

# Moral relativism vs. moral objectivism

Experience, Human Nature



Moral relativism is a philosophical doctrine which claims that moral or ethical theses do not reveal unqualified and complete moral truths (Pojman, 1998). However, it formulates claims comparative to social, historical, and cultural, or individual preferences. Moreover, moral relativism recommends that no particular standard or criterion exists by which to evaluate and analyze the truthfulness of a certain ethical thesis. Relativistic standpoints repeatedly see moral values as valid only within definite cultural limitations or in the framework of personal preferences. An intense relativist stance might imply that assessing the moral or ethical decisions or acts of other individuals or group of individuals does not contain any value, still most relativists bring forward a more inadequate account of the theory.

On the other hand, moral relativism is most commonly mistake as correspondence to moral pluralism/value pluralism. Moral pluralism recognizes the co-existence of contrasting and divergent ideas and practices yet it does not entail yielding them the same authority. Moral relativism, quite the opposite, argues that differing moral standpoints do not contain truth-value. At the same time, it suggests that no ideal standard of reference that is available by which to evaluate them (Pojman, 1998).

History traces relativist principles and doctrines more than some thousand years ago. The claim by Protagoras that man is the measure of all things marks a premature philosophical antecedent to modern relativism (Pojman, 1998). Furthermore, Herodotus, a Greek historian, viewed that every society looks upon its own belief system and means of performing their functions as the finest, in comparison to that of others. Though different prehistoric philosophers also inquired the concept of a universal and unconditional

standard of morality, Herodotus argument on moral relativism remains as the most fundamental idea of moral relativism.

In the medieval age of moral philosophy, Thomas Aquinas defines moral philosophy as the collection or collections of ideas and claims which, as values and guidelines of action, identify the types of preferred action that are justly intellectual and rational for human persons and society (Pojman, 1998). It is a basically realistic philosophy of values which motivate individuals towards human fulfillment so that better-off state of affairs is mutually represented and practicable by means of the actions that equally evident and put up the superiorities of moral fiber conventionally labeled as virtues.

Aquinas argument about moral is not really confined with his prior conceptualization of the idea of virtue – that is acquired through regular practice or by habit. For him, moral law is not a mere product of habituation. As explained above, his idea of moral law is linked with the concept of rationality or reason. A human person regards an action as morally right not because it is habitually observed or performed but because it comes within rational analysis of that individual.

In the contemporary period, Ruth Benedict, an anthropologist, opines that morality differs in every society which is evidently framed on the idea of moral relativism (Pojman, 1998). Benedict argues that there is no such thing as moral values but only customs and traditions. She admits that each society has its own customary practices that are justified simply because they are part of the tradition exclusive to that society.

For Benedict, morals obtain their values based on how individuals see certain acts and behaviors as beneficial to their society. And such is what she called as the standard of moral goodness. Now, such morally good action is deemed to perform habitually to maintain the advantages brought about by such morally good actions. In effect, being morally good and habitually performance of an action subsist together as the society upholds their own moral law.

### **References:**

Pojman, L. (1998). *Moral Philosophy: A Reader* (2nd ed.). Hackett Publishing Company.