

An argument about injustice and “loafing” (from Thoreau)

- a. If one contributes to injustice, and eliminating the injustice is too difficult or costly, but there is a method of avoiding or reducing one’s contribution to injustice that is not too difficult or costly, then contributing to injustice is morally wrong.
- b. Working hard for an unjust employer contributes to injustice.
- c. Quitting one’s job, or changing how one’s employer operates, is sometimes too difficult or costly.
- d. Thus, one is sometimes morally obligated to “loaf” when one’s employer is unjust.

Thoreau: “It is not a man’s duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous wrong; he may still properly have other concerns to engage him; but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support... As for adopting the ways which the State has provided for remedying the evil, I know not of such ways. They take too much time, and a man’s life will be gone. I have other affairs to attend to. I came into this world, not chiefly to make this a good place to live in, but to live in it, be it good or bad.”

obligation x would be too demanding:

1. Give a plausible counterexample to the following conditional:

If A has given morally relevant consent to do x , and x is morally wrong, then A is morally obligated to do x .

A second argument about injustice and “loafing”

- i. If one has a contract requiring one to do x , and x is morally wrong, the contract does not create a moral obligation (or “the parts of the contract that require one to do x do not create a moral obligation to do x ”).
- ii. Whenever someone contributes to injustice, this is morally wrong.
- iii. Thus, if one has a contract requiring one to contribute to injustice, then they are not morally obligated to fulfill that contract (or to fulfill that parts of the contract that require contributing to injustice).
- iv. In some cases, an obligation to quit one’s job is too demanding, but an obligation to loafing is not.
- v. Thus, people have an obligation to loaf when working hard contributes to injustice and quitting is too demanding.

1. Are there examples in which it is morally wrong for a person to contribute to an unjust system?
2. Is it ever permissible to contribute to an unjust system?
3. Can (a) be amended to avoid the examples in 2, while still fitting the examples in 3?