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24.06 SLIPPERY SLOPES HANDOUT

Some Slippery-Slope Arguments

Selective Treatment

- If we think (i) It is okay to choose not to administer life-saving treatment to a severely disabled newborn.
we'll end up thinking (ii) It is okay to choose not to administer life-saving treatment to a child who is shorter than average.

Eugenics

- If we (the state) adopt (i) A policy of encouraging people with mental disabilities to use contraception.
we'll end up adopting (ii) A policy of genocide.

Abortion

- If we think (i) It is okay to abort nine days after conception.
we'll end up thinking (ii) It is okay to abort nine months after conception.

The General Form of a Slippery-Slope Argument

There's a series of normative claims $C_1, C_2, C_3, \dots, C_n$

- P1** It will be very bad if we accept C_n .
P2 We should not accept a claim if doing so will lead to very bad consequences.
P3 For any i , if we accept C_i , then we will come to accept C_{i+1} .

C We should not accept C_1 .

OR

There's a series of policies $P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots, P_n$

- P1** It will be very bad if we follow P_n .
P2 We should not follow a policy if doing so will lead to very bad consequences.
P3 For any i , if we follow P_i , then we will come to follow P_{i+1} .

C We should not follow P_1 .

Motivations for P3

There's a **Logical Slippery Slope** – when we accept the one claim / follow the one policy, then it makes sense to accept the next claim / follow the next policy.

There's a **Causal Slippery Slope** – as a matter of fact, people who accept the one claim / follow the one policy will tend to accept the next claim / follow the next policy.