

# *Introduction: Arguments and Ethics*



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# Reading Philosophy



- **Note the following:**
  - Terms
  - Thesis
  - Premises
  - Support for premises
  - Conclusion(s)
  - Implications
  - Potential problems
    - ✦ Insufficiently supported claims
    - ✦ Faulty reasoning
    - ✦ Hidden premises/assumptions
    - ✦ Vague conceptions of important philosophical terms



# Identifying Arguments



- Applied ethics heavily relies on deductive *and* inductive arguments.
- Deductive – “offer logically *conclusive* support”
  - Validity
  - Soundness
  - → Evaluate according to form of argument, support of premises, reasoning used
- Inductive – “provide *probable* support”
  - Strength
  - Cogency
  - → Evaluate according to quality of sample, links and relations given for facts, criteria of adequacy

# *Let's Try This!*



- **Argument 1:**

1. Bees are capable of complex group behaviors, and we often attribute mental behaviors to them in our descriptions.
2. If bees collectively are capable of “group think” or collective consciousness, then they are morally considerable.
3. Therefore, we should try to preserve bee colonies.

- What type of argument is this?
- Where are the descriptive claims? Normative?
- What is problematic about this argument?
  - Are there hidden premises?
  - What needs further support?

# *Let's Try This!*



- **Argument 2:**

1. Dogs have capacities for loyalty, pain/pleasure, short-term desires, and primitive communication.
2. Humans have capacities for loyalty, pain/pleasure, short-term and long-term desires, and complex communication. We also have dignity.
3. Therefore, dogs probably have dignity.

- What type of argument is this?
- Where are the descriptive claims? Normative?
- What is problematic about this argument?
  - Are there hidden premises?
  - What needs further support?

# *Ethics: Some Basics*



- Descriptive claims:

- Describes a state of affairs; “is/are” language
- Often empirical in nature (can be investigated, established with studies)
- Could be part of a thought experiment
- *Example:* Some non-human animals have comparable mental faculties to human beings.

- Normative claims:

- Marks what is prescribed, ideal, or justified; “should/ought” language
- Confirmed or dismissed through argumentation
- *Example:* Non-human animals with comparable mental faculties should be given equal moral consideration.

# Ethics: Some Basics

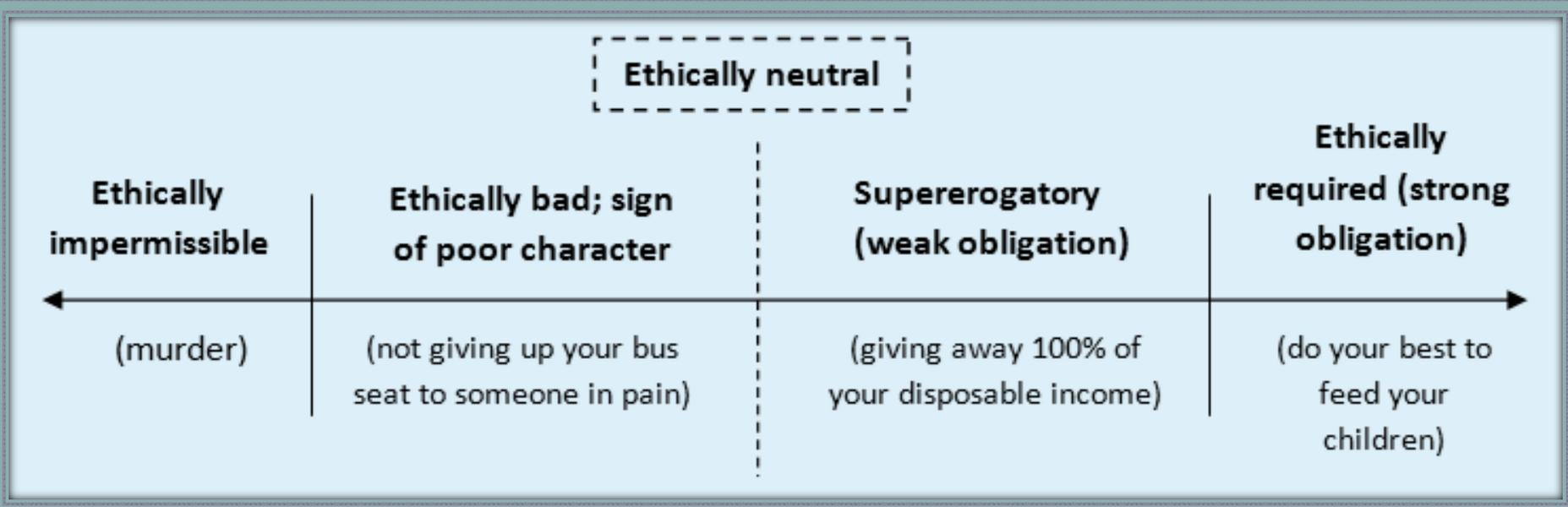


- To establish a normative conclusion, at least one premise will need to be normative as well.
- Example (hidden normative premise):
  1. Shooting pigs for military exercises does not cause them suffering, since they are anesthetized beforehand.
  2. These exercises help build surgical expertise.
  3. We value the welfare of our troops (and humans generally) more than we value the life of pigs, as can be seen in our farming practices.
  4. Therefore, we should continue the practice of shooting pigs to build surgical acumen and skill.



*Descriptive claim!*

# Useful Distinctions



# Useful Terms



- Moral responsibility: “When a person performs or fails to perform a morally significant action, we sometimes think that a particular kind of response is warranted” (Jeske)
  - Comes in degrees
  - Can range over individual and collective actions, motivations, intentions, attitudes, emotions, dispositions
  - Can be responsible for action, omission, complicity, ignorance, unintentionally doing something, being part of an unjust system
  - Can be mitigated by a number of factors
  - Can be backward-looking (assign praise/blame) or forward-looking (make improvements for future)

# Useful Terms



- Obligations/duties
  - Can be absolute, *prima facie*, defeasible
  - Might depend on situational factors, role/profession, special relationships, proximity, alternative possibilities
- Supererogation
  - “the class of actions that go ‘beyond the call of duty’ [...] morally good although not (strictly) required” (Heyd)
- Moral dilemma
  - “at the very least, involve conflicts between moral requirements” (Hursthouse)
  - Moral residue: When a moral requirement is left unfulfilled or a morally impermissible action is done because one had no choice but to act in the dilemma

# Additional References



- Jeske, Diane, "[Special Obligations](#)", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)
- Heyd, David, "[Supererogation](#)", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.).
- Hursthouse, Rosalind. *Virtue Ethics*.