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Moral Combat in *An Enemy of the People*: Public Health versus Private Interests

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Dr Thomas Stockmann, the protagonist of Ibsen's play, *An Enemy of the People*, discovers a serious health threat in the Baths of his Norwegian town. The Baths have been marketed as a health resort to lure visitors. Dr Stockmann alerts officials about the problem and assumes that they will close the Baths until it is corrected. He is met with fierce resistance, however. His brother, the town's mayor, favors keeping the Baths open and correcting the problem gradually. He advances multiple arguments that appeal to the economic interests of the town and Thomas's role-related obligation as a citizen. His wife, Katherine, wants him to cooperate with the mayor. She marshals several arguments that appeal to his obligations as a father. This paper reconstructs and examines the competing arguments, shows how Ibsen's play has both contemporary relevance and moral depth, and demonstrates how Dr Stockmann's responses can be interpreted as an argument that complying with his duties to protect the public health do not force him to renege on his core commitments as a parent and as a citizen.

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Introduction

Henrik Ibsen's play, *An Enemy of the People* (1882),[1] is set in the nineteenth century in a Norwegian coastal town. The town has recently opened its Baths, a kind of health resort designed to attract 'visitors' and 'convalescents'. The Baths are expected to bring great economic benefits to the town and enable its citizens to flourish in ways they have not previously.

The protagonist of the play is Thomas Stockmann, a physician. His brother, Peter Stockmann, is the town's mayor. Thomas and Peter have an intense sibling rivalry, a force that is present throughout the play. Early in the play (Act I, p. 6) readers learn that they often quibble about whose idea the Baths were.

Though all of the townspeople are excited about what the Baths will do for their standard of living, early on readers are alerted that Dr Stockmann may have uncovered a problem (Act I, pp. 10–11). Because some of the previous patrons had become more ill, Dr Stockmann had taken a sample of the water and requested that a local university test it. The results are back. Dr Stockmann declares that the Baths are a 'cesspool', 'poisoned' and a 'serious danger to health' (Act I, p. 18). The pipes must be re-laid in order to purify the water. Though this will be inconvenient, Dr Stockmann expects to be treated as a hero (Act I, pp. 19–20).

Dr Stockmann's expectations prove to be naïve, however. The press—represented by Hovstad, editor of the *People's Herald*, Billing, a journalist, and Aslaksen, a printer—claim that they will give Dr Stockmann full support. When Mayor Stockmann questions the report's accuracy and points out how costly it will be to relay the pipes, however, the press's allegiance changes. Dr Stockmann becomes an object of ridicule and is eventually declared 'an enemy of the people' (Act IV, p. 85).

Given how quickly the press and the townspeople turn against Dr Stockmann, and given that they do so based on little or no evidence, one suspects that this play is a critique of one aspect of democracy. Arthur Miller suggests that a central theme of the play 'is the question of whether the democratic guarantees protecting political minorities ought to be set aside in times of crises' (Miller (1950): 8). This seems correct, and such a theme gives the play much contemporary interest. But there is another theme at work that is also of consequence to contemporary readers. The three main characters in this play—Thomas Stockmann, Peter Stockmann and Thomas's wife, Katherine—each has special obligations in virtue of his or her role. But these special obligations are not jointly dischargeable. The moral success of one agent seems to require the moral failure of another. These agents are in what Heidi Hurd calls 'moral combat' (Hurd, 1999).[2] Dr Stockmann's role as a physician gives him a special obligation to look out for the health of people. But correcting the problem with the Baths may have an adverse effect on his community. Such a conflict may be similar to those faced by other physicians who

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occupy dual roles, such as those asked to assist the state in carrying out the death penalty, or by doctors who are serving in the military.

The Interests of the Town

Thomas Stockmann believes that exposure to the Baths will harm patrons and it is wrong to do so. No special obligations are needed to endorse this position. But he is also a physician committed to promoting the health of people. As such, he is apt to feel a strong obligation to the patrons, even if he is not the cause of the harm. Thomas is also a member of the board governing the Baths. So he might reasonably think that he is doubly responsible were he to lure people into a situation that will cause them harm. No doubt there is a general obligation—one borne by all moral agents—not to harm others. But it is easy to see why Thomas Stockmann also feels the force of special obligations to those who might become ill as a result of using the Baths. Indeed, the town is making a pitch to those who are sick to use these facilities.

