

ISSA Proceedings 2002 - Tu Quoque? Fallacy And Vindication In Appeal To Other People's "Wrongs"



1. "Practice what you preach or you're wrong": wrong?

Tu quoque is the type of argument trying to rebut standpoints by referring to speakers' conduct inconsistent with their standpoints. For example: A tells B to be less lazy in physical exercise. B answers A that he must be telling nonsense, because he is not performing any physical exercise himself. *Tu quoque* may also denote arguments referring to (direct) contradiction in speakers' standpoints, like: "You can't be right, because yesteryear you vigorously defended a completely contrary standpoint." This second (and probably less interesting) variety of *tu quoque* will not be discussed here.

Such arguments seem obviously fallacious, if only because of their complete lack of reference to any relevant subject matter. Whether physical exercise is a good or bad thing to do (at least in the sense of: being good or bad for health) is to be determined by medical evidence, not at all by any speakers' conduct in physically exercising themselves or not (see § 2 for further reasons against *tu quoque* reasoning).

Though simply fallacious at first sight, the well-nigh omnipresence of *tu quoque* in daily and even in professional and scholarly life may not just be a consequence of listeners' lack of intellect and dexterity in discussion. Actually, *tu quoque* appears to be something like an "umbrella" concept, covering a wide variety of types of reasoning, ranging from obvious fallacies to sound and important argument.

First, *tu quoque* fallacies may serve important argumentative and communicative purposes apart from rebuttal of speakers' standpoints, for example in showing up speakers' lack of integrity (see §§ 3 and 4). Second, not all argument presenting itself as *tu quoque* really is *tu quoque* in any fallacious sense. Legal and moral argument may look like *tu quoque*, but may in effect come down to sound argument from contract, precedent and "tit for tat" rules (see § 5). Also, varieties

of tu quoque are implied in and related to many more forms of interesting argument, for example in attempts to justify rules of conduct by reference to third parties' behaviour (see § 6).

Thus tu quoque appears to be not so much a simple fallacy as well as a highly useful complex of heterogeneous appeals to some or other kind of commitment, mutual or otherwise. Not so much avoidance of tu quoque may be the thing to do as well as to avoidance of conduct leaving room for tu quoque reactions. The essence of (avoidance of) tu quoque is positive commitment in the first place (§ 7).

2. Fallacious varieties, for fundamental reasons

Tu quoque arguments purport to lead to normative and/or evaluative conclusions, with few exceptions. It could not be otherwise, as tu quoque refers to inconsistency of utterance and conduct: "You tell me to do x, you yourself are doing non-x, so you're wrong". A descriptive tu quoque may not be a fallacy at all, as it may run along the following lines: "You're stating to me that human beings are x, you are non-x, so you must be wrong". Anyway, discussion will here be focused on evaluative and/or normative tu quoque arguments.

Norms and evaluations in tu quoque argument may be moral in some or other sense, for example concerning prohibitions to lie, or non-moral, again in some or other sense, for example concerning means to ends (think of the physical exercise example).

It will be taken for granted that the descriptive content of tu quoque arguments, relating to speakers' conduct, more or less conforms to the facts. Otherwise, tu quoque would be simply vitiated by depending on falsity instead of being fallacious in some or other more or less complex sense. Imagine a speaker telling somebody: "Don't you smoke!" and the listener retorting: "Nonsense, you're smoking yourself." The speaker may honestly answer: "No, you're wrong, I never smoked (though it does not matter as your answer is fallacious anyway)."

It is also to be taken for granted that evaluations and norms involved in tu quoque argument do apply to speakers themselves. Otherwise, the argument would stall from the beginning. For example: "You must be wrong about jogging being healthy, because you are sitting down more or less motionless all day" Against a cripple such an argument would not even get started. (But then the cripple might still perform healthy movements apart from jogging, within the confines of his physical handicap? Problems of similarity and analogy prop up here, see also § 6.) Without self-reference there is no tu quoque. This implies that one standard

answer to *tu quoque* will not do in normal circumstances, as “It was about you and not about me” implies relevant differences between speaker and listener.

