

Phil 108, September 13, 2012

Foot on intending vs. foreseeing and doing vs. allowing:

Two kinds of effects an action can have:

- What the agent *merely foresees* will happen because of his action.
- What the agent *intends*. His *end*, and what he believes are *means* to that end.

The Doctrine of Double Effect:

- In *some cases*, it is not wrong to X if one merely foresees that Y will happen, even though it would be wrong to X if one intended for Y to happen.
- The DDE is important in Catholic teaching.
- The DDE does not say that this is true in *all* cases. For example, just as it is wrong for gravediggers to give away poisonous oil in order to have more people to bury (intending their deaths), so too it is wrong for merchants to sell poisonous oil in order to make money (merely foreseeing their deaths).
- What is the difference? Perhaps: the DDE applies only when X-ing brings about a *better* state of affairs.
- Note that consequentialism requires us to bring about a better state of affairs, and does not treat intending any differently from foreseeing.
- The DDE can be thought of as a *constraint* on consequentialist reasoning. We may not bring about a better state of affairs if we *intend* to harm others, but we may, at least in some cases, if we only foresee that others will be harmed.

Problems for the DDE:

- The DDE gives the intuitively *right* answer that it is permissible to remove a uterus even though it is foreseen that this will kill the fetus.
- But it gives the intuitively *wrong* answer that it is not permissible to crush the fetus's skull in order to save the mother's life. (Or, at least, it seems intuitively incorrect that the one action should be permissible, but the other action impermissible.)
- *Objection:* The DDE does not lead to the wrong answer, since "the death of the fetus is not a *means* to saving the mother's life. If the fetus could somehow survive the operation, it is not as though our end would not be achieved."
- *Reply:* This makes the DDE too permissive. For example, we can say about the fat man in the mouth of the cave, "We don't intend to kill him, only to blow him to small bits."
- *Moral:* To close this loophole, we need to specify when effects that are *not strictly necessary* for the intended end (such as breaking the fat man into smaller pieces) are still so *closely related* to the intended end that they should count as intended means. What is this relation of "closeness"?

The appeal of the DDE:

- How do we distinguish the framing case from the trolley case? The DDE gives us an answer: In the trolley case, we are diverting the trolley from the five, merely foreseeing that it will hit the one. In the framing case, we are framing the one in order to save the five.

- Likewise, how do we distinguish the case of using the medicine we have to save five instead of one from the case of killing one in order to make a serum from his body to save five?

Foot's diagnosis of the appeal of the DDE:

- We confuse the *intending/foreseeing* distinction with the *doing/allowing* distinction.
- It is really the *doing/allowing* distinction that matters morally.
- The two distinctions can also come apart:
 - One can intend to allow something to happen (e.g., allowing it can be a means to one's end, as in the case of using the beggar for medical research below).
 - One can do things that one does not intend (e.g., one *kills* the one by diverting the trolley, but one intends only to divert it from the five, and merely foresees that it will kill the one).

Positive and Negative Duties:

- What we *allow* to happen to people is governed by our *positive* duties, which say what we owe people in terms of *aid*.
- What we *do* to people is governed by our *negative* duties, which say what owe people in terms of *noninterference, noninjury*.
- In general, negative duties are *stronger* than positive duties.

How the doing/allowing distinction handles the cases:

- In the trolley case, we have a conflict of a *negative* duty not to kill the one vs. five *negative* duties not to kill each of the five.
- In the framing case, we have a conflict of a *negative* duty not to frame the one vs. many *positive* duties to aid each person in danger of the mob.
- So it is not inconsistent to hold that it is wrong to frame the one, but not wrong to send the trolley to roll over the one.
- In the case of merely distributing the medicine, we have a conflict of a *positive* duty to aid the one vs. many *positive* duties to aid each of the others.
- In the case of turning the one into medicine, we have a conflict of a *negative* duty not to kill the one vs. many *positive* duties to aid each of the others.
- So it is not inconsistent to hold that it is wrong to turn the one into medicine, but not wrong to give the medicine to others.
- Rescuing one or five from torture by the tyrant: conflict of positive duties.
- Torturing one oneself in order to save the five from torture by the tyrant: conflict of a positive with a negative duty.
- Not inconsistent to say that it is not wrong to rescue the five, but is wrong to torture one oneself. "To refrain from inflicting injury ourselves is a stricter duty than to prevent other people from inflicting injury, which is not to say that the other is not a very strict duty indeed."
- A case that the positive/negative distinction and DDE treat differently: "Suppose, for instance, that there are five patients in a hospital whose lives could be saved by the

