

Offering Objections – Introduction to Moral Philosophy

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Introducing “objection”

As I will use the term in this class, an *objection* to an argument finds a way in which the reasoning involved in the argument is mistaken or problematic. Common ways to object to arguments include (i) saying that one of its premises is false and (ii) saying that the conclusion doesn't follow from the premises.

Introducing “objection”

As I will use the term in this class, an *objection* to an argument finds a way in which the reasoning involved in the argument is mistaken or problematic. Common ways to object to arguments include (i) saying that one of its premises is false and (ii) saying that the conclusion doesn't follow from the premises. Here is an example:

ARGUMENT 1:

- ❶ Everything that swims is a fish.
- ❷ Whales swim.
-
- ❸ Whales are fish.

An objection to ARGUMENT 1 is that the first premise is false.

Introducing “objection”

Here is another example:

ARGUMENT 2:

- ❶ Most animals that swim are fish.
- ❷ Whales swim.
-
- ❸ Whales are fish.

An objection to ARGUMENT 2 is that the argument is invalid. Even if most animals that swim are fish and whales swim, it doesn't follow that whales are fish.

Introducing “counter-argument”

As I will use the term in this class, if you have one argument, a *counter-argument* is an argument for the opposite conclusion. For example, consider ARGUMENT 2:

- ① Most animals that swim are fish.
- ② Whales swim.
-
- ③ Whales are fish.

Here is a counter-argument:

- ① Animals that breathe air with lungs and have hair are not fish.
- ② Whales breathe air with lungs and have hair.
-
- ③ Whales are not fish.

A tip

When you object to an argument, I recommend being explicit about how you object. Is one of the premises false? If so, which one? Is the argument invalid? Is something else wrong?

For example, take the following argument:

- ① Abortion is the killing of a living being.
- ② All living beings have a right to life.
- ③ It is wrong to kill beings that have a right to life.
-
- ④ Abortion is wrong.

Consider the following objection: “I object to the argument. After all, it’s not wrong to kill mosquitos even though they’re alive.” This objection is not explicit. It’s not clear where the person thinks the argument has gone wrong? Premise 2? Premise 3?

Here's the argument again:

- ① Abortion is the killing of a living being.
- ② All living beings have a right to life.
- ③ It is wrong to kill beings that have a right to life.
-
- ④ Abortion is wrong.

Better would be to say: “I think this argument doesn't work because premise 2 is false. For example, mosquitos are living beings but don't have a right to life.”

Say what's wrong with the following and how it could be improved:

"Some people argue:

- ① It's always wrong to murder.
- ② Euthanasia is a type of murder.
—
- ③ Euthanasia is always wrong.

But I have an objection: sometimes people are suffering and want to die and if someone is suffering and wants to die it's not wrong to kill them. But killing them in this case counts as euthanasia. So euthanasia isn't always wrong."

Say what's wrong with the following and how it could be improved:

“Some people argue:

- ❶ Some people, if they have kids, will cause them to psychologically suffer.
- ❷ Psychological suffering is a kind of harm.
- ❸ No one has the right to do anything that will cause harm.
-
- ❹ Some people don't have the right to have kids

I have an objection. I have a right to make fun of people even if it leads to psychological suffering.”

Even More Practice

Here are some examples of arguments. For each one, find an objection and find a counterargument:

Argument 3:

- ① K-State is in Kansas.
- ② Kansas is in the Pacific time zone.
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- ③ K-State is in the Pacific time zone.

Argument 4:

- ① The US constitution guarantees a right to basic freedoms.
- ② Some people want to drive on the left side of the road.
—
- ③ Americans have a right to drive on the left side of the road.