Tu quoque may not only refer to speakers’ present conduct, as in the example just discussed, but may also refer to speakers’ conduct in the past: “How can you tell me not to experiment with drugs when you did so yourself as a teenager?” To such a *tu quoque* a fitting extra answer may be that the speaker experienced and learnt from the consequences of his own behaviour and thus is especially qualified to admonish any potential imitators: “I know what I’m talking about, so you’d better listen and do what I tell you”.

Tu quoque may also apply to future conduct. An example from the history of the bar in The Netherlands: A legal scholar criticised the bar for relaxing professional moral standards and aiming solely at winning cases by whatever means. To this the dean of the bar association of The Netherlands answered: “Come on, nonsense, our legal scholar will immediately lose his moralising stance as soon as he gets involved in a lawsuit himself. Everybody wants to win.” To this the legal scholar might have answered that he did not plan to ever get involved in any lawsuit, though such an answer might not have been fully convincing.

One last *tu quoque* variety here refers to what speakers would want to do in hypothetical cases. Thus in more than a few Western countries discussion is raging on standards for admission of foreigners on a temporary or permanent basis. Arguments may be overheard like: “Come on, you must be wrong in your pleas for liberalising admission regulations: would you be ready to house economical refugees yourself, if you got any room for them?!” (Problems of analogy here again, as speakers’ housing foreigners may not be directly or even indirectly compared to admitting foreigners to the country.)

A *tu quoque* against an evaluative statement may run as follows. “I don’t like oranges.” “You’re telling nonsense, I saw you peeling and eating one.” “It’s only for my health.” In general, evaluative *tu quoque* may be much more easily rebutted, if only for its much looser connection with speakers’ conduct. (It goes without saying that reference to past, present, future and intended conduct is apposite in evaluative *tu quoque* arguments as well.)

Practically effective as answers mentioned above may be, *tu quoque* in its simple forms as sketched above is all the more fallacious for at least two fundamental reasons. First, it obviously is a kind of fallacious *ad hominem*, a category error confusing truth-value or at least plausibility of statements (standpoints, propositions etc.) with facts concerning speakers and their circumstances. As long

as statements involved do not directly refer to such speakers and their circumstances themselves, *tu quoque* is fallacious for that general reason in the first place. (Let it be noted, though, that *ad hominem* is a complex problem in itself and that reference to speakers' personal qualities and circumstances does not always lead to fallacious argument *per se*, as will also appear shortly in discussion of non-fallacious varieties of *tu quoque*. See also Walton, 1998, with passing reference to *tu quoque*.)

Second, *tu quoque* is an is-ought fallacy, trying to derive norms from facts. Facts constituted by speakers' actual or hypothetical conduct or will are taken to be sufficient grounds against evaluations and/or norms. Complex as "is-ought" relationships may be (see Hudson, 1969), this kind of argument from facts to norms will not do. Indeed, speakers may simply answer that they themselves are doing things wrong as well.

A more practicable rebuttal of *tu quoque* may be an appeal to some or other "ought implies can" argument applicable to speakers but not to listeners, for example in terms of *akrasia* (weakness of will). Thus speakers having put forward some or other norm and having been confronted with inconsistency of utterance and action may answer: "Of course the norm involved applies to myself as well, however, I am unable to comply with it". Speakers may even answer that they were not only addressing themselves but all of humanity as well. Note that this answer is different from the contention that the norm involved does not apply to the speaker himself, as in the cripple case noted above: if so, there can be no *tu quoque* problem.

However (though this probably goes without saying), fallaciousness of *tu quoque* arguments against evaluations and norms of whatever kind does not at all imply any vindication of such evaluations and norms, as fallaciousness of arguments in general of course has no implications concerning truth-value or plausibility of conclusions. Thus a *tu quoque* remains a fallacy in principle, even if it may accidentally succeed in convincing people of the wrongfulness of the norms and evaluations they put forward. (Indeed, in this essay's title 'wrongs' was not put within parentheses for nothing.)

