

Example of ethics argumentative essay

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



Introduction

Knowing what is right from wrong constitutes the main idea of ethics. In order to promote social order, societies have constructed sets of ethical norms constituting values shared by members thereof. However, there is an understanding that every society has different sets of ethical norms, simply because of the fact that external factors brought forth by the environment and conflict experiences have affected each of them, as they specifically thrive in a particular area. Different communities involve various members with their specific set of experiences that eventually form part of ethical systems when shared. Therefore, the idea of a universal culture that covers all societies in the world is difficult to conceive, much less realize.

This study on ethics thus points out the importance of considering differences brought forth by culture. Cultural relativism stands as the best ethical system due to its recognition of the reality that there are different cultures around the world that define the value of specific actions. Such is a fact that requires the recognition of four elements of cultural relativism – customs, change, relativity and conscience, which finds further elaboration in this study. Although other ethical systems may stand as compelling alternatives to cultural relativism, this study notes the importance of culture as a highly crucial aspect that defines the correctness or wrongness of human action, with due consideration of the premise that there could be no universal ethical system due to the heterogeneity of cultures.

What is the best ethical system?

Knowing what is right from wrong should not just involve an understanding of a single set of norms. People from different parts of the world experience different kinds of realities sharable within their specific communities and shaped by their environment, which may ultimately form part of their culture. Therefore, cultural relativism stands as a concrete viewpoint in ethics that enables people from knowing right from wrong with consideration of cultural differences. What is right for a certain culture may not be acceptable in another; therefore, it is important to judge not from the perspective of just one culture (Donnelly, 1984).

The suitability of cultural relativism as a framework for ethics stems from its four elements. Firstly, customs shared between people in a given community influence the formation of ethical principles. Individual experiences that end up affecting the community pave way for the formation of rules and norms, which results to widely accepted conceptions of right and wrong. Secondly, change affects perceptions of ethics in that certain impressions may transform over time, possibly through either positive or negative experiences. Thirdly, relativity stands as a core consideration in cultural relativism. It is not proper to think that other groups living in different parts of the world abide by a universal set of rules. One person from a certain community may find a particular act correct and acceptable, while another person from a different community may find it disgusting. Lastly, conscience represents the demands of a community based on its shared values among its members. A person may decide on committing a particular action based on what his conscience – through the accumulation of social pressures and

individual experiences, dictates. From the foregoing, it appears that considering cultural relativism as an ethical system emphasizes a pluralistic viewpoint on knowing what is right from wrong, as it seeks not to undermine any culture-based belief systems (Donnelly, 1984).

Is it necessary to have universal ethical principles?

The idea of universalism in ethics may not find a proper fit under the theoretical lens of cultural relativism. Although it is possible to assert a skeletal code of universal ethics based on uplifting the well-being of people, underlying details would still differ culturally. A community tends to form distinct cultural values due to its isolation from other communities as well as the accumulation of various experiences of its members. In fact, members may even have split opinions regarding certain issues concerning the values generally deemed by their community as acceptable. The constancy of change further makes the possibility of building universal ethical principles untenable, given that people may gain new experiences that may compel revisions in the norms that bind them as time passes. Therefore, cultural relativism makes the idea of establishing a universal set of ethical principles nearly impossible to realize, given that people do not have a homogenous base of experiences that would form a monotonous culture, in which case that would be the only possible time where an all-encompassing standard for ethics could emerge (Donnelly, 1984; Kluckholm, 1955).

What are the fundamental principles of ethics?

Ethics has four fundamental principles. The first one is about human dignity, which stresses on the importance of giving people their due space for

deciding on their own actions. It is unethical to force a person to give in to a certain decision, mainly because it violates his autonomy, which constitutes knowledge of what is good or bad for him. Secondly, kindness should emanate from any action deemed as ethical. Although maintaining kindness may conflict with preserving the autonomy of other people at times, it is nevertheless important for ensuring that no harm would result from any action. Thirdly, it is crucial for a person seeking to act ethically not to harm other people. Although there is an understanding that harming other people may prove necessary at times, it is the duty of the person not to add unnecessary harmful actions. Lastly, it is crucial for justice to emerge from ethical actions. An action could not become fully ethical if it does not open to any realization on the importance of doing what is right (Taylor, 1974).

What is the good life and how does one achieve it?

