

Philosophical theories and the golden rule

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There are several types of relativism such as truth, cultural and moral relativism. Cultural relativism is the most popular. Cultural relativism claims that each society has a different set of rules and regulations also known as a code of ethics (Rachels 2). This code defines how people dress, build houses and their eating mannerisms. Cultural relativists assert that this code of ethics, cannot be declared as absolute truth or wrong, but it guides the activities of societal members. Societies are diverse due to their cultures and thus it is essential for people to understand their cultural diversity and learn to live in unity. This means tolerating each other and accepting that people are different. Consequently, unity in diversity and harmonious living become part and parcel of society.

Critics of this theory argue that societies have numerous similarities; they value virtues such as truth and preservation of human life. Therefore, there are some things that are universal among societies although societies exist as independent entities. Cultural relativism guides us not to assume that there are absolute truths to anything. It also urges us to be open-minded so as to cope with people from different societies (Rachels 8-11).

The Golden Rule

The Golden Rule has its foundation on ethics. These are moral principles followed by an institution, society or organization. They have no significant variations across cultures and societies, and they are the foundation of responsible behavior. According to John Maxwell, the Golden Rule is that people want to be treated in a good manner (Maxwell 2-7). They always want to feel appreciated, valued and understood. Furthermore, this rule suggests that people have a strong passion for trust and respect. Therefore, they endeavor to obtain all these wants as they progress in their lives.

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On the other hand, Gensler's Golden Rule suggests that people should treat others well if they would want them to reciprocate in the same manner (Gensler 5-15). Thus, one should not do something unpleasant to another person expecting the person to do something substantial in return. However, he does not mention the action to be done; whether it is positive or negative. Critics of this rule such as Immanuel Kant, George Bernard Shaw, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Bertrand Russell argue that it is impossible to apply golden rules in cases where there are varying interests. People may be having different tastes and preferences and such people cannot be treated alike. Another problem with this rule is the issue of different situations. People in different situations cannot be treated in a similar manner. For instance, a prisoner cannot be treated equally with an innocent man. Similarly, the Golden Rule cannot be used to justify oppression. A person who oppresses another does not wish to be oppressed. Thus, the Golden Rule cannot be applied in all situations.

Emotivism

This is a theory that claims that moral judgments and decisions depend on emotions. Therefore, emotions are pertinent in making sound moral judgments (Appiah 35-49). Rational decisions depend on alternatives for action by one's mind, but the reason is inert, and one cannot depend on it to make dynamic decisions. The theory presupposes that emotions evoke moral judgments. Critics to this theory such as Richard Brandt argue that moral judgments cannot be based on feelings alone because reason guides logical and sound judgments. Furthermore, emotions can be based on discrimination and stereotypes thereby leading to inappropriate judgments about a phenomenon.

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