

# Thinking Straight Ethical Reasoning Workshop 3-1 Tuesday (April 15, 2008)

I. In the discussion of cultural relativism, Rachels distinguishes a descriptive version (different cultures have (substantially?) different moral codes and practices from a moral or normative version. This normative version of the theory can be considered as an attempt to characterize morally right action. As we shall see when we consider conceptual theories (Chapter 7 of *Critical Reasoning*), we can represent this position using the following schema:

Moral (cultural) relativism (MCR)

An action (practice) is morally right if and only if it is in accord with the moral code of the culture in which it occur

As mentioned in Friday's class, this is equivalent to saying

**If** an action (practice) is in accord with the moral code of the culture in which it occurs, **then** it is morally right **AND**

**If** an action (practice) is morally right, **then** it is in accord with the moral code of the culture in which it occurs.

Similarly, the simple subjectivist can be construed as maintaining the following moral theory

Moral Subjectivism (MS)

An action (practice) is morally right if and only if the person judging it (would) approve of it.

Both of these approaches can be consider instances of moral relativism. For MCR whether an action or practice is morally right is relative to a culture (subculture?, society?) according to MS it is relative to the individual's judgment of approval.

## A. Small group

1. Complete the schema (along the lines for MCR and MS) above for

a) Divine Command ethical theory

An action (practice) is morally right if and only if \_\_\_\_\_

b) Natural Law version of ethical theory

An action (practice) is morally right if and only if \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Small group** (i) Discuss the stand you took about the relationship of religion and morality in the light of Rachel's arguments for today's assignment. (ii) Discuss the implication of your position for either of the schema's filled in above. If your position doesn't fit either, can you provide an alternative religion based ethical theory. If so, do so.

## C. Plenary Discussion One

## II. Ethical Egoism

**A. Small Group** Discussion:

1. How would the ethical egoist fill in the following schema (for presenting what the critical reasoning text calls a "conceptual theory") that is fill in the blanks in the following statements

*An action is morally right if and only if* \_\_\_\_\_.

where such and "if and only if" statement means the same as

**If** an action is morally right, **then** \_\_\_\_\_

**AND**

**If** \_\_\_\_\_, **then** an action is morally right.

### III Psychological Egoism

#### A. Small Group Discussion:

1. What is the psychological egoism? Did you find the position in captures tempting before you read section 5.2?
2. Rachels presents two arguments in favor of psychological egoism. Reconstruct them in standard form and a representative write one of your reconstructions, on the board.

#### B. Plenary Discussion Two

#### C. Small Group Discussion

3. Assess Rachels' criticism of each. Do you accept it.
4. Rachels ends the by providing an explanation of why people have been tempted to embrace the view. What is his explanation? Does it seem plausible to you.
5. Having read his criticism, what conclusion do you draw about whether genuine altruism is possible? If it is, how common is it?

#### D. Plenary Discussion Three

### IV. Ethical Egoism

#### A. Small Group Discussion:

1. Discuss the difference between psychological egoism and ethical egoism.
2. Rachels provides three arguments in support of ethical egoism. He formally reconstructs two of them p. 77-79. How, exactly, does he criticize them. He is more sympathetic to the third version, less formally reconstructed. What is problem with this approach to ethical egoism according to Rachels?
3. Rachels also presents three arguments against ethical egoism. He criticizes the first two(that it cannot handle ethical conflict and that it is inconsistent). Discuss his criticism. Rachels embraces the third argument against egoism, that it is unacceptably arbitrary. Pay particular attention to his use of Principle of Equal Treatment. Do you find his reasoning compelling. Why?
4. What if anything do you find acceptable about the ethical egoist account?

#### B. Plenary Discussion Four

- V. Pick one or two choices or actions from "3:10 to Yuma. What would an ethical egoist say about the case and the decision.



**Assignment for next Friday, April 18: Read Rachels Ch's 6 and 7 on Utilitarianism .**

**Submit** a short essay about what the ethical egoist would say about some case from "3:10 to Yuma" Indicate any implications it might have for whether ethical egoism provides informative moral guidance in this case and why you think so?