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THE PARADOX OF MORALISTIC FALLACY: A CASE AGAINST THE DANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE

Abstract: *In this article, the concept of moralistic fallacy introduced by B. D. Davis is elaborated on in more detail. The main features of this fallacy are discussed, and its general form is presented. The moralistic fallacy might have some undesirable outcomes. Some of them might even be in direct conflict to the original moral position. If this occurs, it is possible to characterize it as a paradox of moralistic fallacy. The possibility of this paradox provides a further reason not to prevent any scientific inquiries and not to depict any knowledge as dangerous.*

Paradox moralistického omylu: argument proti nebezpečné znalosti

Abstrakt: *V článku je rozveden koncept moralistického omylu, který předložil B. D. Davis. Jsou diskutovány základní charakteristiky tohoto omylu s cílem představit jeho obecnou formu. Moralistický omyl má přitom nechtěné následky, z nichž některé dokonce mohou být v přímém rozporu s původní morální pozicí, která stojí v začátku tohoto samotného omylu. Pokud takovýto stav nastane, lze ukázat, že moralistický omyl způsobuje paradox. Možnost takovéhoto paradoxu pak poskytuje důvod k tomu, aby bylo odmítnuto omezování vědeckého zkoumání a aby nebyla žádná znalost charakterizována jako nebezpečná.*

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Introduction

Is there knowledge which should be considered as dangerous and unwanted? Knowledge which should be prevented from acquiring? There have been many attempts to prohibit some knowledge in history. Plato wrote about a so-called noble lie[1] regarding society. Hume wrote about refuting a hypothesis in philosophical disputes "by a pretence of its dangerous consequences to religion and morality."[2] Many other examples might be found in struggling between the church and science, general morality or the politic situation of a given time and sociological, psychological, historical and other inquiries.[3] Even today, there are restrictions, e.g., regarding dual use problem in technological research.[4] But is dividing dangerous, unwanted knowledge useful and safe?

In the following article, I will argue that to divide knowledge as safe or dangerous, as wanted or unwanted is unwise and possibly harmful. This division might even go against the original intentions or ethical position, which was the reason for adopting the view that something should not be known.

To argue against this division, in the first part of the article I will present Bernard David Davis'[5] and others accounts on the moralistic fallacy. I will

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[1] Cf. Daniel Dombrowski, "Plato's 'Noble' Lie," *History of Political Thought* 18, no. 4 (1997): 565–78.
[2] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 70.
[3] We can also find dangerous or forbidden knowledge in Bible regarding the apple from forbidden tree or in myths, e.g., in Prometheus gift of fire. Cf. Roger Shattuck, *Forbidden Knowledge: A Landmark Exploration of the Dark Side of Human Ingenuity and Imagination* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).
[4] Cf. Seumas Miller and Michael J. Selgelid, "Ethical and Philosophical Consideration of the Dual-Use Dilemma in the Biological Sciences," *Science and Engineering Ethics* 13, no. 4 (2007): 523–80. Michael J. Selgelid, "A Tale of Two Studies: Ethics, Bioterrorism, and the Censorship of Science," *Hastings Center Report* 37, no. 3 (2007): 35–43.
[5] Bernard D. Davis, "The Moralistic Fallacy," *Nature* 272 (1978): 390.

present several examples and discuss the main features of this fallacy. In the second part, I will formulate the general form of the moralistic fallacy, and I will distinguish it from the presumptive reasoning, wishful thinking, and self-deception. In the third part, I will present the paradox of moralistic fallacy and its general form. Finally, in overview and conclusion, I will provide an argument against labeling some knowledge as dangerous.

Moralistic Fallacy

The problem of deriving an "ought" from an "is" was famously presented by David Hume in his *Treatise of Human Nature*:

> In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. [6]

The is-ought problem is well known and still discussed, unlike the problem which can be seen as the reverse version of it, *the moralistic fallacy*. Moralistic fallacy is the problem of deriving an "is" from an "ought," deriving what there is from what there should be. The moralistic fallacy was probably first coined and described by Bernard David Davis in 1978:

> Since blocking off an area of inquiry on moral grounds fixes our knowledge in that area, it becomes, in effect, an illogical effort to derive an "is" from an "ought." I would suggest that we call this procedure the moralistic fallacy, since it is the mirror image of what Hume and G. L Moore identified as the naturalistic fallacy.[7]

It should be noted that the Hume problem of derivation from "is" to "ought" is different than *naturalistic fallacy* which is usually considered as

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[6] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 302.
[7] Davis, "The Moralistic Fallacy," 390.

a problem of defining moral properties as natural properties as described by Moore.[8] Yet this distinction is not made by Davis,[9] Pinker,[10] and Ridley,[11] who consider the moralistic problem as a conversion or reversion of naturalistic fallacy. Thus, moralistic fallacy is sometimes called reverse naturalistic fallacy.