As mayor, Peter Stockmann has an obligation to do what is best for the town. Even if all citizens of the town have such an obligation, Peter has a special moral requirement that goes beyond those of the others. It is not surprising, then, that even before he learns about the specific nature of the problem, Peter insists that Thomas and all others subordinate themselves 'to the authorities charged with the welfare of that community' (Act I, p. 10). This immediately tilts the debate Peter's way; the standard to be used is the welfare of the town.

Thomas Stockmann shared the report detailing the Baths' pollution with Peter. Having read the report, Peter marshals multiple arguments against shutting down the Baths and re-laying the pipes. His first argument appeals to the citizens' economic interests. The town is currently prospering and there is every reason to believe that it will continue doing so. If the Baths are closed, the principal source of income for the town will be shut off. And if the pipes must be re-laid, that will be costly (Act II, pp. 34–35). The Mayor later supplements this argument by pointing out to Hovstad and Aslaksen that the costs of re-laying the pipes will fall on townspeople in the form of higher taxes. So both the town as a whole and individual citizens in particular will be worse off if Dr Stockmann's solution is adopted.

Even though the Mayor may have self-interested reasons for suppressing the report, we can concede that he wants to do what is in the best interests of the town and that he believes that shutting down the Baths is contrary to those interests. In order to prevail, the Mayor needs for others to see the issue in this way. So he tells Thomas that this matter is not just a scientific one; instead, 'it is a combination of technical and economic factors' (Act II, p. 39). The strategy here is to disarm Dr Stockmann by removing the issue from his area of expertise. This approach need not be seen as totally disingenuous. Earlier Hovstad had warned Thomas that things might be more complicated than he realized; 'it probably hasn't struck you that it's tied up with a lot of other things' (Act II, p. 25). It is certainly true that closing the Baths will have an impact on the welfare of the townspeople.

Peter's second argument may be disingenuous. He says, 'I am not entirely convinced by your report that the state of the Baths is as serious as you make out' (Act II, p. 35). This, in effect, denies that there is a problem, or at least a serious one. Contemporary readers might expect the Mayor to say that the report is based on 'junk science'. There are two reasons to suspect Peter of duplicity here. First, whether the Baths are polluted is a scientific matter, and Peter is not an expert in this area nor has he cited reports of experts. Peter seems to be doing nothing more than denying what is for him an inconvenient truth. Second, the Mayor later proposes a solution of his own. But a solution is not needed unless there is a real problem.

Peter advances a third argument, one that appeals to Thomas's obligations as a member of the governing board of the Baths. The Mayor is the head of this board, and so he is the final authority about all that it does. He says, 'But as a subordinate member of the staff of the Baths, you have no right to express any opinion that conflicts with that of your superiors' (Act II, p. 39). Earlier, even before he was aware of the nature of the problem, Peter had expressed the same principle: 'The individual must be ready to subordinate himself . . . to the authorities charged with the welfare of that community' (Act I, p. 10). This argument, if correct, does not establish substantively what ought to be done regarding the Baths; instead, it shows who ought to make the decision.

Peter alludes to a fourth argument, though it is not fully developed. In this case, he appeals to Thomas's obligations to his own family. 'Did you never think what consequences this might have for you personally?' 'For you and your family' (Act II, p. 37). And later, he adds, 'Try to realize what you owe to yourself and family' (Act II, p. 41). This can be perceived either as a mere threat or as a moral argument. Seen as the former, the Mayor is simply warning Thomas that he will lose his job if he tells the public about the alleged problem. Viewed as the latter, Peter is reminding his brother that he has obligations as a husband and a father, and his ability to carry out those obligations will be compromised if he follows through with his plan.

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If Mayor Stockmann is a sincere moral combatant, he believes that he ought to do whatever is necessary for the community's best interests. Convincing Thomas not to announce to the public that the Baths are tainted is therefore necessary. Peter's second argument denies that there is such a problem. His first argument—the one that is most honest—asks Thomas to look at the welfare of all potentially affected parties. If he goes public, people in his own town will be harmed. The issue is economic as well as technical. When the overall calculations are done, the Mayor's proposal will be best for all. The third argument is procedural rather than substantive—Dr Stockmann has no right to speak publicly about this issue. And the fourth argument urges Thomas to focus on another of his roles, that of husband and father. This kind of 'shotgun' approach makes sense when we consider that Peter believes that as a moral combatant he must prevail.