For example (without implying anything about really good reasons for and against in this case): somebody puts it that lying is prohibited in all possible circumstances, with no exceptions at all. A listener retorts by stating that the speaker lied to a killer who asked at gunpoint where his potential victim was. "So you must be wrong", the listener continues. Right, but not for the reason stated,

referring to speaker's conduct.

3. Tu quoque and problems of integrity, credibility and persuasiveness

Though tu quoque fails in refuting statements by referring to speakers' conduct not in line with such statements, tu quoque may still serve to show lack of speakers' integrity in putting forward norms or evaluations with which they do not comply themselves. Thus tu quoque may still lead to vindication of normative and even moral judgement, in condemning speakers' lack of integrity. Such integrity implications may put the moral standing of speakers put in jeopardy. Anybody not acting up to his own publicly avowed standards seems to be a less good person in some or other sense. Also, speakers' credibility suffers. People who don't do what they say may do so again.

This is directly connected to another sometimes interesting variety of tu quoque. Though speakers may be right in what they say, they may not be very effective in making other people believe them. Thus one favourite journalese pastime is bashing left-wing politicians living luxury lives. It may imply nothing about principles of left-wing politics as such (in as far as anything like "politics as such" makes sense and though more than a few right-wing media people would much like it to be otherwise), still people may not always be readily convinced by politicians who do not practice what they preach.

So a sometimes sensible variety of tu quoque may be something like: "You may be right, but why on earth are *you* telling me to do things the right way while you yourself are sitting still?!" This leads to one more variety (or implication) of tu quoque: whence the right of speakers' failing to live up to their own standards to chastise others? Should not moral ledger display some or other balance or evenness?

4. The Moral Ledger

Indeed, part of the attraction of tu quoque at least informally relies on "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone" (John 8:7). For example: "Why did you breach your promise, in not turning up according to our appointment? What you did is wrong and is to be resented, as it ought to go without saying that people ought to keep their promises". The listener (the "victim", in this case) may well retort: "Come on, don't you overdo things, this is the first time I forgot an appointment with you, up to now it was you who did not turn up and I remained silent about it."

Again, such an answer can be no rebuttal of any principle that promises are to be

kept. On the other hand, the listener may well put it that the speaker, though stating an uncontested moral principle, still is not justified in addressing the listener in such a way. Moral ledgers ought to be at least more or less even, if speakers are to chastise or even punish others. That is, apart from special circumstances like parents trying to educate children to live better lives than they themselves did. But even then the “he who is without sin” principle remains in force, not only because honest “teachers” will be all the more effective for it (see already § 3). Again, *tu quoque* may still lead to vindication of normative and even moral judgement, this time in condemning speakers’ right to address their “victims” in such terms.

Confronting somebody with a norm or principle with which he did not or does not comply is a speech act with at least two important characteristics. First, the norm or principle may be conveyed, in the sense of being asserted to be true or at least plausible. Second, in many cases it indeed is, or is at least felt to be, a kind of chastisement or even punishment: the raised finger implied in telling people they did wrong, or will do wrong when they do not comply. This effect of the speech act is partly dependent upon the content of the norm put forward (for obvious reasons, evaluations are less relevant here), but goes much further, in at least implicitly stating something like: “You are less worthy for not having performed well, you deserve to be the object of resentment, punishment etc.” (See on speech acts, illocutionary and perlocutionary force and related subjects Searle, 1969 and Searle, 1995.)

In fact, the “moral ledger” aspect of *tu quoque* is an application of a more generally important aspect of the relationships of content and utterance of norms, moral or otherwise. For example: a norm may be perfectly plausible, like: “Apart from overriding considerations, promises are to be kept.” However, speech acts conveying such norms have their own morality, so to say: what are speakers doing to listeners (and to speakers’ relationship with listeners) in telling them they have to stick to such a rule? Such speech acts (in preaching “life without sin” or even worse) may at times have more undesirable consequences than just upsetting the moral ledger, still apart from the often forgotten fact that few people are to be really edified by moral “education”.

