

MORAL OBJECTIVISM AS A BASIC FOUNDATION AND STANDARD OF HUMAN CONDUCT

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Generally acknowledged accounts of human action firmly recommend that actions must be identified from the first individual point of view, i.e. from the perspective of the reasons that motivate an agent. To this there have been bunches of contention as regards to the standard of human conduct in general. The discussion in which moral disagreement has received most attention is metaethical and concerns the objectivity of ethics. The subjective hypothesis contends that the standard for human action is from a subjective view. Then again some other few speculations have guaranteed that ethical objectivism decides the rightness or unsoundness of our actions. This paper joins the list of long debates on the subject matter. The paper submits that moral objectivism is a basic foundation and determines the rightness or wrongness of our actions corresponding to other theories.

KEYWORDS: Morality, Moral Objectivism, Moral Subjectivism, Human Conduct.

INTRODUCTION

The debate on morality objectivity as a standard of morality is a perennial issue in the history of philosophy so much such that people tend to equate morality to what society allows or what humans determine. Morality consists of the standard that individual or group has about what is wrong, good or evil. In fact, moral standards are ideal that people try to live up to about what is right and wrong or good or evil. Generally speaking, moral standard bothers on what matter to which we attach great importance.

For example, many societies believe in moral standard against lying, thief, rape, enslavement, murder, child abuse, assault, slander, fraud, lawbreaking. All these deals with the matter that people feel are quite serious. People's moral standards typically come from many different sources and influences, including parents, church, school, television, friends, music and association. Culture contrast with respect to certain ethical activities, in this way there is the need to find which is correct however cultures are comparative in regards to the presence and

the requirement for profound quality. Notwithstanding, for a moral rule to be real and steady, they should be determined outside to human social orders. Otherwise, morality is merely one person's point of choice or feeling, not an understanding of objective truth morality that guides human conduct or actions.

In this paper, however, we shall promote the theory of moral objectivism as a foundation and standard of human conduct or action. By denying ethical relativism, relating inherent human rights, belief system and human action or conduct to the necessity of absolute morality and stressing the importance of believing in a justified proposition in decision-making. Before that, it is important to know what moral objectivism means and what it actually means to become a moral objectivist. Moral objectivism states that one and only one correct morality exists. Absolutists mean having the belief that there exist universal moral principle, unchanging and inflexible standards by which an act can be assessed or evaluated to be right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust (Manuel Velasquez, 2001. 513). It also maintains that validity, truth, of these moral principles does not rest on aspects such as social acceptance or cultural norms or even individual preferences (Manuel Velasquez,

515). To become a moral objectivist or moral absolutist as others would call it, takes the modesty to adhere to the reality that our human's lack of perfection does not imply that perfection does not exist. Similarly, the incomprehensibility of the Absolute Good/Absolutely Right should not mislead us into concluding there is only the Relative Good/Relative Right, just because such concept is easier to grasp and hold on to. This I shall do justice to letter in the essay. But for now, let us examine reason moral relativism is problematic and cannot serve as a standard of human conduct or action.

THE PROBLEMATIC NATURE OF MORAL RELATIVISM

Ethical relativism or moral relativism simply rejects the idea of the universality of moral principles. These principles, according to the relativist, are contextual, depending on either the individual or society (Miller 2011, 348). This can be extended into the two theories of moral relativism, namely, Subjectivism and Conventionalism. The position of a subjectivist is that the individual, specifically his preferences, is the basis of morality. To be moral is to live by one's favoured ideologies, one's chosen standards or what one's feel good after and what is immoral is what one feel is bad after

(Sinnott-Armstrong 2006). The subjectivist seems to argue that feeling guilty, since it causes one to feel bad, is immoral. Therefore, in order to prevent this 'immorality' one must not hold on to objective moral principle so that he may, every now and then, bend his evaluative bases and now always feel justified for his actions. The only strength of this argument, if it can even be considered valid is that it gives the person the freedom to create his own set of values to live by. Indeed, how can one be considered free if he is obligated to do the right thing in this case, the right thing according to objective principles. However, Subjectivism is in itself a problematic theory, and also poses a great number of faulty consequences if it were to be accepted by the majority. Regarding subjectivism as a guarantor of freedom will eventually lead to conflict among persons demanding their rights to be free to have their own set of moral principles when these created 'moral principle' begin to overlap with one another and start cancelling out each other. Imagine a person who claims that he has the freedom to create value system wherein another person's entire set of principles will be totally rejected. It leads to chaos, which is in no way a manifestation that Subjectivism is a feasible theory to guide our actions.