The moralistic fallacy is the mirror image of the Hume's problem, and both these fallacies share the same features. Hume describes the derivation of an "ought" from an "is" as something "imperceptible," but "of the last consequence." This derivation also "expresses some new relation or affirmation" and it needs to be studied. All these characteristics are shared by the moralistic fallacy and can be shown in the case of Lysenkoism, which was mentioned by Davis and described by Matt Ridley:

> Thus spake Lenin. The 1920s and 1930s, often seen as a time of lunatic obsession with genetic determinism, was also a time of lunatic obsession with environmental determinism: the belief that man could be remade entirely into new man just by education, propaganda and force. Under Stalin this Lockean faith in changing nature was even applied to wheat. Trofim Lysenko argued, and those who gainsaid him were shot, that wheat could be made more frost-hardy not by selection but by experience. Millions died hungry to prove him wrong.[12]

In many cases of moralistic fallacy, the "ought" is taken out of the context. Thus, to see that there is a strange argumentative move, some additional information not being a part of one particular text must be provided. To see Lysenkoism as the moralistic fallacy, one must consider not only what is written in the work of Lysenko, but also the context in which this work was done. Lysenko might argue for his theory in a perfectly ordinary matter, in some texts, but regarding context, his theory was preferred and accepted due to its affinity with Marxism-Leninism.

The example of Lysenkoism also points out the dangerous consequence of moralistic fallacy on two levels. The first level is persecuting those who cast doubt on the derivate fact. In the case of Lysenko, those who doubt were executed. In other cases of moralistic fallacy, those who argue against might not suffer so hard but suffer after all. They might be isolated, their work

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[8] George Edward Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922).

[9] Davis, "The Moralistic Fallacy," 390.

[10] Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 162.

[11] Matt Ridley, *The Origins of Virtue* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 257.

[12] Ibid., 258.

ridiculed, and they might be forced to change profession. The second level is the aftermath of the situation caused by adopting the view based on the moralistic fallacy. Millions died from hunger. People might suffer if facts are not considered, rather than wishes. The harmful outcome of the moralistic fallacy is also presented regarding social institutions:

> we can adapt our social institutions to our evolutionary legacy, but not vice versa. [...] If we choose otherwise, and suppress human behavioural genetics for fear that the results may contradict our assumptions, the costs may be high.[13]

The outcome of the moralistic fallacy might also be lost opportunities or lost profits. Davis points out this as tension:

> there are very good reasons to forbid human cloning: but if we should forbid any research in cell biology that might bring cloning nearer, we would seriously impair advances in cancer research.[14]

The moralistic fallacy is a severe problem, and we need to pay attention to it. It is a problem which is connected to political correctness, especially as pointed out by Ridley, but it is also a problem of ideals and hopes. The moralistic fallacy is committed by individuals, as Steven Pinker shows in the example of a clinical psychologist:

> Most people don't commit horrendous crimes without profoundly damaging things happening to them. It isn't that monsters are being born right and left. It's that children are being born right and left and are being subjected to horrible things. As a consequence, they end up doing horrible things. And I would much rather live in that world than in a world where monsters are just born.[15]

This is the case of the nature vs. nurture problem. It is a question of what is given and what can be learned. This question is connected to responsibility and the ability to change. The psychologist above was not willing or able to accept that people might be born in some way. Not willing to accept that some people might be "monsters" because of their nature. Therefore, it is an error in learning that there are monsters and it can be corrected. But as in many such cases, it is oversimplified. There might still be a person's or society's responsibility, even though the person behaves accordingly to

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[13] Davis, "The Moralistic Fallacy," 390.
[14] Ibid., 390.
[15] Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, 196.

their nature. Also, it is possible to change manifested outcomes of someone's nature. People do not have to act upon their impulses, and it is possible to correct not only what is gained during life but also correct what is gained from nature by adapting the manifestation to be socially accepted. To accept that something is in people's nature or is due to nurture by reasoning that if the other way around were true it would be horrible, terrifying, impossible to change, or impossible to ascribe a responsibility to is moralistic fallacy.