So what does Peter recommend? First: 'It will therefore be necessary for you to make a public denial of these rumours' (Act II, p. 38). This is designed to keep the Baths open and thus preserve the town's economic interests. But what about the interests of future patrons? 'The existing water-supply for the Baths is now an established fact, and must be treated as such. But it is reasonable to suppose that . . . it would be possible to initiate certain improvements' (Act II, p. 35). The Mayor can thus say that his proposal looks out for the welfare of all. If the rumors can be squashed, the town will continue to flourish economically. If appropriate improvements are gradually introduced, the Baths eventually will be safe for all. It is true that in the short term some patrons may be harmed; but the best outcome for all is the gradualist approach. The fewest people will be harmed the least if this is done.

Familial Obligations

Peter is not Thomas's only moral opponent. His wife, Katherine, also has a moral stake in the situation. Katherine sees clearly that Thomas is likely to lose his job and she knows what that will do to the welfare of their children. Katherine points out that if Thomas continues his fight with Peter, he will probably lose his job. Thomas retorts that 'at least I shall have done my duty by the public . . . and by society'. Katherine makes the obvious reply: 'But what about your family, Thomas? What about us at home? Will you be doing your duty by the ones you should provide for first?' (Act II, p. 42)

Mrs Stockmann believes that she has an obligation to promote the welfare of her children, and that Dr Stockmann is bound by this same requirement. She need not believe that these are their only moral requirements, though in the passage quoted she implies that their duties to the children trump all others. What she suggests to Thomas is that his first duty is to provide for his family. If she convinces him of this, it will enable her to discharge her duties that are imperiled by the moral combat. But readers need not doubt her sincerity here. We may presume that she believes that Thomas's first duty too is to his family.

Katherine advances two other arguments, more pragmatic in nature, designed to convince Thomas to comply with Peter's request. She says that Peter, as Mayor, is far more politically powerful than Thomas. The doctor replies that he has right on his side. Katherine's response: 'Right! Yes, of course. But what's the use of right without might?' (Act II, p. 41) The point of this argument is that even if Thomas's position is morally the best, he is likely not to prevail. Thus, he will exert energy and sacrifice his own interests, and still fail to achieve the desired end. This seems to render his sacrifices fruitless.

Katherine's other pragmatic argument is a critique of Thomas's idealism. When Thomas complains that he has been treated unjustly by Peter, Hovstad, Billing and Aslaksen, Katherine agrees. 'Yes, they've treated you disgracefully, I will say that. But heavens! Once you start thinking of all the injustices in this world people have to put up with . . .' (Act II, p. 43). Katherine is making the familiar point that one must pick one's battles. Fighting all injustices in the world is not possible. The rational person will determine where his efforts will make a difference and direct his energies there. But, as Katherine has already argued, Thomas is not going to prevail against Peter. So in terms of making a positive impact on the world, Thomas should give up this fight and devote himself to more feasible causes. If he agrees to this, that will enable him and Katherine to do what is best for their children.

So, according to Katherine, it is foreseeable that Thomas's struggle to have the Baths closed and the pipes re-laid will fail. In addition, this fight will cost Thomas his job and his standing in the town. Though I earlier characterized Katherine's latter two arguments as 'pragmatic', that may not be accurate. For she may be appealing to the principle that 'ought' implies 'can'. If it is not within Thomas's power to bring it about that the Baths are closed until the problem is corrected, he is not obligated to do so. But if he continues to pursue this course in vain, the consequences for his family will be horrible. So understood, Katherine is portraying Thomas's idealism as not only naïve but also unethical.[3]

There are similarities in the positions of Peter and Katherine. Each appeals to a role that Thomas occupies and argues that there are important obligations attached to that role. The Mayor reminds Thomas that he is a

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citizen and as such has an obligation to do what is best for the town; or, more properly, to obey those who have the authority to determine what is best for the town. Revealing the alleged problems with the Baths is contrary to the town's interests, and so is forbidden. Katherine insists that parents have an obligation to do what is best for their children, and if Thomas defies Peter he will render himself unable to discharge that requirement. Peter and Katherine each points to consequences that will ensue if Thomas does what he threatens, but each focuses on the consequences for a different population.

Thomas Stockmann is not persuaded by either his brother or his wife. But in rejecting their arguments, does he reject the role-related morality to which they appeal? The answer to this is complicated.