More so, Subjectivism defeats the essence of morality and moral standard itself. When a person evaluates his actions based on almost everything he pleases to base them, in order to avoid guilt, thus feel good, thus be moral, it will result to the impossibility of being wrong. When this happens, moral reflection becomes futile, for it will always lead to a 'justified feeling' that what has been done or what is about to be done, is what is good. Furthermore, ethical subjectivism makes it impossible to criticize the behavior of other persons or cultures. Again, ethical subjectivism seems to place high value on tolerance. The fact that a theory approves something good does not imply that the theory is true. The objectivist would agree with the relativist that tolerance is good and intolerance bad. However, the objectivist philosophers would say that only they have a right to make this claim, because tolerance is being offered an objective moral standard that is universally binding. By claiming that all ethical opinions are of equal value, the relativist is in the uncomfortable position of having to tolerate intolerance. If intolerance is to be our sole guiding ideal, should we then consider the sincere ethical judgment of racists and Nazis to be morally acceptable?

Conventionalism on the other hand, seems to have a stronger argument for

relativism as a standard of moral conduct. It is not as radical as subjectivism because it takes into consideration whether the action is acceptable, whether it follows the norms of the society, or whether it is part of the cultural norms or folkways. Conventionalism assumes the premises: that there is cultural relativism and that morality is dependent on culture (Howson 2009, 4). The argument for this theory is that it avoids the issue of ethnocentricity. For conventionalists, it is only right that we do not interfere with other cultures' affairs and impose onto them our customs. The problem with conventionalism can be seen in its implications. First, by accepting the principle of tolerance, one has to consider acts like genocides, oppression and slavery as morally permissible as long as they are in conformity with the culture of that particular group of people. Second, it implies that reformers, people who go against cultural standards and who call for change in the society, are 'always wrong' since the norms is what is right. Thirdly, the very notion of society and culture are hard to define makes it implausible for society and culture to actually become the basis of one's morality. Again, in considering the case of a person who belongs to different societies, if he were to believe in conventionalism it will mean that a single act can be judged

differently at various bases, thus making morality lose its "conduct or action guiding function." If, however, a relativist will suggest that that person can choose a single society's moral code, it is possible that would lead to a form of subjectivism, since the act of choosing itself pertains to one's preference at that particular situation. Having seen earlier the detriments of subjectivism and admitting that at one point, conventionalism may turn into subjectivism, ethical relativism seems to be a dangerous idea as a guide to human conduct or action.

Louis Pojman in his article, *Who is to Judge?*, rejects ethical relativism by finding fault in the implication inherent in it. He refuses to accept that ethical relativism is an implication of cultural relativism. According to him, whether cultural relativism is true or not, it does not follow that there can be no objective way of regarding the rightness or wrongness of things. It does not successfully denounce the moral objectivist's view that there is an absolute standard for evaluating the morality of actions. An objectivist, he says, can agree that different cultures have different moral codes, yet he can still "defend a form of universalism by arguing that some cultures simply lack correct moral principles (Louise 1997, 241). Pojman rejects the dependency thesis, which states that morality

is culture based. It asserts that what validates moral principle is the judgment of the society, that what is right is what society accepts, and what is wrong is what the society does not consider normative. Furthermore, he objected to such proposition that right morality is relative, saying that adhering to such resembles saying that we determine our ethical standards by methods for "simply uncritical acceptance of one's own mores" instead of critically reasoning about it. If we weigh the Weak Dependency thesis against the Strong Dependency thesis, and question reason, relativist have to maintain the latter, when the fact shows that such extreme position demotes us into being that simply comply instead of thrive. Pojman thus concludes that the existence of objective moral code and principles that are based on a common human nature need to solve conflict of interest to flourish. We will in support to the moral objectivist's position, now attempt to establish the inherent nature of human right and its connection to the concept of Absolutism.

