on everyone. In this case, keeping the patient's confidentiality would produce the most happiness, so that's what the psychologist should do.<sup>11</sup>

30. A fetus *potentially* has a right to life. (If allowed to develop, it will become a child, and children definitely have a right to life.) If someone *potentially* has a right, then we should treat them as though they already do have that right. For this reason, we should treat fetuses as if they have the same right to life that children have.
31. In most societies all over the world, women's primary role is in the home, while men are in charge of business, industry, and government. This division of labor between the sexes is so common that the examples dwarf the exceptions. Indeed, that this arrangement has been so long-held and so commonplace shows it to be justifiable. After all, if it wasn't best for society, then why would it be so universal a phenomenon?<sup>12</sup>
32. That women should primarily be in the home while men take responsibility for public offices and institutions is evident given the difference in men and women's natures. Women, as a group, have innate inclinations and abilities that better suit them for the important task of nurturing children and creating a loving home environment, while men are naturally better suited to public life and office due to their superior capacity for reasoning and emotional control. Thus, the natural differences in inclinations and abilities of men and women justify women's subordination to men and their exclusion from control of public life and office and justify enforcing this arrangement through law.<sup>13</sup>
33. Reginald Featherbottom is notorious for his view, explained in his book *The Implications of Racial Inferiority for Public Policy*, that different racial groups

<sup>11</sup>Adapted from case 6–2, page 119, in Koocher and Keith-Spiegel, *Ethics in Psychology: Professional Standards and Cases*, 2nd Ed. (London/New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>12</sup>Adapted from an argument critiqued in J. S. Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869).

<sup>13</sup>Adapted from an argument critiqued in J. S. Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869).

are genetically disposed to have different levels of intelligence, and that, on average, Black people are inherently less intelligent than White and Asian people. Although the “science” of the book has been widely and repeatedly debunked, many white supremacists remain devoted fans of Featherbottom.

In 2017, Featherbottom gave a talk on an unrelated topic at Northern State College. Soon after he started, students in the audience began shouting over of him, which made it impossible for the audience to hear him and forced him to stop speaking. Afterward, student leaders of the protest said that they believed it was important to shut down the speech to avoid giving him a platform from which to spread bigoted views.

Featherbottom’s case raises a challenging question: is it morally right to prevent a speaker from speaking on the grounds that they hold bigoted views?

At least in Featherbottom’s case, the answer is no, it is not morally right. We should respond to the speech of others in a way that best helps the audience form true beliefs. Silencing Featherbottom’s speech at Northern State didn’t do that. Allowing him to speak, and then vigorously and rigorously *critiquing* his views would have been the morally better strategy. After all, vigorously critiquing his views would help the audience understand *why* his views are mistaken, while shutting down his speech only entrenches his supporters in their mistaken beliefs. It was wrong for Northern State students to shut down Featherbottom’s talk.

34. Reginald Featherbottom has claimed, in print, that Black people are genetically inferior to White people. That kind of racist claim is totally unsupported by science but has nevertheless supported attitudes and policies of racial oppression throughout the history of the United States.

Students such as those at Northern State College, who have staged noisy protests to prevent Featherbottom from speaking at their college, deserve our moral respect. It is *always* right to prevent people from contributing to the oppression of minority groups, and that is what they did. Allowing Featherbottom a platform would contribute to the oppression of minority groups, and those students stepped in and stopped it.