First, Do No Harm

We can imagine at least four different answers that Dr Stockmann might give to the arguments just explained. He might agree with Peter that he ought to be a good citizen, but claim that releasing the report and correcting the problem is exactly what a good citizen should do. He might agree with Katherine that he ought to be a good parent, but assert that being honest and living according to one's principles is what a good parent should do. Yet a third response is to claim that his obligations as doctor require him to protect the health of would-be patrons, and that in this situation these obligations take precedence over his obligations as a citizen and as a parent. Finally, he might argue that role-related obligations either are irrelevant or do not prevail here. There is a general obligation—one borne by all moral agents—not to cause harm to others. That obligation will be violated unless the problem with the Baths is corrected. There is some evidence that Thomas makes all of these points in defending his position. This suggests that he believes that his various role-related obligations are in harmony.

During one of the disputes with Peter, Thomas says, 'I'm the one with the real welfare of the town at heart. All I want to do is expose certain things that are bound to come out sooner or later anyway' (Act II, p. 40). If the Baths are polluted, as the report shows, then eventually enough patrons will become ill and people will realize the source of the problem. That will be worse, in the long run, for the town's interests than if they acknowledge the problem and deal with it. Losses will occur either way; but a policy of honesty will minimize those losses. Here Thomas is accusing Peter of being naïve. The gradualist approach of correcting the problem before patrons discover it is bound to fail.

When, at the end of Act II, Katherine pleads with Thomas to focus on what is best for his children, he says, 'I want to be able to look my boys in the face when they grow up into free men' (Act II, p. 43). The suggestion here is that one cannot be a good parent unless one exhibits moral integrity. To do that, agents must abide by their principles. If Thomas were to give up this fight, he would be setting a bad example for his children. Toward the end of the play, when Petra, his daughter, has lost her job, when his sons, Morten and Ejlif, have been permanently dismissed from school, and when his family has been evicted from their home, Thomas says to the boys, 'I'll make decent and independent-minded men of you both' (Act V, p. 105). Readers need not assume here that Dr Stockmann is completely oblivious to the basic needs of his family. Indeed, he says to the entire family, 'Well, you'll just have to skimp and scrape a bit on the side—we'll manage all right. That's my least worry' (Act V, p. 104). Even if with regard to these necessities the children are not as well off as previously, their basic needs will be fulfilled and their moral development will have been advanced.

Contemporary readers might expect Thomas to emphasize his obligations as a physician; but there is comparatively little of that in the text. In one exchange, however, the issue seems to arise. In a discussion with Hovstad, Billing and Katherine, Thomas points out that the Baths are being commended 'for the sick'. This tells us that the town is promoting the Baths as a panacea for various illnesses. Yet Thomas has observed over the past year 'a number of curious cases of sickness among the visitors'. Based on this and the report, he concludes that the Baths are 'extremely dangerous to health' (Act I, pp. 17, 18 and 19). While there are several ways to understand this exchange, one natural reading is this. As a physician, Thomas has a special obligation to protect and promote the health of people. The Baths are being advertised as helpful for the sick. Yet Thomas believes that they actually cause illness. So he has a special obligation to intervene in order to protect the health of potential patrons. Moreover, as a member of the board, he will be complicit in the harm that ensues.

All of these responses work within the framework of role-related morality. Dr Stockmann tries to convince interlocutors that releasing the report to the public and correcting the problem with the Baths are obligations supported by their relevant roles. But it seems plausible to think that role-related obligations are not the key to Thomas's position. Instead, he seems to hold that all agents ought to be honest and to prevent harm when they can. Recall that the Mayor proposed that Thomas publicly deny that there were any problems with the Baths. If Thomas would do this, then Peter would implement his

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gradualist approach and 'take some suitable precautionary measures and treat any noticeable injurious effects'. Thomas has a rather sharp description of Peter's proposal: 'A swindle, a fraud, an absolute crime against the public and against society!' (Act II, p. 35) It is wrong to deceive people, wrong to lure the sick to the Baths, and wrong to put others in harm's way, regardless of one's role in society. Later, toward the end, Thomas tells Katherine that one of his motives is to show 'that policies of expediency are turning all our standards of morality and justice upside down, so that life's just not going to be worth living' (Act V, p. 104). Thomas thinks that there is something rotten in the town—that it, like the Baths, is polluted—and that a morality of expediency is one source of the corruption. Sometimes individuals and even whole societies must sacrifice their own interests in order to do what is right.

An ethics of expediency, as Thomas understands it, is one that calculates the impact of policies on various parties and then chooses policies based on which has the most favorable impact on a selected group. For Peter, that group is the townspeople; for Katherine, her family. In rejecting an ethics of expediency, Thomas is saying that it is wrong to promote the welfare of some at the direct expense of others.

How are we to evaluate Thomas's position?