MORALITY NECESSITATES OBJECTIVITY

When we discuss ethical morality, we can't abstain from discussing what should be just. Impartiality nature can be conceivable in

the event that we free our psyche with the possibility that some have more ideal than others. Saying so is similar to proposing that right are human creations, bestowed by society or a sovereign to whoever is deems to deserve them, and deprived to those who are compulsorily inferior and unable to fight for theirs. This seems, by all accounts, to be the basic idea of rights made and unequally appropriated on the grounds that it is what is shown at present. In any case, attention has to be called to the fact that rights are not by nature, selective. One hypothesis with respect to the legitimization of right is that rights are status-based. To give credence to rights does not mean that every right has to be respected. Or maybe, we think regards for rights is something to be thankful for exactly on the grounds that we think individuals really have them and that they have them since it is fitting that they ought (Cuneo 2013).

Furthermore, Proponents of status-based rights theorist mostly ground ascription of rights on individual dignity. They would even go to the extent of saying that, each person's right imposes side constraints on the pursuit of other goals because the person possesses inviolability that all other must respect (Griffin 2004, 817). Failure to exercise one's right does not mean that these rights do not exist. Moreover, a sovereign's

ability to make others inescapable of recognizing their rights does not mean that those rights are created by him. It is just a manifestation of abusive tendency of people. In many examples presented by ethical relativism, infringement of basic human right is clearly present. By saying that an act can be assessed based on the society's acceptance, then eradicating a whole race for the dominance of one's own power for example in the case of war or terrorism, or enslaving a whole nation because one's society believes it to be right must be considered as an act of goodness. Basic rights like right to life, right to choose one's religion, right to property or right to live peacefully are apparently violated. Furthermore, moral relativism testifies these grave rights violations. Rights, then, will be treated merely as part of a person which he or she may do away with. However, this is not the case. Rights are not supposed to be determined by the cultural environment we grow up in or the society in which we are presently dwelling. These rights are not supposed to be subject to any other person's verdict. As human being we have these rights, and by doing away with them, we lose part of our being human. It is a form of dehumanization to have inherent rights which are not being recognized. Right triumph all

other factors especially the society and human law, not the other way round. Rights exist even if a person does not belong to a society or is not subject to human law. Now believing in the inherent nature of our rights, we must therefore accept the objectivism of these rights. They don't change from person, or from society to society. Everyone has the same rights as everybody else, for one's existence is objective as a logical or mathematical statement. Establishing so, we have to reason to doubt that morality is objective. By accepting that there is at least one thing that can possibly be objectively violated and objectively recognized, we can say that there is absolute good by which my act maybe evaluated (Sattaur 2012, 350).

Whenever we talk of morality, we also cannot avoid taking into consideration the reason by which our action is done. Belief is a great contribution to many actions individuals commit. In fact, majority of our conduct is influenced by our beliefs. Therefore, with this foundation, this contribution, must itself be assessed. We will therefore assess the belief formation as a guide to our conduct or actions.

A STANDARD BELIEF FORMATION AS GUIDE TO HUMAN CONDUCT OR ACTION

To be justified in having beliefs, one must be entitled to those beliefs. William Clifford claims that there is an ethics to believing, that makes all believing without sufficient evidence immoral (Clifford and Madigan 1999). He says that a person has the right to belief in any proposition without properly justifying it by means of adequately providing evidence for it being true. This is at the heart of evidentialism and may seem irrelevant to the position of moral objectivism. However, Clifford's position creates a significant implication on the way beliefs are being held today. In the event that it is unethical to put stock in anything without adequate confirmation how much more if we are to accept without attempting to legitimize it (Clifford and Madigan 1999).

The societal norms and cultural traditions are often in the form of the 'ought' and 'ought not' such that these are usually supplied to the members of the particular society or culture. Individuals do not try scrutinizing the belief framework of their culture. So long as individuals adhere to folkways, he is moral. In the event that he is deviant, he is viewed as immoral. As humans, it is our function to rationalize. Completely following what the society tells us to do or believing on whatever culture has already suggested to us, is a form of irresponsible existence. Regarding

traditions and socially accepted practices as automatically right, shows how one neglects his or her capacity and obligations, to finding truth in this world, to believing it and to having it and to allow ones actions to be guided by it. William Sumner says that morals come down to us from the past; each is subjected to the influence of the societal beliefs and formed by them before we are capable of reasoning about them (Sommers 2001). Without reasoning, one cannot see the flaws in the correct belief system. Belief systems are bases for the morals of society, so what the society would consider the norm are what it believes to be right. Thus, without evaluating one's convictions, the standard of a society would most likely be flawed. It would be linked to claiming that all individuals and all societies have been acting in accordance to the right guidelines (belief system). Having said this, we can again maintain that morality is objective because there is a right way of forming our beliefs and therefore, right actions which would be caused by these beliefs. Having analyzed belief system as guide to human action it is pertinent therefore for us to do justice to moral objectivism as the bases and standard of human conduct.