This holds good for non-moral principles, rules and evaluations as well, e.g. concerning public decency, etiquette and even technical rules prescribing conduct as means to ends (hypothetical imperatives). For example: somebody renowned for rude behaviour better be silent about other people’s lack of

politeness, just as somebody who systematically fails to realise simple ends by clear means does not seem to be in a good position to tell others that they ought to be more effective in realising their ends in life.

Also, this “moral ledger” aspect of *tu quoque* is not limited to situations in which speakers put forward norms they do not comply with themselves. He who did wrong may better remain silent about the wrongs of others, even if other people’s wrongs are not at all like the wrongs committed by a speaker who forgot not to commit them or at least to chastise himself in the first place: “D’abord faire métier de pénitent pour pouvoir finir en juge ...” (thus famously, and rightly, spoke Tarrou in Camus, 1947).

Though Camus had judges in mind and not public administrators, this last category may well deserve some chastisement here too. Thus in The Netherlands and in other countries, public administration is worried about citizens’ public morality in paying taxes, sticking to (building) regulations in order not to pollute (the landscape), respecting other people’s rights in road traffic and in general, and so on. Indeed, in The Netherlands advertisements appeared in the media, telling people: “Society? It is you!” More than a few citizens became enraged about this, asking why a public administration that itself systematically violates public regulations designed to protect human life (for example concerning fire proofing public spaces) and thus is guilty of loss of (several) human lives (at least in The Netherlands, in the past few years) has any right to address citizens in such a (supposedly paternalistic) fashion and to enforce the law against citizens while that very same law may be ostensibly disobeyed by government itself.

Several considerations are apposite here. First, integrity, credibility and persuasiveness problems prop up here again. Second, the moral ledger is apposite here too. Third, and in terms of some or other social contract as the basis of civil obedience, citizens may well come to think that they do not owe that much to a public administration not really caring for them in the first place, like (to maybe overdo things a bit): I’m left alone by government, why should I care for society as a whole? It’s me myself first now”. Traces of “tit for tat” may be recognised here as well. Indeed, not only contract and “tit for tat” like situations may show that important varieties of *tu quoque* argument are not fallacious at all.

5. Non-fallacious varieties: contract, precedent, custom, tit for tat

Up to now, the fallaciousness of *tu quoque* in a strict sense was beyond doubt, the discussion being directed toward informal implications of *tu quoque* that may still

be plausible in their own right or may even be really convincing some or other way, thus explaining part of the attraction of *tu quoque*. However, as just suggested, varieties of *tu quoque* may even constitute completely valid forms of argumentation by themselves. Such argumentation has to do with norms (and values) prescribing speakers' and listeners' conduct toward each other in particular.

Thus: "You must be wrong, because you don't do what you say" may be completely right in circumstances of promise and contract, legal or otherwise. For example: A promises B to sell and deliver goods to B on condition of payment by B upon delivery. A fails to deliver, but still tells B: "You are doing wrong by not paying me, as it is wrong in general not to live up to promise and contract". Here B may completely validly answer: "You are right in your general principle, but you're wrong in its supposed implication for me, as it was you who did not live up to justified expectations in the first place, so your norm must be wrong because you did not comply with it yourself." Though legal (and non-legal) promise and contract may be more complex, for example because one party may still legally enforce a standing contract if the other party does not comply, the principle is clear enough.

Precedent may lead to more or less comparably valid *tu quoque* argument. For example: twin kids are discussing pocket money issues. One tells the other: "You're wrong in asking for more, you got enough!" The other may retort: "Come on, you already got more pocket money (through pestering your parents etc.), so you're wrong." This is completely valid *tu quoque* argument, in the absence of any relevant differences between the twins concerned and given basic justice as equality. (Though not only legal scholars and practitioners ought to be aware of the silliness of any claim to be treated equally as such: relevant or irrelevant similarities and differences and thus underlying principle determine the value of precedent: see Kaptein, 1995.)

Next (and in line with contract, precedent and equality), "tit for tat" may not always be a sound principle, let alone a plausible moral principle, still it may still serve to show some truth in *tu quoque* varieties. It may not just be effective to counter like with like wrongs, as long as harm done is none too severe and in only to convey to wrongdoers what they actually did, it may also give rise to partial rebuttal or at least qualification of norms implicit in "tats" in the first place.

