

Two Fallacies in Applied Ethics

Seyyed Mohsen Eslami *

DOI: 10.22096/ek.2026.2084005.1618

[Received Date: 29/01/2026 Acceptance Date: 11/02/2026]

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.eslami@modares.ac.ir



Bibliography

- Blumenthal-Barby, Jennifer, Sean Aas, Dan Brudney, Jessica Flanigan, S. Matthew Liao, Alex London, Wayne Sumner, and Julian Savulescu. "The place of philosophy in bioethics today." *The American Journal of Bioethics* 22, no. 12 (2022): 10-21.
- Boot, Eric R. *The Ethics of Whistleblowing*. Translated by Iman Abbasnejad. Tehran: Soroosh-e Mowlana Institute, 2022. [In Persian]
- d'Arms, Justin, and Daniel Jacobson. "The moralistic fallacy: on the 'appropriateness' of emotions." *Philosophical and Phenomenological Research* 61, no. 1 (2000): 65-90.
- Dworkin, Gerald. "Paternalism." In *Morality and the Law*, edited by Richard A. Wasserstrom, 107-126. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1971.
- Eslami Ardakani, Seyyed Hassan. "Do esteDLāl-e aqlāqī bar zedd-e mašraf-e gūšt-e šan'afī." *Quarterly Ethical Research*, no. 9 and 10 (2012): 267-291. [In Persian]
- Eslami, Seyyed Mohsen. "Pro Tanto Wrongness and the Case of Whistleblowing." *Res Publica* 29, no. 3 (2023): 521-529.
- Eslami, Seyyed Mohsen. "Three-Level Analysis of Charity Theories: The Case of Effective Altruism." *Journal of Endowment & Charity Studies* 3, no. 2 (2025): 1-20. [In Persian]
- Jamieson, Dale. "Constructing Practical Ethics." In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics*, edited by Roger Crisp, volume 3, Translated by Hasan Mīyāndārī, 1373-1407. Tehran: Hermes, 2023. [In Persian]
- Kagan, Shelly. *Normative Ethics*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.
- Kant, Immanuel. "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy." In *Dorūgh-e mašlahat-āmīz: baḥṣī dar maḥmūm va gostareh-ye ān dar Islāmī*, edited by Seyyed Hassan Ardakani, 467-473. Qom: Bustan-e Ketab, 2003. [In Persian]
- Lemos, Noah. *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- McPherson, Tristram. *Epistemology and Methodology in Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Moore, G. E. "A Defence of Common Sense." In *Philosophical Papers*, 32-59. London: Allen & Unwin, 1959.

- Moore, G. E. *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903/1993.
- Norcross, Alastair. "Puppies, pigs, and people: Eating meat and marginal cases." *Philosophical perspectives* 18 (2004): 229-245.
- Pritchard, Duncan. "Hinge commitments and trust." *Synthese* 202, no. 5 (2023): 1-20.
- Schüklenk, Udo, and Peter Singer. *Bioethics: An Anthology*. 4th edition. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2021.
- Shafer Landau, Russ. *Living Ethics: An Introduction with Readings*. Translated by Abolghasem Fanai and Iman Abbasnejad. Tehran: Soroosh-e Mowlana Institute, 2021. [In Persian]
- Singer, Peter. "Famine, Affluence, and Morality." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (1972): 229-243.
- Temkin, Larry S. *Being Good in a World of Need*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.
- Vander Nat, Arnold. *Simple Formal Logic: with Common Sense Symbolic Techniques*. New York: Routledge, 2010.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *On Certainty*. Translated by Malik Hosseini. Tehran: Hermes, 2008. [In Persian]