Psychological Aspects of Social Issues

Chapter 3
Evaluating Moral Arguments

1

Outline/Overview

- Claims and arguments
- Types of arguments
  - Deductive & Inductive
- Framing moral arguments as deductive arguments
- Examining the support for premises
- Fallacies – reasoning pitfalls

5

Claims and Arguments

- Claim - an assertion we make about the truth or falsehood of some state of affairs
  - either true or false
  - can be accepted, rejected, or essentially ignored

6

Which of the following are claims?

1. A mile is 5280 feet.
2. Get out of here!
3. The moon is made of green cheese.
4. Animals should not be killed for food.
5. Do animals like living on farms?
6. The war in Iraq was a terrible decision.

7

Arguments

- One statement is provided as a reason for believing another statement
  - Premise(s)
  - Conclusion(s)
- Variable in terms of length and complexity
- Indicator words for premises and conclusions

8

Types of arguments

- Deductive – gives logically conclusive support to the conclusions that are reached.
  - Form vs. content
  - Sound argument – valid + true premises
- Inductive – supports conclusions in a probabilistic fashion.
  - Confidence in evidence
  - Cogent argument – strong argument + true premises

9

Different deductive types

- Use letters as shorthand
- Modus Ponens – Affirming the antecedent
  - If P then Q
  - P
  - ∴ Q
- If it is raining, there will be clouds overhead
- It is raining
- There will be clouds overhead

10

Deductive types (cont.)

- Modus tollens (a.k.a. denying the consequent)
  - If P, then Q
  - Not Q
  - ∴ Not P
- example?

11

Invalid forms

- Denying the antecedent
  - If P, then Q
  - Not P
  - ∴ Not Q
- example?
- Affirming the consequent
  - If P, then Q
  - Q
  - ∴ P
- example?

12

Invalid examples

○ Denying the antecedent
  ● If it's raining, then the streets are wet.
  ● It isn't raining.
  ● Therefore, the streets aren't wet.
○ Affirming the consequent
  ● If it's raining then the streets are wet.
  ● The streets are wet.
  ● Therefore, it's raining.

13

Hypothetical syllogism

○ 3 statement deductive argument.
  ● If P, then Q
  ● If Q, then R
  ● ∴ if P, then R
○ Example?

14

Moral argument example

1. Taking an innocent life is wrong except to save a life.
2. Abortion is the taking of an innocent life.
3. Therefore, abortion is wrong except to save a life.
4. The only life that can be saved by an abortion is the mother's.
5. Therefore, abortion is wrong except to save the life of the mother.

15

Rules for framing deductive arguments

1. Premises that can be used with valid deductive rules.
2. Premises must be general.
3. Must add sufficient premises to make the arguments valid.
4. Charity – we must use plausible premises.
5. Premises must be faithful to the beliefs of those advancing the argument.
6. Must not be "begging the question."
7. Must not equivocate.

18

Examining premises

- look for "absolutes"
- with a premise containing absolutes, easy to construct counterexamples
- determine if the premise can be saved via slight revision
- revisit with premises resting on moral judgments
  - no objective way of determining the "correctness" of these judgments

19

Fallacies

- Ad Hominem Argument (Appeal to the person)
  - An attack on the opponent rather than the opponent's argument
- Red Herring (Appeal to emotion)
  - An irrelevant issue introduced to distract attention from the issue at hand
- Straw Man
  - A distortion of an opponent's actual position to make it easier to attack
- Others?   Examples?
- Hand waving/Post hoc, ergo propter hoc

20