THINKING TOOLS. FALLACY: TWO WRONGS MAKE A RIGHT

Stephen Law

Thinking tools is a regular feature that offers tips and pointers on thinking clearly and rigorously.

This fallacy involves attempting to justify doing something bad to a person or persons on the grounds that they would do it us. So, for example:

> *Bert regularly sells cars he knows are no good, so I'm justified in selling him this car that I know is no good. After all, he'd do the same to me.*

> *Zenda would certainly nuke us, given the opportunity, so we are justified in nuking Zenda.*

The truth, of course, is that two wrongs do not make a right. It may be true that *a* would do *F* to *b*; it doesn't follow that *b* is then justified in doing *F* to *a*.

Indeed, even if *a* has *actually* done *F* to *b*, *b* is still not necessarily justified in doing *F* to *a* (though perhaps, with additional premises, such a justification might be constructed: perhaps doing *F* in response might *deter a* from doing *F* again, or perhaps doing *F* to *a* might be justly deserved *punishment* for *a*'s doing *F* to *b*).

Under some circumstances, the fact that someone has not yet done, but is clearly *about to* do, something bad to you may justify doing it to them first, but again, only with help of additional premises, as in this example: "Bert clearly is about to kill me, and the only way to stop him is to kill him first, so I am justified killing him in self defence".

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