Moralistic fallacy can be committed by organizations and groups of scientists as well. An example like the psychologist case above is UNESCO's *The Seville Statement on Violence*, in which scholars and researchers from around the world explicitly state:

> we challenge a number of alleged biological findings that have been used, even by some in our disciplines, to justify violence and war. Because the alleged findings have contributed to an atmosphere of pessimism in our time, we submit that the open, considered rejection of these misstatements can contribute significantly to the International Year of Peace.[16]

The problem of moralistic fallacy is not that the statements are incorrect, but that they are accepted by inadequate derivation regarding scientific standards on evidence, and its character prevents possible scientific objections because of this different standard. Although scholars, who signed the statement from Seville, had been from relevant fields, they made the mistake of binding factual research findings with promotion or justifying some morally questionable actions. They based their position on moral background, and labeled those findings, which oppose their views, as "scientifically incorrect." The moralistic fallacy thus divides knowledge into two categories. The first category is acceptable and according to a normative background. The second category is wrong, immoral, against accepted normative status and thus *dangerous*.

So far, the presented examples might look like something from the past, or something rare, but even in today's scientific texts the moralistic fallacy occurs. Examples of it might be easily found in the field of research connected to human nature or evolution, and questions on differences between groups of people. Regarding the former, Gorelik and Schackelfold[17] pointed

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[16] David Adams, *The Seville Statement on Violence: Preparing the Ground for the Constructing of Peace: Disseminated by Decision of the General Conference of UNESCO at Its Twenty-Fifth Session, Paris, 16 November 1989* (UNESCO, 1991), 16.

[17] Gregory Gorelik and Todd K. Shackelford, "Suicide and the Moralistic Fallacy: Comment on Joiner, Hom, Hagan, and Silva (2016)," *Evolutionary Psychological Science* 3, no. 3 (2017): 287–89.

out the moralistic fallacy in the analyses of a suicide by Joiner et al.[18] Joiner et al. are accused of committing this fallacy by "believing suicide to be unnatural or evolutionarily maladaptive due to one's belief that it is immoral."[19] Another case, against philosophers, is made by d'Arms and Jacobson[20] regarding emotions. They say that some philosophers tend to infer "from the claim that it would be morally objectionable to feel *F* toward *X*, that therefore *F* is not a fitting response to *X*."[21] Also, it might be argued, that cases of moralistic fallacy can be found if there is no willingness to study scientific endeavor itself, binding it to the moral high ground and missing its social character as an activity of fallible humans, especially in the field of scientific misconduct.[22]

The later cases of moralistic fallacy are most visible in the discussion of human intelligence issues, or to be more specific, on testing or measuring intelligence. Measuring intelligence is a problematic field for several reasons. There is no single, agreed definition of intelligence. Also, applying intelligence tests and the results of these tests were and still might be abused for political purposes. Nevertheless, this should not prevent researchers from studying it, studying it with these tests and even studying the results from the tests themselves. As an illustration how the discussion about measuring intelligence can be compromised by the moralistic fallacy, it is possible to present an outline of the quarrel between Stephen J. Gould and J. Philippe Rushton together with Arthur R. Jensen.

Gould discussed his view in the book *The Mismeasure of Man*.[23] Gould stands in opposition to the claim that there is one number, one general intelligence which is biologically determined and unchangeable during life. In his book, he accused previous researchers of bias or even frauds in favor of white, rich, western men. He connected this fraud to the attempt to maintain the social status quo. Gould claims that most previous research intentionally or unintentionally committed moralistic fallacy because they believed that the results of white men should be better than those of other people. Therefore,

[18] Thomas E. Joiner, Melanie A. Hom, Christopher R. Hagan, and Caroline Silva, "Suicide as a Derangement of the Self-Sacrificial Aspect of Eusociality," *Psychological Review* 123, no. 3 (2017): 235–54.
[19] Gorelik and Shackelford, "Suicide and the Moralistic Fallacy," 287.
[20] Justin d'Arms and Daniel Jacobson, "The Moralistic Fallacy: On the 'Appropriateness' of Emotions," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 61, no. 1 (2000): 65–90.
[21] d'Arms and Jacobson, "The Moralistic Fallacy," 75.
[22] Wolfgang Stroebe, Tom Postmes, and Russell Spears, "Scientific Misconduct and the Myth of Self-Correction in Science," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 7, no. 6 (2012): 670–88.
[23] Stephen J. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (London: Penguin, 1997).

they should have higher intelligence, and if the data did not comply, it was a failure of the procedure which needed to be corrected. Gould's book had an impact, and when he was openly critical in the second edition of the book, some contemporary researchers reacted. Rushton and Jensen accused Gould in the article, which name is self-explanatory, *Wanted: More Race Realism, Less Moralistic Fallacy.*[24] They wrote that even though there are problems in the history of intelligence measurement, it does not necessarily mean that the results of these tests do not vary between specific groups of people. Therefore, it is Gould himself who is biased and committed the moralistic fallacy.