The good life, under cultural relativism as an ethical system, revolves around the premise of avoiding harmful deviation to norms while respecting the culture of other communities. Deviation would most likely result to rebellion within the community that would force the committing person to stop. As much as possible, the community would hold on to its duly established ethical values in order to stop anyone who tries to deviate. The deviating person, on the other hand, has the choice on whether to let his conscience succumb to the pressures of the community in which he belongs or continue acting deviously in order to herald change. The conscience of the deviating person would allow him to deliberate on the possible implications of his action. The occurrence of changes on ethical values is always imminent in cultural relativism and it stands as an integral feature of a good life for so

long as there is respect for autonomy, which alludes to human dignity, and rejection of actions that violate the well-being of others (Donnelly, 1984; Taylor, 1974).

Is ethics natural or learned behavior?

Cultural relativism emphasized on the premise that ethics is learned, not natural. Although norms in ethics emerge from the values built by communities, people exercise the ability to absorb those on his own and decide whether he would follow those or not. As a person grows, he assimilates his personal experiences with the accounts his fellow community members would share with one another, which would then form part of his conscience. The natural instinct of self-preservation would prevail within a person, but he must learn the manners in which he could improve it and protect himself from threats through the workings of his conscience (Velasquez et al., 1987).

What is an ethically bad life? How do we know?

A person focused on going against the norms of ethics binding his community, which would then generate negative results, characterizes an ethically bad life. As much as possible, a person should not seek to deviate from any established rules through committing violent actions, although such could also result to positive effects. Deliberately committing something that violates the views of the community violently would lead to an ethically bad life, as such would most likely involve the destruction of peace in the area alongside violent reactions. An ethically bad life could proceed if the person concerned purposely violates the law (Taylor, 1974).

How do humans differentiate between good and bad in the realm of ethics?

Ethics, with due consideration of cultural relativism, provides directions for telling between good and bad actions. A consensus within the community helps form the common prevailing attitudes on ethics of a person, alongside his conscience that also enables him to deliberate on his personal preferences. As long as there are experiences that provide trauma to the affected person shared with members of the community, then the community would deem that matter as highly controversial and worthy of closer deliberation (Taylor, 1974).

Do ethical actions have value apart from the outcomes of those actions?

The value of ethical actions depends on whether those produce outcomes that are good and avoid those that are bad. Cultural relativism provides a set of meanings that define whether an action is favorable or disadvantageous. Therefore, it pays to consider that ethical actions may not stand to have any value if it does not generate any corresponding positive impressions based on the prevailing norms within a given culture observed by a community. In other words, an ethical action should correspond to generally good outcomes, as deliberated thoroughly by present norms, for it to justify its value. At the same time, an ethical action should also encourage avoidance of bad outcomes, defined culturally, in order for it to have substantial value (Donnelly, 1984; Taylor, 1974; Tilley, 2000).

Are humans free or determined, and how does this perspective relate to human responsibility?

Although norms defined by culture tend to determine ethical behavior, it does not mean to say that humans are limited to commit actions in such respect. In other words, humans may still act outside of the norms set by the community in which he belongs. Deviation from ethical behavior set by culture within a given community is possible because humans have the freedom to act according to their decisions, as provided by their conscience. If a person decides on committing certain actions, he has the following considerations in mind: the ethical norms of society and the implications of a possible deviation thereof. Although deviation may lead to positive innovations to existing norms of ethics, it can also lead to unethical actions. In terms of human responsibility, ethical norms serve as guidelines defining whether certain actions are good or bad, and thus a person has to hold himself responsible over the outcomes of anything that he does in accordance to what his culture demands and his personal judgment. If the person knows that he is going to deviate from the ethical norms of his culture, he has to use his conscience to assess whether his actions will result to harmful outcomes or to different yet beneficial ones. Ergo, human conscience help defines human responsibility towards committing ethical actions (Donnelly, 1984; Taylor, 1974).

Conclusion

It is difficult to establish a universal ethical system simply because of the fact that there are different cultures around the world that influence different people on their perceptions on good and bad actions. Cultural relativism

therefore stands as a strong ethical system for it recognizes the importance of cultural differences in defining whether specific actions are beneficial or harmful. The four elements of cultural relativism apply greatly to the study of ethics. Customs define the prevalence of shared values in a community; change refers to environmental triggers for positive deviation; relativity asserts that societies hold different cultures affecting perceptions on ethical actions; conscience deals with assessing existing ethical actions in relation to implications on deviation. In light of the assertion this study has made on cultural relativism being the ideal ethical system, it is only proper to establish the conclusion that there could be no universal ethical system.

References

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