

Ethics and social  
responsibility  
philosophy essay



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From chapter 1, we learn that the statement Ethics has no place in business is in fact a moral standard, as opposed to a nonmoral standard. It is a moral standard because it contains implied in it “ the six characteristics of moral standards” (Velasquez, 12-13). Ethics is a discipline that is exercised by individuals to evaluate, in a systematic way, moral standards that are reasonable for a person’s life (Velasquez, 13). This discipline, when exercised in business is an applied branch of ethics known as business ethics (Velasquez, 15).

For something to be a matter of ethical concern, it must concern “ serious wrongs or significant benefits”(Velasquez, 12). This means that nonmoral standards are very different than moral standards because nonmoral standards are often a matter of etiquette or polite standards of behavior. In contrast, moral standards are very so serious that if they are ignored or violated, they often result in injury or loss of substantial benefits for a society (meaning they are systemic), an organization (meaning they are corporate) or individually (meaning for an employee or a customer or the recipients of a company’s goods or services) (Velasquez, 16). In other words, to say that “ Ethics has no place in business” is a moral standard that condones lawlessness and chaos. If employees or owners of a business can behave in any way they want as long as it maximizes their profits and promotes their self interest, regardless of the outcome of their choices, it leaves us with a kind of subjective and personal morality that is temporal and not universal. This would of course by the book’s definition not be ethics; since ethics must have a universal component that extends across cultures and is normative rather than just descriptive (Velasquez, 14). Descriptive studies of behavior

are the work of social anthropologists and they are intended to describe what exists in cultures. Descriptive studies refuse to draw conclusions or make recommendations about how people “ought” to behave.

This being the day after Obama is re-elected to his second term, I believe that the study of business ethics and ethics in general, is more needed than ever before. I personally believe and have seen that there is a lack of systematic thinking on every level (systemic, organizational and personal) about what is universally true and good. American culture is so fragmented and subjective that the teaching of ethics may become like the teaching of Latin: a matter of history with no modern people who speak it as a first language.

**5. “ Kohlberg’s views on moral development show that the more morally mature a person becomes, the more likely it is that the person will obey the moral norms of his or her society.” Discuss this statement.**

Kohlberg’s theory argues that just as a child grows up and develops physically, people as moral beings also grow up and develop. He argues that humans who fully grow up morally progress upward in three levels, and each level has two stages. However, it seems that this statement is true until a person progresses to the 5th and 6th level. People who operate out of the third level of Kohlberg’s moral standards may not be perceived by society as being as morally obedient as those who only progress to the fourth stage on the second level.

In the first level, which he calls the “preconventional stages” young humans are motivated to do what’s right because either they want certain rewards or

want to avoid certain punishments (Punishment and Obedience Orientation). Children do what's right, not because they understand it will hurt others if they don't, but just because they don't want to be punished. The second stage in this first level is called the "instrumental and relative orientation" stage (38). In this stage, the child is practical in a way. The child might think, "I won't do X to my brother, because I don't want my brother to do X to me." Kohlberg argues that there are some grownups that get stuck on level one (in either stages one or two) because they never progress beyond their fear of punishment or loss of reward, while there are other adults who behave a certain way to avoid someone doing something the same to them. If a person gets stuck in either stage of level one, his/her moral reasoning will always function on this level motivated out of fear.

Level two is called by Kohlberg the "conventional stages". In the first level of this development of ethics a young adolescence does what's right because they are being loyal to their family, friends or ethnic group or they do what's right because they have a duty or allegiance to the law. I have seen that most middle class Americans get stuck right here. These are the good citizens of the society. In the first stage, the "interpersonal concordance orientation," a person does what they believe is right so that they will be loyal to and approved of by the people who they value. This is a good stage for an adolescent if they are in good company. However, we can see this in a negative or deviant way too: kids who are loyal to their gang members, suicide packs or pregnancy packs that teens take with other teens to do terrible things together, mafia families in which teens choose to cooperate with their family's illegal acts over what they know is right.

However, if teens have a good family background this can be a blessing that they do what's right because they want to be well thought of and accepted by their families and the society. In the second level a loyalty to the society, nation and law develops. There is a sense of group and community that if they don't honor, they will not fit well or be a responsible member of the group. Overall, I guess that most government officials are very pleased if people get here and remain here. They would not call it "stuck" if a person's conduct and motivation stayed right here.

