

The Myth of Moral Relativism

The following presentation is a summary of Dr. John Dolhenty's article on "The Myth of Moral Relativism"

What is Moral Relativism

- Moral relativism is the belief that states that there are no fixed values in morality. Values are always changing and relative is the belief. The belief is that values in general change from individual to individual.

Typical Expressions of Moral Relativism

- Have you ever heard these expressions?
Maybe you have used them yourself?
- What's true for you is not true for me.
- Morality is a matter of personal opinion.
- We can't judge another person's morality.
- All societies have different moralities.

Why is this part of class on Morality?

- This course asserts that there is a morality and people act as if there is a morality.
- Assertions that there is no morality are an attempt to minimize immoral actions as being ok.

Some terms that are important to know.

- The opposite of relativism is absolutism.
- Absolute means fixed and unchanging. Norms that are absolute are valid at all time and in all cultures.

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Arguments against Moral relativism. 1) It's a logical Contradiction.

- First, statements such as "all morals are relative to each individual" are a morality.
- It's the morality of anything goes. It's a morality that says all human acts are good and moral. So that person is claiming an absolute moral norm by their first statement. Which means they are contradicting themselves in their opening statement.

2) Moral Relativists are not consistent

- Moral Relativists make relativist statements, then make absolute statements which show that they don't really believe that morality is a question of opinion.

Inconsistency of Relativism.

- Take for example the feminist movement which claims that morality is a question of person choice in the case of abortion. They are relativist in this instance. Yet when they claim the following actions are immoral, they are in fact showing that they are moral absolutist.

Examples

- The treatment of women is wrong in Afghanistan by the Taliban.
- Child-adult sexual activity is wrong and should be punished.
- Rape is wrong, and should be punished by crime.

Consistency

- If the feminist were consistent in their belief that morality is a question of personal choice, then all the previous activities would be just considered a cultural thing, choices made by individuals and society that we have no business judging. However, they vehemently condemn those activities as immoral, an assault on women and thus with their other beliefs they are also saying they admit there are moral absolute values.

Lack of Credibility

- When a person says one thing and contradicts themselves they immediately lose their credibility. What they are saying is they really don't believe in their own statements.

Credibility

- Imagine the person who says that smoking is bad for your health, yet he is found smoking. He really doesn't believe its bad.
- Imagine the person who says that a person should not own a gun, yet he does. Does he really believe what he says? Does he have credibility? Think of some other examples.

Another Ploy of Moral Relativism – but its Legal

- Some times a law may hide an immoral act, and it is considered a good act because it's the law.
- Look at the following example of acts that we know are wrong by means of the dignity of the human person, yet they were sanctified by the law.

But its the law

- Slavery was considered the law of the land.
- It was legal to take the property of the Jews in World War II
- In the United States, Women and African Americans were considered property and had no right to vote.
- There are many other examples.

The law

- The law can't hide immorality of certain actions. Sooner or later its immorality comes out.
- Also if the moral relativist is consequent he can't condemn the most hideous of acts because it can become it can be defended according to personal opinion.

In Conclusion, Moral Relativism is a contradiction

- As long as a relativist affirms one absolute value as constant and unchanging, then he contradicts himself.
- He also contradicts himself the minute he affirms his morality, because he is making an absolute statement
- Therefore moral relativism is untenable and a myth, since the relativist ultimately admits to a moral value.

What does this mean?

- If then, moral relativism does not make sense then the questions immediately comes to mind. What are those values and norms that are absolute and unchanging? That will be the nature of this course to discover those standards and norms. Some of them will be obvious and easy; like though shall not kill. Others will not be as clear like in vitro fertilization.

Another question that is important. Human dignity

- At the basis of morality is the belief that a human being has dignity and therefore you may not take innocent life.
- What is it that give a human person a dignity and ultimately a value of respect?

Human Dignity

- Language
- Freedom
- Intellect
- Spiritual
- Immortality

Human Dignity

- Morality is based on the fact that each person has a human dignity and that dignity can not be violated. If it is, then society will place penalties that may be severe.