This example illustrates again that it does not matter if Gould or Rushton and Jensen are correct. Both parties, those who believe that there are differences in intelligence test results between groups of people and those who do not, can make moralistic fallacies in an attempt to justify their points. What is important is how they justify their statements. It also shows that both parties tried to prevent or discredit the other party's research by labeling it as morally flawed.

General Form of Moralistic Fallacy

The previous description of moralistic fallacy presupposes a general understanding regarding the difference between "ought" and "is." For further analyses, it is useful to introduce a simple theory of statements. PVF theory[25] differentiates between three types of propositions: policy propositions (P), propositions of value (V) and propositions of facts (V). Policies are recommendations for future actions. Propositions of value can be used to express statements that reflect moral or other normative systems. Propositions of facts are statements of what is the case.

Although in natural language the type of proposition is usually easy to identify in real life, the exact theoretical analyses might be difficult, especially without context.[26] Take, e.g., the sentence "Alexander should visit his parents tomorrow." This sentence might be about policy in a sense, that we have proposed what course of action should take place. It also might be about values, when there is a normative reason which has obliged Alexander

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[24] J. Philippe Rushton and Arthur R. Jensen, "Wanted: More Race Realism, Less Moralistic Fallacy," *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 11, no. 2 (2005): 328–36.
[25] Jean Wagemans, "Rhetorical Status Theory as an Institutional Framework for Legal Discussions," in *SSRN*, accessed September 30, 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2786290.
[26] Cf. Gerhard Schurz, *The Is-Ought Problem: An Investigation in Philosophical Logic* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1997), 9–10.

to visit his parents. Furthermore, the same sentence could describe a fact, when it is about future which is expected to occur. Because the moralistic fallacy is based on the distinction between value and factual propositions, proper identification is necessary.

Another example of the problems in identifying moralistic fallacy is the following example considering crossing one-way street:

> Have you ever crossed a one-way street without looking in both directions? If you have, reasoning that people shouldn't be driving the wrong way up a one way street so there's no risk of being run over from that direction, then you've committed the moralistic fallacy. Sometimes things aren't as they ought to be. Sometimes people drive in directions that they shouldn't. The rules of the road don't necessarily describe actual driving practices.[27]

This example is presented as a case of moralistic fallacy, but it is a tricky one. There are problems with identifying the statement that "People should drive in one direction in a one-way street." Initially, this statement was identified as a value proposition, but it seems to be much more appropriate to identify it as an expectation, as a proposition of facts and rephrased: People usually drive in one direction in a one-way street. Therefore, it seems more natural not to see this as an example of moralistic fallacy, but rather as an example of expressing regularity.

PVF theory enables us to present a general form of moralistic fallacy. The simplest form of moralistic fallacy is thus:

> Because of normative positions, which are expressed by propositions of value (V), propositions of facts (F) are accepted.

This simplest form seems to be too universal because it also covers examples of *presumptive reasoning* and *wishful thinking* or *self-deception*. Furthermore, it does not capture the Davis characterization of the moralistic fallacy regarding preventing an inquiry. Therefore, it seems more suitable to describe moralistic fallacy in this manner:

> Because of normative positions, which are expressed by propositions of value (V), some propositions of facts (F) are denied, and the contrary propositions of facts (counter-F) are accepted.

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[27] Logical Fallacies, "Moralistic Fallacy," in *Logical Fallacies: An Encyclopedia of Errors of Reasoning*, accessed September 30, 2018, https://www.logicalfallacies.info/relevance/moralistic/.

Although this form captures better the nature of moralistic fallacy as described by Davis, it also covers cases of presumptive reasoning, because any justification excludes at least some other counter-evidence. What makes presumptive reasoning different from moralistic fallacy?