Kohlberg then describes a final level with two stages of maturity. This of course should happen to everyone. After reading this, I had to even reflect on myself to see if I have progressed beyond level two/stage four as a Christian male and as a Cuban American. Having come from Cuba, I know so many people who come to this country and because there was a mindset of poverty and government blame, many people I know, even my family members, may be stuck on level one in stage one or stage two. I thought because I value obeying the laws and I don't want to shame my family name, My Savior, or the country that took me in and gave me the chance to be productive and an entrepreneur, I thought this was a high level of development. But now I see stages five, "social contract orientation" and stage six "universal moral principles orientation" and I realize that these are both in the Bible. And furthermore, if you live them, you actually may be considered dangerous to the existing power structure as Jesus and the Apostle Paul were considered dangerous to the Jewish leaders of that time.

In stage five, a person realizes that reasonable people disagree over what is right and try to reach "a consensus" to achieve change or action. I think that

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when the Greeks came up with the first democratic system involving the city state – one man, one vote, this was a reflection of this kind of ethical system that recognizes that conflicting moral views are best settled by a vote that allowed majority ruling. Of course the American system is much more complex than this now with the Electoral College and the weight each state has in an election, but the basis of the Greek's ancient system is still in place. But the best example I saw of this in the Bible was in John chapter 8. In this chapter Jesus responds out of this level of ethics. The Pharisees brought Jesus a woman who was caught in adultery. They brought her, and not the man, to see if Jesus would uphold their law and stone her to death. They created this dilemma to accuse him of not being loyal to their group or not obeying the known law of that day (stages three and stages four of Kohlberg's model). However, Jesus, being more developed ethically because He always operated out of eternal/universal principles of virtue, brought them to a point of consensus that made each of them agree to walk away from the situation. He told them, whoever of you is without sin, you cast the first stone at her (John 8: 7). From the oldest to the youngest, they all walked away. This was a kind of consensus. He even got the woman to walk away by showing her that her level of moral standards failed her – “ Woman, where are your accusers? Does no man accuse you?” (John 8: 10) She probably was motivated only by stage one, level one: she did not want to be caught and punished. In that day, violating marriage laws meant death by stoning.

In stage six, “ universal moral principles of orientation” a person who has developed to this level behaves out of a moral certainty because he is sure that the principles he follows are reasonable, universal and consistent

(Velasquez, 39). Usually on this level, the person acts wholly out of these beliefs and is able to analyze and reason out of this level of moral development. Most people guess that only moral superstars of the human race are able to attain this. However, I guess along with people who have died for their principles, there are many unknown heroes who act in a daily way out of their convictions and ability to act in universal, rationale ways in spite of what it may cost them. If we are looking, we have seen this over and over again during crisis situations all throughout history. An example of this, for Christians, is shown when Jesus is dying on the cross. He asks His Father to forgive those who were crucifying Him: Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do (Luke 23: 34). He chose this because He chose to treat “ people as a (eternal) end in themselves”(Velasquez, 39). He saw from His Father’s perspective that this was “ reasonable, universal and consistent” with what He was sent here to do.

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**2. A student incorrectly defined utilitarianism this way: “ Utilitarianism is the view that so long as an action provides me with more measurable economic benefits than costs, the action is morally right.” Identify all the mistakes contained in this definition of utilitarianism.**

Well the first mistake that this student makes is when he says “ me”. This is the first rule that someone breaks when they do not understand what utilitarianism really means. A person misuses utilitarianism if they do not understand that “ an action is right if it produces the most utility for ALL PERSONS affected by the action.” True utilitarianism is not subjective and personal in this way. A second mistake this person made is that he did is <https://assignbuster.com/ethics-and-social-responsibility-philosophy-essay/>

thinking of measuring the economic benefit and costs based on a single action instead of thinking about the consequences that need to be measured regarding the action both in the short run and the long run: what needs to be measured are “ both the immediate and all foreseeable future costs and benefits that each alternative will provide for each individual (which) must be taken into account” (Velasquez, 83). This is much more complex and full of analysis than this person’s statement suggests. Finally, and again, this person’s statement is only about the costs and benefits to himself, which is very different from what utilitarianism prescribes: “ the right action [which means there is only one] is the one whose COMBINED BENEFITS and COSTS outweigh the COMBINED BENEFITS and COSTS of EVERY OTHER ACTION the agent could carry out” (Velasquez, 79). This really puts a burden of analysis and effort on the person making the decision to make sure his choice lives up to this standard.