Contra Expediency

One of Thomas's replies to Peter initially seems plausible. Thomas says that the problem will eventually be revealed, and so fixing it now is the least costly solution. Today, with information flow as rapid as it is, we readers are apt to nod in agreement. But perhaps we should examine this closer. Three factors suggest that Peter's deceitful gradualist approach may be one that he can pull off. First, in this town at this time, the exchange of information will be slow. Second, many who use the Baths will already be ill. So the fact that they become sicker will not be a surprise and so will not be immediately attributed to the Baths. Third, the patrons are mostly visitors. So after using the Baths, they will scatter about the country, and even the Continent. Even if many of them experience problems after using the Baths, it will likely take a long time to see the common link. There is no one individual or group who will have enough information to draw the pertinent conclusion. We have seen this often throughout history. The problem with thalidomide in the 1950s is one such example. So working within Peter's own 'ethics of expediency' may not be Thomas's best strategy.

What about the argument with Katherine? Her prediction that Thomas could not prevail in a political battle with Peter proved correct. Not only did Thomas lose his job, but Petra lost her teaching position, the boys were dismissed from school, and the entire family was evicted from the house they were renting. Even in the nineteenth century, whistleblowers did not fare well. But for an offer from Captain Horster (Act V, p. 103)—a man who is apolitical but suspicious of majorities—to stay with him, the family would have been homeless. The bigger question, however, is which interests of the children Thomas and Katherine should be promoting. With respect to basic necessities—food, shelter and education—there can be little doubt that the Stockmann children are worse off at the play's end than before their father was declared 'an enemy of the people'. But if the children have additional interests and if their economic interests do not fall below what is acceptable, then perhaps Thomas is right. He believes that his children's moral development and moral education are seriously compromised if he accedes to Peter's ethics of expediency. Thomas's position need not assume that economic interests and moral interests are commensurable. He may instead hold that as long as the children are well off enough with respect to economic interests, then good parents will promote other interests as well. If this is his view, then it suggests that he thinks that the familiar 'best interests' principle is too simple. Katherine did eventually switch sides: 'I'll stick by you, Thomas!' (Act III, p. 65) It is not clear, however, if this is because she is morally persuaded by his argument or if she is merely playing the role of a supportive wife.

Even if Thomas converted Katherine by 'playing on her turf'—appealing to the interests of the children—a comparable strategy will not work in his dispute with Peter. The Mayor will not be convinced that it is in the town's interests or in his own interests to tell the public about the problem with the Baths. Here Thomas must reject the ethics of expediency. And so he does. His first reaction is that it is wrong to harm others knowingly; to do so is a violation of their rights. After Dr Stockmann explains to the newspaper men that the Baths are 'dangerous to health', Hovstad asks him what he is going to do. He replies, 'To see the matter put right, of course.' (Act I, p. 19)

There is no hesitation on his part and no calculation of the impact on the interests of the townspeople.

There is another way to put Thomas's position. It is simply morally inappropriate to compare the loss of benefits for the town with the harm done to the patrons, as does Peter's ethics of expediency. If the Baths remain open, the patrons are being harmed; if the Baths are temporarily closed, the townspeople are being denied a benefit. The losses of the two parties are on a different moral plane. The obligation not to harm takes priority

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over the obligation to provide benefits, even if one has a role-related obligation to provide for the welfare of the town. When Peter urges Thomas to think about the losses that the townspeople will incur if the Baths are closed, Thomas's reply is straightforward: 'We live by peddling filth and corruption! The whole of the town's prosperity is rooted in a lie.' (Act II, p.41) The core mistake in the Mayor's position is that loss of benefit is morally equivalent with harm and that these must be weighed each against the other. Thomas denies this. Prosperity that is rooted in the deliberate infliction of harm compromises the integrity of those who are prospering. Thomas's response anticipates Bernard Williams' criticism of utilitarianism nearly a century later (Williams (1973): 108–118).

Lessons Learned

Peter's two-pronged attack in response to the problem raised by the report should be familiar to contemporary readers. One prong—the ethics of expediency—appeals to the overall interests of all affected parties. The economic interests of the townspeople are on a par with and are to be weighed against the harm that will come to future patrons of the Baths. Moreover, if the problem is corrected, not only will the townspeople be denied the income from the Baths, but they will also have to pay for the repairs in the form of additional taxes. This is ingeniously designed to convince people that the overall good happens to coincide with what is best for them.

