Week 3: Mozi and Logic
Section 9: Problems for Moral Naturalism

- This practical syllogism also generates the problem of trying to understand ethics on naturalistic grounds.
- Remember, the practical syllogism can be used with many different forms of the desire premise, including statements of value, imperatives, rights, duties and so on.
- The general normative counterpart we call the 'ought' premise. You must have an 'ought' in the premises to derive one in the conclusion.
- Hence, we can not prove what *ought to be the case* with only descriptive, factual premises.
- Paraphrasing David Hume: You can't get an *ought* from an *is.*
- Back to the *abortion* example:
    - Imagine an argument: "A fetus has brainwaves and can feel pain, therefore you ought not to kill it"
    - To make the argument formally valid, we need to supply a missing premise such as, "You ought not to kill anything that has brainwaves and can feel pain"
    - Then, if we accept the required moral premise, we should accept all the conclusions that follow from it. What about killing cockroaches? We are back at the moral reform impasse. To reject the conclusion (we ought not kill cockroaches) then we must reject the law-like moral premise.

- Even an appeal to the authority of God is problematic for a similar reason.
    - God's command sounds like an *is* statement. "God has commanded X" has the form of an assertion, a factual belief. To derive "I ought to X" we need a premise that says "I ought to obey what God's commands."
    - Can we escape the puzzle by saying "God commands that I obey God's commands"? How else might I arrive at the premise that commands me to obey God?
- This moral use of the practical syllogism leads us to 2 characteristic Western conclusions.
    - Psychologically, we are all motivated by our own desires.
    - Normatively: We cannot determine moral issues from purely scientific bases.