MORAL OBJECTIVISM AS A FOUNDATION AND STANDARD OF HUMAN CONDUCT (ACTION)

Morality must be objectively derived. The concept of good and morality exist. The existence of the good argues for something in human society that is different than the existence of animals or the wolves. Thus the nature of humanity is somewhat different we realize that specific standards and activities are great and adequate and essential for existence. We ponder the conceptual idea of moral principle itself and the all universality of such thought. All human cultures does have exactly the same moral codes, but all cultures have variations of moral code (Shapiro 2006, 357). This concept of the nature of humanity argues for the code of morality that fits all people; we seek it, we believe it; we feel that we need it.

Human culture does tend to agree about the same moral ideas, such as murder of one's own people, cruelty except against enemies, rape and other violent actions which force one person's will upon another. The fact that there is agreement seems to indicate a common source of moral conscience, a standard to which all humans attempt to adhere. C S. Lewis called this idea the 'Moral law or natural law of morality (Flax 2007),

and idea similar to Immanuel Kant's 'Law of Nature'. Kant ground his concept in *a priori* practical human reason, which Lewis identifies in *imago Dei* within human nature. Kant's categorical imperative demands that morality depends on substantial impersonal principle, in the intrinsic worth of right itself, upon which every human should act. To duty, every other motive must give place, because duty is the condition of the good itself whose worth transcends everything (Kitcher 2004, 557). These principles if acted upon rationally would then bring about harmony, and harmony to social interactions. Any fully rational person would necessarily recognize the good and act according to the imperatives (Rippon 2014, 783). Kant insists that the point of morality is the principle not the frailty or inconsistencies of human nature.

There is a possible existence of absolute moral standard or value. Glaucon in *Plato's Republic*, suggests the need for convention in order to function (Santas 2008), that is, for humans and society to function. But this notion requires awareness that humans must have some kind of restraints or we will likely destroy ourselves. Why is this so? Social Darwinism proposes that humans are like animals and the strongest achieve their perennial ends. Might makes right. If this notion were the case, humans would not be

aware of ideas like equality, fairness, discrimination, injustice, oppression and so on. We will just live and die like other animals, because that's just the way things are. No one will propose alternatives.

Some Eastern thinkers believe that chaotic moral behavior result from disharmony in the functioning of the universe. But what makes a person violates this harmony? What force creates harmony that makes one malfunction? Christian philosophers would say that human sin is the problem; the reason people act to harm themselves and others. God's law provides the constraint that allows societies to function and good things to happen in the world.

However, Richard Taylor believes that people can be 'good' without God or any divinely-given external standard. He indicates that people know, there are reasons for not stealing, there are reasons for not assaulting, and there are reasons for not lying. These things hurt people (Peacock 1972). If there is no standard why does pain matter? People suffer pain. If there is no moral standard why do we not just accept that the strongest, 'fittest,' will survive, where the force or whatever is necessary.

William Craig believes that naturalism does not provide a sound basis for

naturalism. If naturalism is true, objective right and wrong do not exist (Peacock 1972). Craig says that without God there is no objective right or wrong. If naturalism exists, then we cannot condemn war, oppression or crime. Some actions may not be socially advantageous, but cannot be called crime or wrong. Craig argues that Taylor and naturalism defines morality as social skill, but such skill can develop cruelty as well as kindness. With Taylor's naturalism no one is morally obliged to be virtuous. Nietzsche defines his own virtue but became self-centered, elitist and cold hearted, which Taylor condemns (Leiter 2002). Plato's philosopher-king reflects similar non-egalitarian preferences for one type of human over another. Equality of worth and value do not logically emerge from naturalism for humans. Again, there is external authority that dictates some behavior, such as the system of laws in a country, enforce by police and courts. The existence of this authorities to direct how people ought to conduct their lives, presupposes the place of objectivism as a guide to human conduct or action. Relativism we know does not work. Somewhere in the course of human affairs, people who have conflicting values will collide, who, then, get to behave the way they want to?

