

What sorts of ethical problems are posed by the fact of cultural pluralism and ho...



In the contemporary environment of fast globalization, the social and political constructions of identity and changing pattern of societal norms and structure have produced complex dynamics of human interaction and relationship. The geographical boundaries have increased the interaction of people cutting across culture, religion, color, race and nationality. This has resulted in the changing perspectives to ethical behavior. Most importantly, it produces ethical dilemma that may create misunderstanding, conflicts and in general make decision making process complex. This also raises the issue of cultural pluralism, moral absolutism and ethical relativism which need to be understood from the wider perspective of pluralistic society and the ethical challenges that are posed.

Cultural pluralism broadly defines the social structure that is distinct in its diversity vis-à-vis culture, race and color. The cultural differentiation in the fast transforming political system has become a reality, As such, the autonomy of individuals irrespective of their color, race and culture is not only desirable but must be incorporated within the socio-cultural and legal paradigm of the region. Equal rights and freedom to speech and actions become essential components of societal norms. The states must therefore promote these values for peaceful co-existence. Philosophers have myriad views on the topic. Rawls (1993) believes that state must not intervene in personal choices of individual regarding their religion, culture etc. The actions of individuals must be rational such that they do not have adverse impact on others. But this may also produce ethical dilemma between moral absolutism and ethical relativism.

Moral absolutism supports normative ethics and believes that actions are

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either right or wrong. Kantian utilitarian theory (Schneewind, 1990) emphasizes moral obligations and asserts that actions that result in the good of maximum number of people are correct. This does not give way to doubts which in reality, is a very possible fact. It is especially true in the era of cultural diversity where moral relativism has emerged as critical aspect of one's actions. Cultural pluralism highlights the different ideologies of various cultures that may view their actions differently as opposed to others. For example, polygamy is moral obligation in some community whereas in West, it is ethically wrong. Thus, challenge of moral relativism always exists in pluralistic culture.

Ethical relativism also promotes the concept of differing views on personal and general ethics. It believes that no actions can be fully right or fully wrong. The interpretation of one's actions therefore relies on one's socio-cultural paradigms. The cultural pluralism therefore creates ethical dilemma that can only be resolved through cross cultural understanding. Nihilism theory is very interesting as it claims the existence of human existence as imagery and therefore negates the very meaning of life. Marx, on the other hand propagates the philosophy of a meaningful life which contributes to the development of classless society. This is quite relevant because the theory delineates the concept of differences in society and regards individuals as equal.

Hence, it can be concluded that in current times, ethical dilemmas have become common. The resolution of ethical dilemma is only possible through understanding the cross cultural values and rationalizing one's actions within the broader framework of the values of pluralistic society.

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