It seems to be reasonable and pragmatic to derive a factual statement from a value statement in some cases. It would be paralyzing, e.g., not to be able to say that my electric kettle will heat the water because it should do that. Also, it would be disturbing not to be able to say that the defendant is innocent until proven guilty. Both these derivations are cases of presumptive reasoning or presumptive arguments.

> Presumption can be described as a move in dialogue that is mid-way between assertion and assumption.[28]

Presumptive reasoning is the reasoning applied in everyday thinking and argumentation.[29] It can be simply described as reasoning based on generally adopted schemes of world function. Presumptive reasoning enables us to provide weak support for a conclusion or shift in the burden of proof. Ones is not obliged to argue for what is generally accepted, even though there is no direct proof, but the other side must provide reasons when it claims that there is some disruption from the accepted order. This means that in cases like the electric kettle or presuming innocence, the reasons for accepting a statement are weak, yet enough to support their conclusions in the given discussion. However, if there is acceptable counter-evidence, such as that it does not seems the water is boiling and quite some time has passed, or that there is proof of crime, it is obligatory to give up the presumptions and accept the conclusion supported by the evidence.

What makes the moralistic fallacy different it is that it prevents the possibility to put forward such evidence. Henceforth, the general form of moralistic fallacy is rather this:

> Because of normative positions, which are expressed by propositions of value (*V*), inquiring of propositions of facts (*F*) by given rational (scientific) means are prevented, and the contrary propositions of facts (counter-*F*) are accepted.

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[28] Douglas Walton, "Abductive, Presumptive and Plausible Arguments," *Informal Logic* 21, no. 2 (2001): 156.

[29] Cf. David M. Godden and Douglas Walton, "A Theory of Presumption for Everyday Argumentation," *Pragmatics & Cognition* 15, no. 2 (2007): 313–46.

Even in this case, someone can argue that any justification prevents some ways to inquire.[30] That might be true, but the moralistic fallacy prevents inquiring by the originally adopted rational means. Thus, in real-life examples, the difference between presumptive reasoning, although based on a weak derivation as described by Walton,[31] and moralistic fallacy can be a matter of degree.[32] If preventing possible inquiry is too restrictive, and goes beyond what would be a reasonable limitation, it will be a case of moralistic fallacy. If the prevention is weak, it can be considered a reasonable limitation of discussion and thus be taken as presumptive reasoning, based on the rules of the given discussion.[33]

On the contrary, wishful thinking is usually described as a type of cognitive error. It goes from something we wish for to something that we are taking for granted. We can also find the definition of wishful thinking as argumentation fallacy in Damer's textbook:

> Assuming that because one wants something to be true, it is or will be true. Conversely, assuming that because one does not want something to be true, then it is not or will not be true. [34]

Wishful thinking is usually described in comparison to self-deception,[35] and there are also some important features which must be taken under con-

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[30] When some statement is challenged for some reason, it might be defended by providing justification to accept the statements regarding a given challenge. Thus, it prevents challenging the statement in the same way. This is complying to the 9th commandment of critical discussion in Pragma-dialectics. Cf. Frans H. van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst. *A Systematic Theory of Argumentation: The Pragma-Dialectical Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 195. It might be noted that it is not a necessarily universal rule of critical discussion and thus differ, e.g., in some sets of rules for obligations. Cf. Mikko Yrjönsuuri, "Obligationes. 14th Century Logic of Disputational Duties," *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 55 (1994): 1–182.

[31] Presumptions are something between assumption and statement, regarding Walton. See Walton, "Abductive, Presumptive and Plausible Arguments," 141–69.

[32] This is also in agreement with some approaches towards fallacies. Cf. Maarten Boudry, Fabio Paglieri, and Massimo Pigliucci, "The Fake, the Flimsy, and the Fallacious: Demarcating Arguments in Real Life," *Argumentation* 29, no. 4 (2015): 431–56.

[33] In this sense, the moralistic fallacy is closed to if not the same to concept of immunizing strategy or epistemic defence system as put forward by Boudry and Braeckman. Cf. Maarten Boudry and Johan Braeckman. "Immunizing Strategies and Epistemic Defense Mechanisms," *Philosophia* 39, no. 1 (2011): 145–61.

[34] T. Edward Damer, *Attacking Faulty Reasoning: A Practical Guide to Fallacy-Free Arguments* (Belmont: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), 146.

