

Chapter 2

Moral Reasoning

Chapter Overview

This chapter provides students with the tools necessary for analyzing and constructing moral arguments. It also builds on Chapter 1 by encouraging students to examine their own worldviews and cultural paradigms using critical thinking skills.

Learning Objectives

In this chapter, students will learn about

- the three levels of thinking: experience, interpretation, and analysis.
- the role of moral sensitivity and ontological shock in praxis.
- the impact of our worldviews and paradigms on moral thinking.
- how to recognize and break through patterns of resistance that prevent them from analyzing their worldviews.
- how to construct a moral argument.
- how to recognize and avoid logical fallacies.
- how to resolve moral dilemmas.

Teaching Suggestions

1. *Emphasize the difference between reason and opinion.* Reason requires that students be able to back up their positions with well-thought-out arguments.

2. *Work through several examples of constructing moral arguments and identifying fallacies, with the class or in small groups.* If your students have not had a prior course in philosophy or logic they may have difficulty with some of the exercises. Answers to the exercises on pages 51-52 and 63-64 are found in the following section. Once you are confident that students understand these exercises, have them do the rest on their own.

3. *Ask students who have taken logic to be small-group discussion leaders.* They may also be willing to serve as tutors for students who are having problems with this chapter.

4. *Encourage students to use examples of moral arguments, informal fallacies, and moral dilemmas from their own experience or from newspapers, magazines, or movies.* Use these examples as class or small-group exercises.

5. *Encourage students to use the skills learned in this chapter throughout the rest of the course.* Ask students to identify the conclusion and premises in the selected readings, as well as in their own arguments. Encourage students to point out fallacies when they come across them.

Answers to Selection Exercises

Exercise 1 on Pages 51-52. Note: [c] indicates the conclusion, and [p] indicates a premise. Premise and conclusion indicators are bracketed.

- a. [c] Racism and sexism are wrong, (because) [p] all people deserve equal respect.
- b. [c] It is immoral to use rabbits in cosmetic experiments, (because) [p] causing pain is immoral and [p] animals such as rabbits are capable of feeling pain.
- c. [p] People need to pass a driving test to get a license to drive a car. [c] People should also have to take a test and get a license before they can become a parent. (After all), [p] parenting is a greater responsibility and requires more skill than driving.
- d. [p] Embryos are not persons with moral rights. [p] Furthermore, the embryos used in stem cell research are going to be discarded anyway. [p] (Because) we have a moral obligation to help people suffering from disease and the use of stem cell research has the potential to help many of these people, [c] stem cell research should be legal.
- e. [p] We have an obligation to become the best person we can. [p] One of the primary purposes of education is to make us better people. (Therefore), [c] colleges should seriously consider having a community service requirement for graduation, (since) [p] community service has been shown to increase students' self-esteem and facilitate their moral development.

Exercise 1 on Pages 63-64

- a. Ignorance
- b. Begging the questions
- c. Naturalistic fallacy
- d. Abusive fallacy
- e. Hasty generalization
- f. Irrelevant conclusion
- g. Equivocation
- h. Irrelevant conclusion
- i. Accident

- j. Appeal to inappropriate authority
- k. Appeal to force
- l. Circumstantial fallacy
- m. Ignorance

Sample Test Questions

Multiple Choice Questions Questions 1–24 relate to the text and readings in Chapter 2. The correct answers are preceded by an asterisk.

1. At which level of thinking would one be most likely to hear the statement “Euthanasia must be immoral because it is illegal”?
 - a. experience
 - *b. interpretation
 - c. analysis
 - d. praxis
2. Opinions are
 - a. the foundation of moral thinking and, therefore, ought to be respected.
 - b. most likely to be found at the level of moral analysis.
 - c. never true.
 - *d. based on feeling rather than on reason.
3. Which of the following groups, according to liberation ethicists, have epistemological privilege in American society?
 - *a. women of color
 - b. White males
 - c. philosophers
 - d. nonhuman animals
4. The pampered daughter of a wealthy businessman and a prominent Boston socialite joins the Peace Corps following college and spends one year working with AIDS orphans in a poverty-struck area of Africa. This experience deeply upsets her and, to her parents’ dismay, leads her to question her childhood values. What, according to Sheila Mullett, is the daughter experiencing?
 - a. resistance
 - b. paradigm inflexibility
 - *c. ontological shock
 - d. praxis
5. Which of the following is the best example of the use of resistance as a defense mechanism?
 - a. avoiding the use of fallacies
 - b. being an autonomous moral agent.
 - *c. avoiding people who have different views than ours