For example: an apartment tenant is annoyed by the noisy lifestyle of his (only) neighbours. After abortive discussion of the problem or even without it for that

matter, the apartment tenant simply pops up the volume himself. His protesting neighbours may well be confronted with a *tu quoque* by then. Did not they set the norm themselves in making noise in the first place? Though the norm of not audibly disturbing neighbours still stands, it may be qualified in case like the one sketched above: “No noise, apart from noise against noise started by neighbours”.

“Two wrongs make a right”? Maybe, because the neighbours may go on to tell the tenant: “It is wrong to make noise” (or something like it). The tenant may rightfully answer in terms of a valid variety of *tu quoque*: “1. You did not comply with that norm yourself, 2. because you did so, another and overriding norm comes into force: though people generally ought not to make noise, repaying a debt, evening the playing ground again or even executing retribution come first, 3. which has to do with restoring equality, and 4. Which may well end the problem we started with.”

This case also shows another more or less sound *tu quoque*, leading to one more conclusion: these specific neighbours, having started the noise themselves, lost their rights to appeal to any general “anti-neighbour noise” norm. Like in “tit for tat” cases in general, immediate and equal retaliation may even help end the disturbance as such.

“Tit for tat” is ubiquitous in many more situations. Think of two people cooperating in cleaning a room. One may tell the other: “Come on, you’re being lazy.” Against this the other may answer: “You’re wrong. Given your inactivity, my working harder would only mean that I have been doing everything in the end and you would finish having done almost nothing, which is not fair.” Note the appeal to some or other kind of equality here again.

Related to this, “tit for tat” may also have to do with adaptation to opponents’ unacceptable but presumably unalterable conduct in order to still ensure an acceptable outcome. For example: lawyer Rodent tries to win a materially unjust case by exploiting the limits of civil procedure in viciously delaying court proceedings, thus hoping to force the defendants on their knees because they are running out of money needed to pay their own lawyer. Then Rodent may be confronted with comparable frustrating tactics, in order to level the playing field again and to give material justice a fair chance. Against Rodent’s complaints on such “tit for tat”, his opponents may justify their retaliation in *tu quoque* fashion: “You can’t say we are wrong in our frustrating tactics, because you did so yourself to start with, creating circumstances that forced us to answer like with like.” Or:

somebody may wrongly create a situation which elicits a like answer, to be justified as inevitable, given the unacceptable conduct that created the whole problem (see also Aldisert, 1997, pp. 213 v.).

“Tit for tat” situations complex in other ways, in which “tat” is not identical but (more or less) analogous to “tit” can be mentioned only in passing here. For example: one child hits another in the face for having been pestered by his victim for too long. Or somebody refuses to pay any more attention to somebody having insulted her in public. Such situations may give rise to more or less sound and even fruitful tu quoque arguments as well.

An interesting and intricate variety of “tit for tat” tu quoque is to be found in Kant’s famous attempt to justify retribution as the essence of state punishment and capital punishment in particular on the basis of the categorical imperative (see especially Kant, 1797, pp. 331 v.). Slightly simplified this argument runs as follows. According to Kant, we are to act according to rules (so called “maxims”) we must be willing to accept as everybody’s effective rule of conduct. This specific Golden Rule, or “categorical imperative” (famously formulated by Kant himself in different ways) seems to imply that a murderer, acting according to the rule that another person’s life may be taken at will, implies that his life may be taken by others as well.

This is all the more interesting for its elegant, intricate and seemingly deeply convincing justification (rather briefly sketched here indeed) of deep-seated retributive sentiments against crime and criminals. Still this argument cannot be but fallacious in the end. Even if it may be put that a murderer himself cannot but will that license to kill applies to everybody, the question whether other people should will the same unto that murderer remains unanswered. In particular, the state meting out punishment is a third party in most cases and thus cannot simply put it that “tit for tat” may be applied by victims against offenders, as in the simpler cases sketched above.