[35] Cf. Alfred R. Mele, *Irrationality: An Essay on Akrasia. Self-Deception, and Self-Control* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Alfred R. Mele, *Self-Deception Unmasked* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

sideration. The first feature is the *problem of the truthfulness* of a proposition which somebody believes and subsequently takes as granted. The question is whether it is necessary to consider the truth of the conclusion when we are talking about wishful thinking. The answer is no. If the original state of affairs is unknown, there might be a chance that we deceive ourselves to accept a statement which is the case, but it is a case for different reasons.[36]

Another feature is the *problem of intention* transitioning from wishing something to taking it as granted. Does a person have to have the intention to think wishfully and subsequently obtain a belief grounded in his wishes? Some scholars reason that intentions make distinction between wishful thinking and self-deception,[37] but this does not seem correct. We can say that it would be unusual for somebody to intentionally try to obtain information from an uncertain source, especially when he could get this information from a more credible source. People usually (at least in a discussion which is supposed to be rational) do not deceive themselves intentionally. They do so because they believe it is a credible source of justification in some cases. We have to say that no one wishes to be wrong, unjustified, but everybody believes that his/her position is well justified. This is also what makes wishful thinking (or self-deceiving) hard to uncover or hard to prove. There are *backward rationalizations*[38] for our beliefs, and the true source may stay unnoticed.

This characterization is also important for the third crucial feature, the *problem of subsequent evidence or counter-evidence*. In this sense, there may be found little difference between wishful thinking and self-deceiving. In the case of self-deceiving, the counter-evidence could be convincing but still left unaccepted in favor of much weaker evidence which the self-deceiver could put forward for his beliefs. On the contrary, in cases of wishful thinking noticing counter-evidence could lead to the urge to back one's positions and this could be done by backward rationalization (I know, but we must be open to all options [...]) or by denying the counter-evidence (I know, but I still do believe that [...]). The problem of subsequent evidence or counter-

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[36] I do not consider self-fulfilling prophecy, because those are of a special sort where the person can influence the outcome.

[37] Cf. Mele, *Self-Deception Unmasked*, 73.

[38] Cf. "The fallacy of wishful thinking is sometimes difficult to distinguish from rationalization. Both the rationalizer and the wishful thinker want a claim to be true, but while the rationalizer attempts to establish that claim by means of irrelevant phony premises, the wishful thinker tries to establish it exclusively on the unwarranted assumption that his or her wishing it to be true will make it true." Damer, *Attacking Faulty Reasoning*, 147.

evidence shows how hard it may be to find out the case of wishful thinking and how people could try to hide the origin of their sources of justification.

The last feature of wishful thinking, to be discussed here, is *the problem of desire*. This feature clearly shows us the difference between wishful thinking and self-deceiving. If someone wishes for something and if he achieves it, he is somehow satisfied. In a case of self-deception, reaching the goal does not have to have the same effect. People may deceive themselves to believe something, which might be against their wishes and might be unsatisfactory for them. This is a case of so-called *reverse self-deceiving*. Barnes describes it like this:

> What shows that self-deceptive belief cannot be assimilated to wishful belief is the fact that in wishful belief that *p, the believer cannot have a stronger felt desire that not-p and lack a desire, all things considered, that p*, while in possible cases of self-deceptive belief that *p, the believer does have a stronger felt desire that not-p and lacks a desire, all things considered, that p*. Some cases of self-deceptive belief are not, therefore, cases of wishful belief.[39]

In conclusion, wishful thinking is a particular type of self-deceiving and self-deceiving is a type of moralistic fallacy. Self-deceiving is primary characterized as adopting beliefs by wrongful means. Subsequently, if this is connected to the satisfaction of that person, it is wishful thinking.

Regarding Davis' description, it should be pointed out that policy involved is consisting partially of prohibition of acquiring, seeking or verifying some knowledge. If we intend to cover this policy in the general form, of the moralistic fallacy can be easily complemented:

> Because of normative positions, which are expressed by propositions of value (*V*), inquiring of propositions of facts (*F*) is prevented by adopting limits of possible inquiring (*P*), and the contrary propositions of facts (counter-*F*) are accepted.

Therefore, this can be taken as the complete general form of the moralistic fallacy, where (*V*) leads to actions or policy (*P*), which prevent inquiry into some facts (*F*) and establish acceptance of other facts (counter-*F*).

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[39] Annette Barnes, *Seeing through Self-Deception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 54.

