

On Relativity and Absolutism in Morality

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Occupy Morality, Something, Something, Somewhere

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We demonstrate that it is impossible for humans to implement moral absolutism. The resolution to any moral proposition is, in all cases, an implementation of moral relativity.

Suppose there is an absolute moral proposition defined with X number of words and a real-life moral quandary defined with Y number of words, and that one wants to rely on moral absolutism to make a judgment of morality regarding the quandary. First, one must discover the complete details of the moral quandary through an investigation because one has no way to know, *a priori*, if the quandary is completely specified by the Y words.

For instance, suppose there are two individuals, Alice and Bob, and Bob wants to know if it is moral to kill Alice. An absolute moral proposition of relevance would be that murder is wrong and, therefore, Bob must determine whether killing Alice is murder or justifiable homicide. Bob might ask, "Is Alice on a machine gun rampage such that I will save lives by killing her?" If yes, Bob must still consider whether or not aliens have threatened to destroy the entire planet if Alice does not complete her rampage. If aliens so threatened, then Bob would cause the termination of all life on Earth by killing Alice and that is not morally justifiable. However, Bob must further consider that a second group of aliens with a time machine might retroactively prevent the destruction of the Earth if Bob stops Alice's rampage, *etc.*

While these issues are outlandish, they demonstrate that one's complete evaluation of any quandary requires increasingly specific questions where the increasing specificity leads to increasing numbers of words: (a) kill Alice, (b) kill Alice rampage, (c) kill Alice rampage aliens, (d)

kill Alice rampage aliens time travel aliens, *etc.* Since one cannot process words at an infinite rate, and because there are an infinite number of conditions that could modify the quandary, one will not be able to completely specify the quandary within a finite human lifetime. Without absolutely specifying the quandary, one has no way to compare it *absolutely* to the absolute proposition. Therefore, in all cases, when humans attempt to implement moral absolutism, they will actually implement moral relativity when they decide, relative to their own personal standard of sufficiency, that they have considered enough of the context of the quandary such that it can be compared to the absolute proposition. Therefore, it is impossible for humans to implement moral absolutism.

In mathematical terms, consider a vector space \mathcal{H} consisting of all combinations of words that can be used to define an absolute moral proposition. Limit the propositions in \mathcal{H} such that they contain at most 10^{100} words because a human must be able to fully consider a proposition from \mathcal{H} in one lifetime. Now consider the vector space Ω of all moral quandaries that might arise in life. The vectors in Ω form a continuous spectrum. As defined, \mathcal{H} is a finite-dimensional vector space but Ω is infinite-dimensional. Therefore, Ω can never be covered with vectors from \mathcal{H} . Therefore, it is impossible for a human to implement moral absolutism.
