

BUSINESS, SOCIETY & ETHICS

Justification in Business Ethics

As you read the material for our next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the reading:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.

Reading

- James Rachels & Stuart Rachels, "Subjectivism in Ethics".

Questions

1. Last class, we saw that the major issue in business ethics involves how to justify your business decisions to others in order to secure their legitimate cooperation. For instance, suppose someone believes the company they work for should adopt environmentally sustainable practices. How might that person get others to cooperate with that decision?
2. In this reading, Rachels and Rachels critique one common account of justification for moral positions and decisions, which they call "Ethical Subjectivism". What do Rachels and Rachels say is the "basic thought" (p. 33) behind Ethical Subjectivism?
3. Rachels and Rachels mainly focus on one popular form of Ethical Subjectivism, which they call "Emotivism". How does justification work in Emotivism? In other words, how do you get others to agree with your business decisions according to Emotivism?
4. Why do Rachels and Rachels believe that both Emotivism and Ethical Subjectivism are flawed?
5. Finally, Rachels and Rachels defend an alternative account of justification by comparing ethical justification to proofs in math and science. Rachels and Rachels do not give this theory a name, but I will call it "Ethical Cognitivism". How does justification work according to this account? That is, how do you get others to agree with your business decisions according to Ethical Cognitivism?