- d. the use of premise and conclusion indicators in an argument
6. According to Buddhists, this path can guide us to right thinking and moral wisdom.
 - a. the Path of Least Resistance
 - b. the Lotus Garden Path
 - *c. the Noble Eightfold Path
 - d. the Straight and Narrow Path
 7. Marlene often gets angry and storms off in a snit when people question her views on the morality of abortion. Marlene is in all likelihood using
 - a. *doublethink* to avoid *interpreting* her worldviews.
 - b. *analysis* to avoid *experiencing* her worldviews.
 - *c. *resistance* to avoid *analyzing* her worldviews
 - d. *interpretation* to avoid *resisting* her worldviews.
 8. Which of the following is most often used as an immature defense mechanism?
 - a. tolerance of ambiguity
 - b. suppression of harmful emotional responses
 - *c. conformity
 - d. empathy
 9. Which of the following expressions would you be most likely to hear from someone who is engaged in doublethink?
 - *a. "I agree with both sides of the argument."
 - b. "The ends justify the means."
 - c. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."
 - d. "I'll have to rethink this now that you've brought up a new point."
 10. What is the conclusion in the following argument? "The United States is a democracy. Therefore, more gun control laws should be enacted in the United States because most people favor stricter gun control laws."
 - a. "The United States is a democracy."
 - *b. "...more gun control laws should be enacted in the United States..."
 - c. "...most people favor stricter gun control laws."
 - d. "Therefore" and "because"
 11. What is the premise indicator in the following argument? "Discrimination violates the principle of justice. Therefore, affirmative action is wrong because it involves reverse discrimination."
 - a. "principle of justice"
 - b. "Therefore"
 - *c. "because"
 - d. "involves"
 12. The primary purpose of rhetoric is to
 - a. discover moral truths.
 - b. resolve moral dilemmas.
 - c. construct a logical moral argument.
 - *d. win an argument through persuasive speech.

13. In constructing moral arguments, we should begin by
- a. coming up with a conclusion.
 - b. checking for fallacies.
 - *c. compiling a list of premises.
 - d. engaging in rhetoric.
14. People are most likely to use fallacies when
- a. they are analyzing a controversial moral issue.
 - *b. they are unable to rationally defend their worldviews.
 - c. they are using the Socratic method.
 - d. they are operating at the level of experience.

15. In resolving a moral dilemma, we should first
- a. come up with a possible solution.
 - b. make a list of the moral duties and values involved.
 - *c. get our facts straight.
 - d. make a list of all the alternative courses of action.

16–22. Identify the fallacies in the following arguments.

16. It is morally acceptable for parents to conceive a child in order to obtain blood or an organ tissue transplant to save the life of another of their children because parents have the right to make their own decision about whether or not to conceive one child in order to save another child's life.
- a. accident
 - b. hasty generalization
 - c. appeal to authority
 - *d. begging the question
17. I fail to see why hunting should be considered cruel when it gives pleasure to so many people.
- a. abusive
 - b. popular appeal
 - *c. irrelevant conclusion
 - d. hasty generalization
18. In defense of his position that Black people are innately inferior intellectually, to White people, biologist Arthur R. Jensen writes, "No one has yet produced any evidence based on a properly controlled study to show that representative samples of Negro and white children can be equalized in intellectual ability through statistical control of environment and education."
- *a. ignorance
 - b. popular appeal
 - c. hasty generalization
 - d. appeal to inappropriate authority
19. I don't support the Obama administrations policy on the non-use of nuclear weapons if we are attacked by another nation. As far as I'm concerned it has no validity since they're just a bunch of naïve and spineless wimps.

- a. circumstantial fallacy
 - *b. abusive fallacy
 - c. appeal to tradition
 - d. equivocation
20. Of course private ownership of property is morally acceptable. It's been fundamental to our American way of life since this country's inception.
- a. naturalistic fallacy
 - b. appeal to inappropriate authority
 - c. fallacy of accident
 - *d. appeal to tradition
21. I believe in the Golden Rule. Therefore, I have an inherent duty to do unto others as I would have them do unto me. If I were puzzled by a question on an examination, I would want the person sitting next to me to help me. So it was my duty, professor, to let my friend sitting next to me copy answers from my test. You surely aren't going to fail me simply for obeying the Golden Rule?
- a. appeal to force
 - *b. accident
 - c. begging the question
 - d. ignorance

22–24. Identify the person who said each of the following.

22. "There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says she believes, that truth is relative."
- a. George Orwell
 - b. Aristotle
 - *c. Allan Bloom
 - d. Buddha
23. "This shift in consciousness includes a search for the collective actions that can transform the existing unjust social structures...."
- a. Thomas Jefferson
 - b. Stanley Milgram
 - *c. Paulo Freire
 - d. George Orwell
24. "Ordinary people, simply doing their jobs and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process."
- a. A. J. Ayer
 - b. Sheila Mullett
 - c. Mary Midgley
 - *d. Stanley Milgram

Essay Questions The following exercise questions in this chapter are suggested for use, with modification in some cases, as essay questions: Page 36-37, #2 (choose one example from options a-e); p. 44, #2; p. 64, #2; p. 69, #2 (selection on example from options a-e).