

Two Fallacies in Applied Ethics

Seyyed Mohsen Eslami *

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Abstract

I introduce two common fallacies in applied ethics: (1) the fallacy of foundationalism and (2) the fallacy of reason-aversion. By “fallacy” I mean a type of argumentative move that is rather widespread in debate yet misleading. Some questions we address in moral philosophy concern the deontological status of specific actions. In such cases, the aim is not to inquire into ethical normativity in general or to discover overarching moral principles (if any), but rather to assess particular actions that are closer to practice. Accordingly, it is not the case that we always judge specific cases on the basis of ethical theories. On the contrary, even when evaluating ethical theories, we sometimes argue from particular cases. This being said, the fallacy of foundationalism involves insisting on priority of fixing foundational questions in the midst of an applied ethical debate. The fallacy of reason-aversion involves dismissing the issue under discussion as reason-averse. I explain why both moves are fallacious considering what applied ethics is.

Keywords: applied ethics; fallacy; religion and morality; moral epistemology.

* Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran.
Email: s.mohseneslami@gmail.com



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