



Background Beliefs

Student Handout #1: Facts, Values and Worldviews

Matters of Fact and Values

Disagreements come in two different varieties: matters of fact (e.g., the final score of last night's baseball game) and values (e.g., which of the players in last night's game is the best hitter). What this means is that when we encounter a controversial topic, there really are four different relationships that can arise. For example, let's consider the positions two people might take on the war in Iraq.

1. Agree on both facts and values. Alex and Britney might agree that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and that wars are always wrong.
2. Disagree on both facts and values. For instance, Alex might believe that Iraq did not have WMDs and that war is always wrong; whereas, Britney might think that Iraq really did have WMDs and that war is justified whenever it will benefit the U.S.
3. Agree on facts and disagree on values. Alex and Britney might both agree that Iraq did not possess WMDs, but they might still disagree about whether or not it is ever moral to go to war.
4. Disagree on facts and agree on values. Perhaps Alex and Britney both agree that going to war can be morally permissible but disagree as to whether or not Iraq had WMDs.

Disagreements about matters of fact can often be resolved simply by looking at the relevant data. Disagreements about values are deeper and cannot usually be resolved so easily.

Worldviews

Worldviews consist of our most deeply ingrained beliefs, the kinds that are most resistant to questioning or amendment. They frequently guide us, though we're not consciously aware of it. When we do examine these beliefs, we tend to reject information that conflicts with them almost automatically. Our worldview is particularly important because it enters into many decisions about what to do or what to believe, decisions that we need to make regularly to live our lives. Some examples of worldviews: It's wrong to betray one's country; everyone is mortal; the laws of physics don't change from day to day; killing is morally wrong. Most of our worldviews are of this general sort, but some are very specific: Belief (or disbelief) in God is a pretty specific belief, and for many it is a central part of their worldview.