Paradox of Moralistic Fallacy

The is-ought problem is of last consequence as described by Hume, and moralistic fallacy is as well. Not only that those who want to argue against the accepted facts can be persecuted, but acceptance itself can have a damaging impact. People were persecuted for disagreeing, and millions of people died hungry in a case of Lysenkoism. Should Marxism-Leninism not be driven by science and helpful to ordinary people? Is this not a paradox? In some cases, moralistic fallacy causes a situation where preventing inquiring or acceptance of some facts on the grounds of normative position leads to actions which are contrary to the original normative position. I will show an example of this paradox in the case from the IQ testing domain in the educational system in the Czech Republic.

The Czech Republic, as well as some other countries, was criticized for its approach towards the education of minorities. This criticism was especially displayed in legal action against the Czech Republic at the European Court of Human Rights which took place between 2000 and 2007.[40] The main point of this dispute is connected to the process used to allocate children to specialized schools, and especially to so-called special or practical schools as subcategories of specialized schools, and to regular "ordinary" elementary schools. The process of allocation was considered unfair to Czech minorities, namely to Roma. The unsatisfactory situation with minorities in the Czech educational system was one of the reasons why, in 2005, a new intelligence test was introduced. Pedagogical and psychological counseling centers (pedagogicko-psychologické poradny, PPP) began to use employ it at that time. PPP plays a specific role in the process of allocating children to schools. They overview the process of evaluating the mental abilities of children, their readiness to go to school and provides materials for the decision to allocate children to specialized schools.

The new test was Snijders-Oomen Nonverbal Intelligence Test 2½–7 (SON-R 2½-7). This test is intended for children between two and a half to seven years old, that covers the age of children when they are going to elementary school in the Czech Republic. SON-R 2½-7 has allegedly one quality for which it was chosen; it is supposed to be culturally fair. The results of SON-R 2½-7 should not depend on the culture from which the children came from. It can be speculated that this characteristic was ascribed to this

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[40] European Court of Human Rights, "Case of D. H. and Others v. the Czech Republic (Application no. 57325/00)," in *Legal Tool Database*, accessed September 30, 2018, https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/8739a8/pdf/.

test because it is non-verbal. Therefore, knowledge of Czech language should not play a role in testing. This test was used without a study of it to measure characteristics regarding culture for several years. A study published in 2010[41] pointed out that this test is not culturally fair, furthermore, that in some cases differences between values measured by the test and values obtained by other means, especially by observation in normal conditions, is causing inadequate allocation of children to specialized schools. Thus, it was proven that the SON-R 2½-7 is culturally biased.

This case can be considered as a case of moralistic fallacy, and subsequently as a case of the paradox of moralistic fallacy for several reasons. The original context in the Czech Republic prevents studying the characteristics of the test. This situation was due to the ongoing trial at the time and the pressure to change the school allocation process. Also, it was not appropriate to study the differences between children from different cultural backgrounds. The question of the possibility to test intelligence without cultural bias has still not been resolved,[42] and regarding the SON-R 2½-7, it was proven before its adaptation in Czech Republic that the test has a cultural bias.[43,44] Thus, it is possible to state that this test was adopted on the basis of normative reasons instead of appropriate consideration[45]. Therefore, this whole process of adapting the test can be described as the moralistic fallacy:

> Because it should not be the case that there is an unfair discrimination of children regarding the process of their allocation to school (*V*), it will not be considered (*P*), how different groups of children score in tests of intelligence adopted in the process (*F*) and it will be taken as granted that this test is culturally fair (*counter-F*).

[41] Simona Pekárková et al., *Nemoc bezmocných: lehká mentální retardace. Analýza inteligenčního testu SON-R* (Praha: Člověk v tísni, 2010).

[42] Robert J. Sternberg, "Culture and Intelligence," *American Psychologist* 59, no. 5 (2004): 325–38.

[43] Cristal Moore et al., "Concurrent Validity of the Snijders-Oomen Nonverbal Intelligence Test 2 1/2–7–Revised with the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence–Revised," *Psychological Reports* 82, no. 2 (1998): 619–25.

[44] Peter J. Tellegen and Jacob A. Laros. "Cultural Bias in the SON-R Test: Comparative Study of Brazilian and Dutch Children," *Psicologia: Teoria e Pesquisa* 20, no. 2 (2004): 103–11.

[45] Lately, limiting use of the test is very briefly mentioned in Edita Chvojková, Štěpán Postulka, and Tereza Horáková, "Snijders-Oomen neverbální inteligenční test-recenze metody," *TESTFÓRUM* 6, no. 11 (2018): 54. But this note is basically just reference to Pekárková et al., *Nemoc bezmocných*.

