

Ethics – college essay



Ethical relativism is a view on morality stating that there are no universally accepted moral principles. Morality varies from one culture to another and no society has the right to impose their view of morality on other societies.

Ethical relativism can be summed up to mean that morals are derived from what is culturally acceptable in any given society. ER is made up of two theses.

The first is the diversity thesis, which simply says that moral practices are diverse across cultures. Ruth Benedict defends this theory by using homosexuality as an example. She explains how homosexuality was accepted and even encouraged in many cultures throughout history, like ancient Greece, but denounced in others. More evidence for the diversity thesis can be found in burial practices. Ancient Greeks honored their dead by burning the bodies. Similarly, Callatians showed respect to their dead by eating the bodies.

However, both cultures were extremely offended when asked how much money would be required to institute the burial practices of the other. These examples clearly illustrate the vast differences in morality from culture to culture. ER's second thesis is called the dependency thesis. It states that there is no objective standard by which to judge morality. Westermarck defends this theory by saying that ethics is a learned set of behaviors instilled in every human at a young age by his or her surroundings. As a young person, we pick up on "right" and "wrong" by learning from those around us what is culturally acceptable.

The ultimate source of morality, according to Westermarck, is sympathy. This “gut feeling” of right and wrong is the only scale of morality each person has. Pojman has found many discrepancies in the theory of ethical relativism. Since ER says that no cultures view of morality can be criticized, we ought to be tolerant of all cultures. The problem is that tolerance would then be a universal moral principle, which ER says doesn't exist.

In fact it would be just as acceptable for a culture to be intolerant since morality is relative. Thus ER is logically inconsistent. This inconsistency makes ER inapplicable to solving conflicts between cultures, since each can be viewed as being morally right in any action by their own definition.

Pojman also explains how any social reformers, like Martin Luther King Jr.

, would inherently be wrong by going against the societal majority (i. e. those that determine morals). ER also implies that mass opinion is infallible, thus making a brutal dictator such as Hitler morally justified. The challenge of the ring is a hypothetical question posed to Socrates by Glaucon in the 5th century BC.

Glaucon introduces a mythical ring that turns its wearer invisible. Glaucon says that every person, even the seemingly most moral, would use the ring to his or her advantage even at the detriment of others. His argument is based on the fact that the only reason people don't live fully unjust lives now is fear of repercussions. Under the stipulation that one can never be caught, the fear vanishes one becomes immoral.

Socrates responds by asking if injustice really does pay. His point is that by one's own definition of success, one may or may not use the ring. For

example if success is defined by a man as being scrupulous, he wouldn't use the ring because ultimately it doesn't lead to happiness for him. In contrast, the man who defines success by wealth would use the ring.

Socrates says that to do injustice is to scar ones " soul," which is equivalent to the modern word " character. " Both sides of the ring argument have merit. For the majority of the population I believe Glaucon is right, they would use the ring. However, some define happiness differently, and for them the ring is of no use. Friedman's argument on corporate social responsibility is that it doesn't exist. According to Friedman, a corporation's only goal is to increase profits infinitely while staying within the realm of the law.

He states that a corporate executive is merely an employee of the shareholders and his or her job is solely to increase return to the shareholders. If an executive were to be " socially responsible" and donate money to a charity, it's an unauthorized distribution of shareholder funds. Thus being socially responsible is simultaneously being morally irresponsible. The burden of social responsibility should be placed on individual consumers. If they don't like the policies and practices of a certain company they have the option to not buy the product or not invest in the company. The divine command theory makes a single differentiation between right and wrong.

Simply, according to DCT, morally right means commanded by God and morally wrong means forbidden by God. This theory is highly criticized and many philosophers would say it has been refuted for thousands of years. The main criticism comes from Socrates and Euthyphro. The question is whether

what is right is right because God says so (DCT) or does God say it's right because he sees that it's right (theory of natural law). Option one is quickly dismissed by Euthyphro because it implies quite a bit of arbitrariness. For instance, in the very beginning all actions were morally equal until God starting commanding and prohibiting certain ones.

If God loving something makes it right, what reason is there for God wanting us to do right? If God commanded adultery, adultery would be morally right and obligatory. Option two means that there is a standard of morals independent from God's own will. This contradicts the divine command theory's basic component that commanded by God is right and prohibited by God is wrong. -Reason, Morality, and Public Policy: Classic and Contemporary Readings in Philosophy by: G. M.

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