6. Related forms of fallacy (and sound argument)

Adding to this complexity of tu quoque as a mixed bag of argument ranging from the completely fallacious to undeniable soundness is its relationship to other forms of argument. Here one related and interesting form of fallacy (and sometimes argument) will be discussed in particular: the appeal to other people’s conduct (instead of appeal to speakers’ conduct, as in tu quoque proper). Thus well-known mountaineer Ronald Naar tried to defend his leaving alone a dying Sherpa on an isolated Himalaya mountain slope – in the absence of any overriding

reasons – by appeal to the (by itself indubitable) fact that car drivers speed past highway accidents “as well”. Sure enough, but even Naar may have to admit that such car drivers are acting wrongly. Analogously, Naar would have to put it as well that hitting somebody over the head may be justified by the given fact that people do get beaten up at times: “such is life”. Sure enough, but ought things to be this way? An is-ought fallacy is committed here again. Still apart from more serious problems of analogy here too: may a deserted and isolated mountain slope be sensibly compared with a motorway in these specific respects?

From this it is only a small step to all too common fallacies like the (non-analogous) one committed by the mayor of Amsterdam in telling his citizens that it would be unjust not to install a separate inner city district council, because other parts of the city already have their own district councils. – OK mayor, one might retort, if Black Death breaks out in other parts of the city, then it would be unjust again not to spread this disease within the inner city as well ... (note resemblance with the precedent problem discussed in § 5 above). Again, a social security service director criticised for inadequate performance tried to defend himself by pointing out that he is understaffed in comparison to other social security services in the country. Sure enough, but then these other centres may have been grossly overstaffed, in terms of sensible normative standards. Or (analogously again) German criminal courts letting neo-nazis go free “because Turks having committed genocide against the Armenian people in the early 20th century have not been punished either”. And so on: the list of examples of this particular *non tu quoque sed alii* by analogy is virtually endless.

An interesting “why me” variety may be overheard in smoking circles. As may be well-known by now, cigarette boxes and other tobacco wrappings are adorned by ever more serious warnings against hazardous consequences of tobacco consumption. A cigarette smoker judged this unfair, “as car drivers are not at all confronted with like admonitions before they can start their engines in order to pollute the atmosphere”. An implicit *tu quoque* fallacy hinted at here is something like: the cigarette box admonition is wrong, because it is not repeated elsewhere. However, the smoker may well have meant something like: though the admonition is not wrong in itself, it is wrong to confront smokers with it while car drivers go free. By this she may have implied something like: I suffer from it, while others go free. (But should not car drivers suffer from well-meant admonitions too?)

Note an analogy issue here as well: warnings against consequences of smoking tobacco and car driving are (probably correctly) taken as specifications of more

general warning against consequences of atmospheric pollution. Thus there is analogy in the sense of: both analogata are derivable from the same more general principle. (The smoker committed a “hop, skip and jump” manoeuvre, in deriving the background principle from the smoking issue, in order to next derive the car driving warning from the principle. See on this Kaptein, 1995.) (More than a few reminiscences here of the well-known complaint against drugs prohibition: alcohol is freely available ... Fallacious of course as well, though drugs ought to be decriminalised anyway.)

Then there is what may be called the “tropical rain forest” argument. A Japanese businessman heading a wood-logging company was criticised for destroying the rain forests of Borneo. “Yes, it is a great pity” he retorted: “However, as soon as we would have left the scene, others would have stepped in to finish the job (and the forest). So leave me alone, I’m doing nothing wrong”. Wrong, unless nothing can end the destruction of the rain forest and/or unless he does things in a less harmful way than others would do it. Lawyers taking in smelly cases like the same argument: “It makes no sense to want to be holier than the rest of the bunch, I may send clients away and they’ll go next door”. It may still make sense to try to be at least slightly holier than the rest (it is to be hoped).