Legitimate moral principle that guide human conduct to a good act must be derived external to human preferences. The fact that societies differ, does not mean that there is no absolute moral principle that is the basis of human actions. One cannot combine several different moral systems into one completely relative one. Each of the different societies has one system, not any of them have a relative one.

Plato, however, is one of the advocates and supporters of objective morality being the guide of human actions **Book 6: The Republic**. The external forms are not changeable, a fixed external standard that applies to everyone (Santas 2008). Aquinas' morality is grounded in principles that are fixed in nature, discernible through reason and were planted in nature by God as a reflection of His Character as Being. All human laws are judged in reference to these (Santas 2008). Some scholars think that, in naturalism, emotions are simply motivators connected with the need of the being and these needs provoke the motions, and thus the being acts. All well and good if we think only humans are involved, but animals have no such motivators and why would humans have them if we are simply advanced beings in the food chain? Christian ethics, as well as most religious philosophers, recognizes the

realities of moral virtues as well as the mandate that humans should be morally virtuous according to an objective pattern.

Similarly, no one can be sure that his personal preference of morals is the correct one. No humanity-derived systems of morality can be certain of truth and right. We do make errors in judgment and discernment. The force which motivates the objectivist is that truth and right thing must be done, the transcendent standard commands and requires it whether there be sanction against those who disobey or reward for obedient. Intrinsically human nature recognizes the need to be moral and good; if the standard points the way and insists by its very existence that humans are bound by its tenets, then resistance to the standard brings negative sanctions where obedience produces social and personal well-being. Supporting this line of thought Immanuel Kant notes that:

... unless we wish to deny all truth to the concept of morality and renounce its implication to any possible object, we cannot refuse to admit that the law of this concept (reason which determine a priori the will to

duty) is of such broad significance that it . . . must be valid with absolute necessity and not merely under contingent conditions and with exception (Kant 1999).

Kant's refutes and criticizes the subjectivists concerns about the limitations and restriction of and objective standard and indicated that such concerns reveals the "imperfectly rational being" who only feels constrained by commands which are necessary manifestations of the principle rather than imposition on an unwilling being who can individually decide which actions they should take (Robinson 1990). Truth and right does exist objectively and this influences human actions. Nonetheless, the very existence of religion provokes a strong argument for the existence of objective morality as a sole determinant of man's conduct or action. Humans seem constrained to worship something, to submit to a greater power, to conceive of an external, supernatural Being and conceive of this Being in certain ways. The belief that morality requires God is not limited to theists, however. Many atheists subscribe to it as well (Irwin 2013). Besides this conception, we have exhibited similar notions of how this Being must be

approached, satisfied and obeyed. The ideas of living after death, the necessity for redemption or absolution of personal sin, sacrifice and prayer would be wholly unnecessary and unthinkable if humans lived like animals, like naturalism implies. We practice religion because somehow we know there is something or someone else, greater than us, to whom we owe allegiance and obedience.

CONCLUSION

From our studies thus far, we have brought to the fore that relative or subjective morality cannot be the standard of human action. However, moral objectivism determines the rightness or wrongness of an actor of our actions. In following this line of thought I wish to bring to credence as a way of conclusion Plato's assertion of objectivity of values, through his notion of form (Anderson 2012). Goodness is perfect, whereas our good action change and are not consistently good or perceived as good. But the idea, the Form of Good persists in our knowledge and awareness (Wolfsdorf 2011). Christian philosopher identifies this inherent knowledge with the *Imago Dei*, the built in recognition of the essential goodness of God. Cudworth asserts that, human mind contain the imprint of divine wisdom and knowledge

which is objective (Gill 2004). Human nature, his experiences and life recognize the existence of the idea of objective morality as a basic determinant, rightness and wrongness of man's activities over the weakness of moral subjectivism. Moral objectivism as a standard form imperative is inherent in human nature and is the basic foundation and standard of human conduct, without which relativism would be a sole determinant of human conduct which would leave us with no morality at all.

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