

Moral relativism and plato's euthyphro

Experience, Human Nature



People have different beliefs on what is considered “ right” and “ wrong. ”

The idea that the truth is relative simply means that “ what is true for me is true for me, and what is true for you is true for you. ” There have been problems with this view however, because there is not a definitive meaning to the idea that the truth is relative; it is only a matter of opinion because the truth is the truth whether you believe it or not.

For example, if a person is a vegetarian, then to that person, eating meat is bad because it is against their beliefs, but for another person, someone who is not a vegetarian, eating meat is good because it is healthy and a good source of protein. In this case, the two beliefs disagree with each other, but each person's belief is true for that person because we all have our own personal truth. A problem with this view is that you can mistakenly think something is true when it is really not true. We cannot learn anything with this view because there is no absolute truth, which leads to a new problem of perspective.

I see a wooden desk in front of me; it looks and feels like a wood desk, but is my perception of this desk the same as someone else's perception of the desk? The idea that the truth is relative is self-refuting. The idea of moral relativism is that different civilizations have different moral beliefs, and that there is no absolute moral truth. “ There is no actual standard that makes one societal code better than any other. ” Each society lives by its cultural norms, and if someone from another culture came and did something different from the norm, then that person would be judged.

One of the problems with moral relativism is that we cannot criticize someone for bad behavior because within that person's society, what they are doing might be moral. An example of moral relativism is in Australia where it's etiquette is for people to wear black clothes to a funeral, but in Japan it is their etiquette for people to wear white clothes; if a person from Australia attended a funeral in Japan wearing all black, then that person would probably be judged by the people for doing something wrong. The same goes the other way.

A problem with the idea of moral relativism is that majority opinion is the only thing we can look too because there is no " truth. " To judge whether actions are right or wrong we will have to look to the standards of our society. " If 52% of the population thinks that we should allow slavery, then this would make it okay because that is the majority, but as in this case, the majority is often wrong" (class notes). Religion is the one thing that can be used to kind of ground the moral. Religious beliefs tend to pretty much have the same concept about morality.

Most religions say that it is immoral to steal, kill, rape, and lie. By believing in that creates a foundation of morality because people believe if God says it is good, then it is good and if God says it is bad, then it is bad. God grounds the foundation of the moral, and if we do not obey it we will be punished. People obey God's foundation because they are scared of the unknown (life after death). Pragmatic considerations fall under the idea of moral relativism as well because it difficult to determine whether a choice is morally right under certain circumstances.

Is it immoral for a father who is homeless with a starving family to steal food from somewhere to help his family survive? When facing life or death situations, sometimes making a moral decision is difficult because by going with the moral, you may not survive. In Socrates' form/model of the good, he believes that a person must seek the moral potential of his or her soul. He says " wealth does not bring about excellence, but excellence makes wealth and everything else good for men, both individually and collectively" (p. 32).

In Socrates model of the good, he means that people value material things such as wealth and glamour more than the moral good and the soul. He believes that people need to value the moral more because it is the human soul that is the highest good. A form or model of the moral would allow us to have a set of guidelines that every one would abide by. In the world today the moral is not relative because different cultures have different moral codes that the people live by, so by having a form or model there would be a " universal truth. "

We cannot have knowledge of the God or the Gods. The idea that a God or Gods exist is relative because some people believe that God does exist and some people believe that God does not exist. We can't have knowledge of God or the Gods because there is no universal truth. We are not able to ground the moral just by saying it is what God or the Gods love. According to Socrates, " different Gods consider different things to be just, beautiful, ugly, good, and bad" (p. 7). We cannot ground the moral to the Gods because they are always at odds and war with each other.

Socrates questions the idea that piety is what is pleasing to the Gods at prayer and sacrifice. He believes that what is pleasing to one God is may not be to another. Socrates says to Euthyphro, “ And they often disagree with one another. What is pleasing to one is obnoxious to another, such as the case when the god Zeus mutilated his father Chronus. How can you say that piety is what is pleasing to them when they don't agree? After all, religion makes mistakes all the time” (p. 14).

The idea that “ piety is what is pleasing to the Gods at prayer and sacrifice, those are pious actions such as preserve both private houses and public affairs of state. The opposite of these pleasing actions are impious and overturn and destroy everything” is questioned by Socrates because he wants to know why the Gods want this from people. Socrates does not understand what the people can offer the Gods that they do not already have, and how do the Gods benefit from what they receive from us. Socrates says to Euthyphro, “ I prefer nothing, unless it is true.

But tell me, what benefit do the Gods derive from the gifts they receive from us? What they give us is obvious to all. There is for us no good that we do not receive from them, but how are they benefited by what they receive from us? Or do we have such an advantage over them in trade that we receive all our blessings from them and they receive nothing from us? ” (p. 18) Euthyphro then tells Socrates that the Gods do not receive anything beneficial from us, but it is the pious that is pleasing to them. There is nothing that we can do for the Gods because they are already perfect.