**4. “ Every principle of distributive justice, whether that of the egalitarian, or the capitalist, or the socialist, or the libertarian, or of Rawls, in the end is illegitimately advocating some type of equality.” Do you agree or disagree? Explain.**

I find this question the hardest. The problem with this is a lack common principles or rules that people can agree to in this culture. And this reality is complicated by the fact that humans are free will agents and the definition of what humans consider fair is so varied.

Initially, if you have a society of people who will all work hard and value taking care of the widowed and orphaned, which is called “ true religion” in the book of James, or if you have people who want to feed the poor and take <https://assignbuster.com/ethics-and-social-responsibility-philosophy-essay/>



care of the weak, then you don't have to legislate a distribution system for those who cannot contribute and "earn" a portion of the American pie. However, although Americans still tend to be more philanthropic than other groups, they give to whom they want, when they want and what they want – which is the idealism of Libertarianism (Velasquez, 113). And in some ways, this type of freedom does seem just. For example, if you had a culture of giving that the majority of people agreed with and practiced from their hearts, then everyone would give without being threatened or coerced, and this of course would be a utopian system. Furthermore, as long as these values were handed down from generation to generation and each generation would affirm and strengthen these values, then this self governance would be a high quality of living for those people who willing practiced it. Unfortunately, as of yet, there have been human systems that tried to create collective cultures and have failed: communism, the Greek polis system, hippie communes, Jewish Kibbutz movement, along with various cults or other religious groups who choose to hold these ideals. But the problem with pure egalitarianism is summarized by the book so well: "Human beings differ in their abilities, intelligence, virtues, needs, desires and all other physical and mental characteristics. If this is so, then human beings are unequal in all respects" (Velasquez, 109).

Humans in general struggle with resentment and strife when from their point of view they are more capable than others, do more than others but receive the same rewards or compensation than less capable or willing members of a group. I think this is why socialism doesn't work: "Work burdens should be distributed according to people's abilities, and benefits should be distributed

according to people's needs" (Velasquez, 111). Interestingly though, I think the above statement does work in small community situations when people are committed to one another through love. Many families work based on this principle. My family had 12 children who range in age over 24 years. I am 48 and my oldest brother is 72. My mother had to develop ways to make system to distribute the burden as well as the giving to the needy ones in the family. I think in small ways, socialism can work if there is a very common interest and dedication to members of the group that allows more capable and members to selflessly meet the needs of more needy, less able members.

It seems that of the systems that are presented in the chapter, John Rawls' system of justice would work best with larger cultures of people from diverse backgrounds and ability levels, especially for Americans. " Rawls claims that the more productive a society is, the more benefits it will be able to provide for its least-advantaged members" (Velasquez, 115). It uses three principles, which remind me of the three branches of government that make checks and balances in the American system: principle of equal liberty, difference principle, and principle of fair equality of opportunity (Velasquez, 115). The first principle protects the human liberties and ensures that all people's liberties are given equal value. The second principle claims that a productive society will contribute to and work to improve the standard of life for the marginal groups in the society. Finally, the last principle ensures that everyone has a fair chance to climb the social ladder. Together there are measures in place to ensure the entire society is safe and prosperous, at least theoretically.

I'm not sure achieving true equality and justice is possible within a nation that does not share common beliefs and principles. I think that as America has become less Judeo-Christian in orientation, basic truths are in dispute and the entire foundation of the culture is fragmenting underneath us. I wish this were not true. How to get a group of people who are not "like-minded" to go in the same direction is impossible on some level. Even if "an educated elite" could be agreed on and appointed to design and implement a system of social justice, outside of having a shared faith or belief system, special interest groups would insist that their interests were not being represented. Unity is a rare thing today. Without unity and agreement, definitions of justice cannot be agreed upon.