

Free essay on philosophical analysis of nikes labor practices

[Business](#), [Company](#)



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Introduction

Multinational companies like Nike have been accused of their insidious exploitation of labor. The practices of Nike with respect to its treatment of labors in third world countries have received considerable attention due to violation of labor laws. The reasons behind this is that several developing countries don't have strict adherence to the labor laws, unlike Europe and United States and the business from multinational companies are promoted by the political system. The labor exploitation in third world countries are ignited by unresponsive government. Though, the activists across the world have been compelling Nike to follow labor laws and increase the wages to workers and improve the safety and health standards followed at their sweatshops, the economists are promoting the benefits to labor in developing countries. As per these economists, the labor gets higher wage in comparison to local work and if Nike raises the payment, this would lead to increased unemployment. Kant Deontological Ethical theory provides an excellent theory to assess the Nike's actions and objectives on the ground of

humanity. This paper critically analyses the Nike's labor practices in the light of Kant ethical theory.

Respect for Human

The most prevalent critic to the sweatshop is based on human rights and human dignity. Kantian ethics give a basis in philosophical terms for human rights assertion and are derived from the categorical imperative of Kant ethical theory that "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only"(Kant 1990, p. 46). This implies that one should respect other humans. Kant theory maintains that people deserve respect because they have dignity. Workers are humans and they have dignity which is more than any price. The dignity workers have is due to them being competent of moral activity which is not possessed by capital and machines. As per Kant, "Morality is the condition under which alone a rationale being can be an end in himself because only through it is possible to be a lawgiving member in the realms of ends. Thus, morality and humanity insofar as it is capable of morality alone have dignity" (Kant 1990, 52). The activities of Nike company with their labor lie in the realm of exploitation and demonstrate that the company doesn't have any respect for the person. The people of third world company working as labor are beaten, kept hungry and forced to work 18 hours a day with the minimum wages. The company also employs child labor which demonstrates its focus (Boggan, 2001). Nike, well aware of implications of such labor practices strategically subcontracts the work of manufacturing its products and these sub-contractor companies establish

their work unit in the developing countries taking advantage of their weak economies, corrupt politicians and inconsistent labor laws. The maxim of Nike and its sub-contractor company is to maximize their revenue by comprising with the respect and dignity of other humans. The act of Nike is focused on the revenue maximization through lowering their manufacturing cost and is not founded on the principles of morality. Nike uses the workers of third world as the means to fulfill its greed and not as the end themselves. The employees of Nike in U. S. and Europe have privileges which are never accorded to the employees at third world country and this confirms that Nike doesn't promote equality as stated by Kant, "...measure himself with every other being of this kind and value himself on a footing of equality with them" (Kant 1991, 230). The act of Nike in relation to its labor practices defy the first formulation of categorical imperative that " Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" as the unfair labor practices are restricted to third world countries only. Through Kant second categorical imperative, this can be argued that Nike has the responsibility to respect the humanity of its workers in the third world nations. The workers at Nike sub-contractor are made part of the Nike's scheme of reducing cost and increasing profit without their active consent which involves not taking consent or informing workers about the harsh working conditions like no permission for bathroom breaks and working at a stretch for 18 hours and many more. This act of Nike makes it defy the second formulation of categorical imperative of Kant ethical theory.

Coercion

The second categorical imperative states that one should not use other human as the means and should consider other human is equally capable of autonomous law guided action. This rule requires two actions; one, not using people as means and other, to think they to be capable of making decision and consider them as ends in themselves. The sweatshops violate this imperative as they uses the workers as the means to cut their manufacturing without respecting their dignity by providing them safe and efficient working conditions and appropriate wages for their services. Moreover, workers are compelled to work as per the requirement of the company which may involve working at a stretch for 18 hours or more. This becomes coercion which is compelling the person against his freedom. Coercion is unethical at the first place as it considers the individuals, on which coercion is applied as the meager tools, as the subjects who lack the capacity to make rational decision about their activities and acts. Sweatshops operated by Nike clearly practices physical coercion and psychological coercion. Coercion is segregated in physical and psychological coercion³³. Physical coercion is when the movement of one's body is forced physically by others, which in the case of Nike are done by forcing the workers to work for 18 hours. Psychological coercion is practiced when the person is convinced psychologically that if he or she doesn't work as desired they will be punished. Sweatshops create psychological coercion by beating the workers and raping the women if they don't work properly, thereby generating fear in their minds. The coercion restricts the autonomous movement of the individual and Kant maintains that when one acts autonomously, it complies

with dignity. The freedom is required for one to make its decisions which are derived from the laws created by that individual adhering to the dignity and self-respect. This is also known as positive freedom as defined by Onoro O' Neill, " Positive freedom is more than independence from alien causes. It would be absent in lawless or random changes, although these are negatively free, since they depend on no alien causes. Since will is a mode of causality it cannot, if free at all, be merely negatively free, so it must work by non-alien causality ... it [free will] must be a capacity for self-determination or autonomy"(O'Neill 1989, p. 5). Nike's sweatshop forcing its workers to work for 18 hours accompanied with threat of beating is the form of physical and psychological coercion and is a violation of labor laws.

Conclusion

As argued by Kant, the consistent adherence to the norms of human dignity enables a person to raise him above everything else and the dignity of individuals and their humanity should be respected as specified in the categorical imperatives of Kant Deontological Ethical Theory. Nike, the multinational company encourages the violation of labor laws and has adopted a strategic route to minimize its production cost by outsourcing its work to sub-contractors which ensures that the work is performed in inhuman conditions. Nike deliberately overlooks the inhuman treatment of workers and the violation of labor laws as this leads to revenue maximization for Nike and the sub-contractor company.

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