The second prong of Peter's attack is to deny that there is a serious problem. Minor tinkering will make the Baths safe. This is a common strategy. For years cigarette companies played the role of the skeptic by challenging claims that their product had a negative impact on the health of its users. And the campaign to convince the public that global warming is a hoax is legendary.[4] This second prong is important. The public, represented by those from the *People's Herald*, is not willing to side with Peter until he raises doubts about the report's veracity. It seems to say something good about people that they are not willing to approve of a policy or action when it benefits them at the expense of the welfare of others. On the other hand, it is disappointing that they are so easily convinced that what they are doing is not really harmful to others. Hovstad, Billing and Aslaksen were convinced that the report about the Baths was false merely because Peter said that it was; he offered no evidence.

Thomas too delivered a multi-pronged attack. He *argued* that acknowledging the problem and repairing the Baths was in the best interests of the town, and that his action of exposing the problem was best for his family because it taught the children not to abandon their principles. His core position, however, was that knowingly exposing people to harm is wrong, even if doing so would reap profits for the town. As a moral combatant, it was important to Thomas to win. For winning would mean that the public had been alerted to the Baths' contamination, and thereby had their health and rights protected. Thomas need not deny that the interests of the town and the interests of his children are important. But these interests may not be advanced by harming others.

In one sense, Thomas is an idealist urging others to sacrifice at least their short-term interests in order to do what is right. One message of the play is that those with vested interests will try to silence the idealist. When the *People's Herald* refuses to print Thomas's article about the problem with the Baths, he calls a meeting of the townspeople. His plan is to explain the problems to them in a speech. But Peter prevents him from speaking by appealing to fear. The version of Peter's argument in Arthur Miller's adaptation of *An Enemy of the People* is powerful. '[I]n ordinary times I'd agree a hundred per cent with anybody's right to say anything. But these are not ordinary times. Nations have crises, and so do towns' (Miller (1950): 89). Peter goes on:

> Now this is our crisis. . . Today we're just on the verge of becoming internationally known as a resort. I predict that within five years the income of every man in this room will be immensely greater. . .. I predict that if we are not defamed and maliciously attacked we will someday be one of the richest and most beautiful resort towns in the world. (Miller (1950): 90)[5]

'Crisis ethics' is one tool that is used to silence idealists.

A second message in the play concerns how the idealist is portrayed by others. When Thomas tells Peter that he will proclaim the truth about the Baths on every street corner, the Mayor calls him 'absolutely crazy' (Act III, p. 65). When Morten Kiil tries to force Dr Stockmann to recant by tying all of Katherine's inheritance to stocks in the Baths, Thomas nevertheless refuses. This prompts Kiil to say, 'But you couldn't be so stark, staring mad as all that, not when it affects your wife and children' (Act V, p. 97). When Hovstad threatens to accuse Dr Stockmann of conspiring with Kiil to drive down the cost of stock in the Baths so that they could gain a monopoly, again he will not budge. This prompts Hovstad to ask, 'Have you gone completely mad?' (Act V, p. 101) All of this is designed to marginalize Thomas. At the play's end, after the Stockmanns have lost most of their worldly possessions, Thomas declares, 'I'm one of the strongest men in the whole world' (Act V, p. 105). Does he not recognize how utterly ineffective he has been? But Thomas is not insane for he goes on to explain what he means: 'The

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thing is, you see, that the strongest man in the world is the man who stands alone' (Act V, p. 106). He is asserting that agents should not abandon their principles even if there is a price to pay, as long as the family's basic needs are met.

One conclusion that might be reached after reading this text is that the role-related obligations of politicians to their constituents and of parents to their children are limited by the rights of others. Whenever what is best for one's constituents or what is best for one's children involves putting innocent third parties at risk, one may not pursue the best for those individuals. As long as the options remaining are 'good enough'—meet the basic needs of the constituents or the children—then situations of moral combat may be limited, though not necessarily eliminated completely.

Notes

1. Henrik Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960). 'Introduction', 'Select Bibliography' and 'Chronology of Henrik Ibsen' by James McFarlane. Page references will be given parenthetically in the text.
2. Elsewhere this same phenomenon has been dubbed 'interpersonal moral conflicts.' See McConnell (1988).
3. The need to make this clarification of Katherine's position was pointed out to me by both David Lefkowitz and Sandra Shapshay.
4. For a recent account of the role that scientists have played in such campaigns, see Michaels (2008).
5. In Miller's adaptation, this occurs in Act II, Scene 2; in Ibsen's play, the comparable speech is in Act IV (pp. 70–71).

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