On the other hand, not all reference to other people’s conduct is completely fallacious regarding norms (or evaluations). Reference may be made to conduct that may not be really appropriate in the sense of: in accordance with relevant norms, but that may still be so widespread and socially accepted that nobody takes much offence. For example: A tells B that it is wrong to use the office photocopier for multiplying private documents. Then B may more or less validly answer: “In principle you’re right, but everybody here does as I do, including the boss.” This is related to problems of precedent again: though others may have committed wrongs before, their going free for it may be one good reason to accept like wrongs committed by themselves and by others in the future.

In simpler forms, reference may be made to generally accepted custom or even to conduct that is perfectly acceptable according to explicit norms. However, in the last case reference to other people’s conduct is at least logically superfluous, as it is the norms that bear the brunt of the argument. For example: “I am perfectly justified leaving my hat on while sitting in church. Even the Queen does so.” Sure, but then the rule is that women don’t doff their hats.

To add to a probably already slightly complex picture, reference may be made to

“ought implies can” issues here too. One may protest against a norm put forward by pointing out that nobody complies with it. As such this is fallacious, until general non-compliance is more specifically interpreted as: general inability to comply. Thus somebody may tell a university student to study all day every day of the week, year round (“in the interest of your future” etc.). To such advice (silly anyway, of course) a student may answer: “Come on, no student ever does so and how could he, at an age of raging interest and emotion directed to so many other things in life.” Right.

Lastly, a well-known and rarely heeded fallacy on so-called cultural relativism warrants some discussion here. “Because different cultures believe in and live up to different norms and values, there can be no generally (“transculturally”) valid moral norms and values prescribing outlines of the good life for all human beings”. Whatever may be of cultural relativism, this semblance of argument will not do to support it, as it leaves open the possibility that some (or even all) cultures are wrong in their beliefs and practices. Analogously, the existence of the “Flat Earth Society” and its sincere believers would preclude any objective statements on the shape of the earth.

Actually, there are two varieties in fallacious appeal to other people’s beliefs (instead of to their conduct, as in standard *tu quoque*). First, as in the relativist argument outlined above, it may be sceptically put that there can be no truth in the matter because people disagree. Second, it may simply be put that somebody is wrong because other people disagree with him (traces of negative *ad verecundiam* here of course). In as far (non-relative) truth, justification and related notions are to be understood in some or other normative sense, such fallacies suffer from is-ought problems as well, in their appeal to what people factually believe.

Here it may be of interest to note that more than a few anti-sceptical arguments rely on *tu quoque* like argument in explaining performative contradiction in scepticists’ beliefs and behaviour. Thus scepticists wielding fallacious *tu quoque*-like arguments in trying to reduce everything to the merely relative by pointing out differences of opinion and conduct or otherwise may be confronted with an *ad baculum*. Hit a scepticist over the head for no apparent reason and he will probably say (among other things): “You did wrong, I did not deserve this!” According to his own scepticism he is telling nothing, then, as there can be no appeal to any norms and values transcending his own subjectivity. So he’d better give up his scepticism (or shut up completely, like some of his famous forebears

from ancient Greece reputedly did).

7. *Concluding inconclusive remarks*

It may be clear by now that tu quoque is a thorough-going moral or even moralistic issue. Thus tu quoque would not even get started if it were normal for speakers to answer that purportedly general norms do not apply to themselves. Then a speaker might indeed simply answer any tu quoque by stating: "It was about you and not about me, so what are you talking about". Or: some or other kind of (moral) equality of human beings is presupposed by the whole tu quoque problem. And it goes without saying that positive uses of tu quoque-like argument as discussed here are unimaginable without basic moral commitments like that promises are to be kept.

In the end, the best way to tackle possible tu quoque issues may be: speaking and acting in such a fashion that no (reasonable?) person will be elicited to committing any tu quoque, fallacious or otherwise. This is what commitment comes down to. Behave yourself in the first place: tu quoque! Next: don't preach too much, not only because you may thus crush your own credibility in the first place.

No doubt, many varieties of tu quoque are left out of account here, from oversight, ignorance, or both. – If any reader were to object this against the present writer, she would no doubt receive an answer in tu quoque style: Go ahead, do better, go foster scholarship and maybe even life itself.

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