

Moral absolutes are not useful in business ethics. Discuss.

Moral absolutes are defined to be actions that have to be considered as right or wrong, not taking into account the context of the act performed itself. An ethical theory which places a strong emphasis on what is right and what a person's duty entails is that of Natural Law, where Aquinas states that we must follow Five Primary Precepts in accordance to our way of life. In context to the issue of environmental pollutants that are hazardous to human health, Erin Brockovich represented herself in court, despite the lack of formal legal training, against Pacific Gas and Electric, on the allegation that Hexavalent Chromium was added to the water supply of a town in Southern California. This in itself is a contradiction of Aquinas's Primary Precept of defending the innocent. By adding a hazardous chemical to a town's drinking water, this inevitably can be very harmful to its inhabitants and therefore Aquinas would be strongly against what this company has done. In terms of this case study, I believe that Aquinas' principles are unmistakably correct as human life is of intrinsic value and should in no manner be taken lightly at all. In this specific situation, moral absolutism is very useful as it involves the matter of human life.

Another ethical issue involving moral absolutes would be Kantian principles where Kant states that we are provided with the God-given gift of reason and should therefore be able to sense our 'moral law within'. He states that an action is only good when a person acts from a sense of good will. Animal cruelty has been one of the most controversial arguments over the years and Monsanto has been one of the most popular companies to be made famous for it. The company provided their cattle with growth hormones to be able to provide the nation with more milk. The effects of these hormones were unthinkable, causing pain and suffering within cattle, even going as far as being the cause of several diseases. The diseases endured by every individual cow allows for their milk to be infected which the company sells on to the general public. This can be seen as harmful to humans as the infection that the cows had may be passed on to people drinking the milk. Kant states that human life is of intrinsic value and must be held above everything else. Upon Monsanto's action, Kant will render this unacceptable as it is endangering human life. The moral absolute of not giving unsafe growth hormones to cattle can then be seen as useful within this issue.

Contrary to Aquinas' and Kant's theory is Utilitarianism where it states that a situation must be weighed out in terms of its usefulness and whichever path that leads a person to greater pleasures is the right path to take. On the issue of espionage, we are inclined to question whether or not it is the right thing to do and evidently Proctor and Gamble also debated on this question. The company sent their own employees to 'spy' on Unilever by deceiving them and pretending to be marketing researchers to obtain the information that Proctor and Gamble needed to succeed. A utilitarian would weigh out whether or not the operation that Proctor and Gamble acted upon brought higher pleasures to a greater number of people. By doing this, it provides the company with a cheaper alternative to researching into ingredients that make Unilever more successful than they are. If they were to do

this, more money would be spent on the research and more people would be made redundant, hence losing their jobs all for the sake of Proctor and Gamble's quest to be more successful/on the same level as Unilever. By using espionage, more people would be able to keep their jobs, less money would be lost by the company and they would merely end up at the same business level as Unilever is. From this we are inclined to ask this question: Was there really anything wrong with what they had done? Moral absolutes are not of great importance in terms of this issue considering the consequences produced by the actions done.

Virtue ethics emphasizes the character of the moral agent, rather than rules or consequences as the key principle to ethical thinking. This ethical issue looks at reaching eudaimonia where living a good life is of an essence to our whole being. In the case of Enron Corporation, where they creatively planned accounting fraud by concealing the decrease in value per share of the company to their stockholders, which in turn deceived them into believing that the company was doing well despite the drastic drop in company value. It could be argued that Enron tried to seek eudaimonia within its stockholders and within itself by hiding this fact as they felt that the shares may eventually go up and stockholders would have been none the wiser, therefore barricading disappointment within both the company and also its stockholders. This then can be argued to have been a good thing to do within Enron's part as it would not have diminished the happiness and confidence felt within the society, ergo declining the prevention of beatitude within the company's society.