Adopting SON-R 2½-7 as culturally fair causes unfair discrimination of specific groups of children. It caused something that should have been prevented. Furthermore, it caused discrimination in a systematic and unreflected way. It might be said that this is a scenario where possibly good intentions lead to actions contrary to those original intentions. To capture this, it is suitable to make a complement to the previous description:

> Because it should not be the case that there is an unfair discrimination of children regarding the process of their allocation to school (*V*), it will not be considered (*P*), how different groups of children's scores in the test of intelligence adopted in the process (*F*) and it will be taken as granted that this test is culturally fair (*counter-F*). Taking tests as culturally fair led to situations where using of these tests (*P'*) caused systematic and unfair discrimination of groups of children (counter-*V*).

The complement is made by describing actions (*P'*), which were taken after the adoption of the test, and by pointing out the conflict between these actions (*P'*) and original values (counter-*V*). This example also provides a general description for the paradox of moralistic fallacy, where the seriousness of the original fallacy is strengthened by the outcome of the situation. The description of the desired situation should be generally in the form of propositions of policies, i.e., actions which conflict with the originally held values. Therefore, the general form of the paradox of moralistic fallacy can be presented in this manner:

> Because of normative positions, which are expressed by propositions of value (*V*), inquiring propositions of facts (*F*) is prevented by adopting limits of possible inquiring (*P*), and the contrary propositions of facts (counter-*F*) are accepted. The prevention (*P, F*) and acceptance (counter-*F*) led to a situation where actions (out-*P*) are taken and these actions in their execution conflict with original values (counter-*V*).

The unwelcome outcome could be easily overcome if at its core there would not be the moralistic fallacy. This fallacy prevents possible avoidance to the outcoming actions (out-*P*) by preventing inquiring (*P*). Therefore, the unwelcome outcome can be unrecognized and covertly and systematically damaging in the given situation. The seriousness of this was shown in the example from the Czech educational system. The possibility to change the situation came about after the inquiry in 2010 was done.

The problem of adopting SON-R 2½-7 is not in imprecise measurements. The SON-R 2½-7 is a well-established method with studies in its validity, reliability and convergence to other tests. The problem is that SON-R 2½-7 has limits which were omitted for policy reasons.

The paradox of moralistic fallacy presents what can happen when an inquiry is restricted solely because of values, norms or morality. It also shows that this kind of reasoning can backfire on those who are committing it. Regarding the measurement of intelligence, it should be noted, that to know how some groups score in tests does not tell more than exactly that. It does not divide people into some morally better and morally worse groups, nor to some superior or inferior. And, it especially does not commit anybody to any action.

Regarding the results of the test, they imply no commitment to undesirable actions or policy in society. Actions and policy are based on goals, or values of society. If we do not like using a test which scores unfairly, we can change it, but it is necessary to know that there is a bias, and to study the bias of the test. Otherwise the outcome might be against our wishes. There is no dangerous knowledge, only dangerous actions, and it is possible to commit them in ignorance.

Overview and Conclusion

The moralistic fallacy is defined as the derivation of an "is" from an "ought" by preventing some inquiry. Regarding the character of this prevention, it might be differentiated from presumptive reasoning. Wishful thinking and self-deception might be particular cases of moralistic fallacy if this is connected to one person.

The moralistic fallacy can have serious outcomes and in the case of the moralistic fallacy paradox, these outcomes can go against an original position and associated values. Therefore, committing this fallacy, especially in science, should be considered a serious problem. Inquiries provide data, and these data do not commit anybody to behave in a certain way. Values do. It is not possible to change what there is, to change what the given facts are, but it is possible to change how it is approached and what can be done with it. Therefore, it is inadequate and possibly harmful to divide facts to welcome and unwelcome ones, and even dangerous ones. There is no dangerous knowledge. Knowledge itself does not intend to hurt somebody; it simply describes what is.

On the other hand, if what there is, if facts are ignored, the actions might be counterproductive and can backfire. Thus, labeling some knowledge as

dangerous is mistaken and potentially dangerous in its own right. Furthermore, this can be done covertly due to the restrictions of the inquiry.

The moralistic fallacy and the subsequent paradox are still present in today's science. Although there might be commendable reasons, preventing research can be costly and can backfire. Allowing any research is also not the way to understand refusal of moralistic fallacy. There should be restrictions, but these restrictions have to be considered carefully and wisely. In the end, what should be prevented is not knowledge but actions. The messenger should not be shot for unwelcome news.

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