

Justification in Business Ethics

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

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 position on an issue, rather than another.

Reading

Rachels, J., & Rachels, S. (2012). Subjectivism in Ethics. In *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (7th ed., pp. 32-48). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Questions

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. Suppose you are the head of advertising at a large multinational company, and you want to hire a controversial social figure to act as the company spokesperson in a huge multimedia ad campaign. Who might you need to convince to cooperate with you on this? What are some “good” and some “bad” ways in which you could try to secure their cooperation?
2. In this reading, James Rachels and Stuart 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, according to Emotivism, what are the “good” ways in which you can get others to cooperate with your business decisions (like the one from question 1)?
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, according to Ethical Cognitivism, what are the “good” ways in which you can get others to cooperate with your business decisions (like the one from question 1)?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

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.