manufacture of a certain gas, but that this inevitably releases lethal fumes into the room of another patient whom for some reason we are unable to move.” Wrong, because we violate a *negative* duty to that patient in order to fulfill positive duties to the others. But we do not *intend* to kill that patient, merely foresee that he will die.

- “In an interesting variant of the model, we may suppose that instead of killing someone we deliberately let him die. (Perhaps he is a beggar to whom we are thinking of giving food, but then we say ‘No, they need bodies for medical research.’) Here it does seem relevant that in allowing him to die we are aiming at his death, but presumably we are inclined to see this as a violation of negative rather than positive duty.”
 - But if so, doesn’t it suggest that the negative/positive distinction is not the same as the doing/allowing distinction, and that the negative/positive distinction is the one that matters?
 - *Why* is this as a violation of a negative duty? After all, it’s a refusal to aid.
 - Isn’t it plausible to say that the difference is that one *intends* the beggar’s death in this case, but does not intend the death of the one when one gives medicine to the five? Doesn’t the *DDE* explain this case?
 - Perhaps the intending/foreseeing distinction is a further factor. One may fail to fulfill one’s positive duty to the one in order to fulfill positive duties to others, but not if one intends that the one will be harmed as a result.
- Allowing someone to die of starvation before one’s eyes is *just as* wrong as poisoning him.
- Why? Perhaps because, in these cases, the positive and negative duties do not conflict with any other duties.
- But *this* does not explain why allowing people in other countries to die of starvation is *not as* wrong as poisoning them.

Other factors that may matter:

- Strict duty vs. charity: our own children vs. children in other countries
- Is the person not already threatened?
- Is the person himself the threat?

Three abortion cases: Assume that the fetus has the same rights as an adult.

1. Nothing can be done to save the fetus, but by killing the fetus we can save the mother. Here the DDE says we may not kill the child in order to save the mother, which seems wrong. (Doesn’t the positive/negative distinction say the same thing? We are violating our negative duty to the fetus in order to fulfill our positive duty to the mother. Isn’t the explanation of why it is permissible to kill the fetus that it has no strong interest in *not* being killed, because it will die anyway very soon?)
2. Either we kill the mother to save the fetus, or kill the fetus to save the mother. The fact that we would be killing one in order to save the other does not resolve the conflict of interests, since this is true whether we save the fetus or the mother. The question is just whom to save. (Why doesn’t the positive/negative distinction say that we must let *both* die?)
3. The fetus will otherwise live, but by killing the fetus we can save the mother.

The big questions:

- Is there a consistent distinction between aiding and noninterfering/noninjuring?
- Does it matter morally?
- If so, why?

Review Questions:

1. Consider the third abortion case above: “The fetus will otherwise live, but by killing the fetus we can save the mother.” So our options are, first, to do nothing, with the result that the fetus lives but the mother dies, and second, to kill the fetus to save the mother. What would the Doctrine of Double Effect say about these options? Why? What would the distinction between Negative and Positive duties say about these options? Why? Do your answers support or undermine Foot’s position?
2. Suppose that your country has been unjustly invaded by a foreign power. With the aim of stopping the foreign power, two bombing raids are contemplated. The first raid would target a munitions factory with the aim of destroying it. It is known that the resulting blast would also destroy a nearby school, killing many schoolchildren. The second raid would target the school directly, with the aim of so demoralizing the parents that they will refuse to work at the munitions factory. It is known that the destruction of the school would indeed have this consequence. What would the Doctrine of Double Effect say about these options? Why? What would the distinction between Negative and Positive duties say about these options? Why? Do your answers support or undermine Foot’s position?