

An Attempt at a Universal Ethic IV: Universality



Send him mail. [f](#) [t](#)

“One Voluntarist’s Perspective” is an original column appearing most Mondays at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Sklyer J. Collins. Archived columns can be found here. OVP-only RSS feed available here.

An Attempt at a Universal Ethic I: Introduction

An Attempt at a Universal Ethic II: Subjective Identification

An Attempt at a Universal Ethic III: Moral Outrage

Universality is an important component of any moral philosophy worth its salt. If an ethic can’t be universalized, then it does no good, as it doesn’t apply to everyone. I hope to show that the ethic as described in part one is not only universalizable, but when formulated as a maxim it approaches universal law. And further, not only a universal law for humans, but for all of animalkind in the rest of the universe.

What is Universality?

Universality is the applicability of an ethic to all similarly situated individuals. With a universal ethic, the moral standing of various behaviors are always the same regardless of the person or culture in which the behavior occurs. As seen in part two, relativity applies not to the moral standing of a given behavior, but to the identification of particular instances of behavior. When a particular instance of behavior is identified the same by different people or cultures, the consequences to the society between the individuals involved are also the same. When I formulate this ethic as a maxim, it is easily recognizable as a universal law.

Universality of the Ethic

In order to demonstrate the universality of the ethic, it must be formulated into a maxim, or “a short, pithy statement expressing a general truth or rule of conduct.” The ethic as formulated as a maxim is as follows:

When a person is observing or learning of a particular instance of behavior that they identify as the type of which is unethical (or

ethical), the society between them and the one behaving as such will be diminished or destroyed (or maintained or strengthened).

Now then, even though particular instances of behavior are identified relative to the socialization that occurred within each person and culture, when the identity is agreed upon, the maxim is always true. For example, as people and cultures identify a particular instance of behavior as murder, rape, or theft, the society between the individuals involved is always diminished or destroyed.

Complete Universality

The maxim is also always true for non-humans. Other animal species on earth likewise identify particular instances of behavior as the type of which is ethical or unethical, with the resultant consequences to society between them and others. Consider when a bear identifies the behavior of another animal as a threat, the society between them is destroyed and enmity strengthened. All of animalkind identify the behaviors of others as threatening or not, and respond accordingly. This seems to be a major component of animal life. Further, if we ever discover animalkind on other planets in our universe, we will likewise observe the same phenomena of ethics and moral outrage.

Final Thoughts

As I believe I have shown, the universality of the ethic presented in this series is easily recognizable when it is formulated as a maxim, and its universality applies not only to humans, but to all of animalkind everywhere in the universe. In the next part, I will take a look at other ethics and determine their integratability with the ethic presented in this series.

An Attempt at a Universal Ethic V: Integrating Alternatives

An Attempt at a Universal Ethic VI: Answering Objections

Read more from “One Voluntarist’s Perspective”: