



The Elements of Moral Philosophy

By James Rachels

Book summary & main ideas

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Summary:

The Elements of Moral Philosophy, written by James Rachels, is a comprehensive introduction to moral philosophy. It covers a wide range of topics, from the basics of ethical theory to the application of ethical principles to contemporary issues. The book is divided into three parts. The first part introduces the reader to the major theories of ethics, including utilitarianism, Kantianism, and virtue ethics. It also examines the nature of moral reasoning and the role of emotions in moral decision-making. The second part looks at the application of ethical principles to specific issues, such as abortion, euthanasia, animal rights, and the environment. Finally, the third part

examines the implications of ethical theories for public policy. Throughout the book, Rachels provides clear and concise explanations of the various theories and issues discussed, making it an ideal resource for students and professionals alike.

The book begins with an overview of the major ethical theories, including utilitarianism, Kantianism, and virtue ethics. Rachels explains the basic principles of each theory and how they can be applied to moral decision-making. He also examines the strengths and weaknesses of each theory, and how they can be used to resolve ethical dilemmas. In the second part of the book, Rachels looks at the application of ethical principles to specific issues. He examines the ethical implications of abortion, euthanasia, animal rights, and the environment. He also looks at the ethical implications of

public policy, such as the death penalty and affirmative action. Finally, the third part of the book examines the implications of ethical theories for public policy.

Rachels looks at how ethical theories can be used to inform public policy decisions, and how public policy can be used to promote ethical behavior. Throughout the book, Rachels provides clear and concise explanations of the various theories and issues discussed, making it an ideal resource for students and professionals alike.

Main ideas:

#1. Utilitarianism: Utilitarianism is a moral theory that states that the right action is the one that produces the most overall happiness for the most people. It is based on the idea that the moral worth of an action is determined by its contribution to overall utility in maximizing happiness and reducing

suffering.

Utilitarianism is a moral theory that holds that the right action is the one that produces the most overall happiness for the most people. It is based on the idea that the moral worth of an action is determined by its contribution to overall utility in maximizing happiness and reducing suffering. Utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory, meaning that the morality of an action is determined by its consequences. According to utilitarianism, the best action is the one that produces the greatest balance of good over bad consequences.

Utilitarianism is a form of consequentialism, which means that the morality of an action is determined by its consequences. Utilitarianism holds that the best action is the one that produces the greatest balance of good over bad

consequences. This means that the action that produces the most overall happiness for the most people is the right action.

Utilitarianism is a form of teleological ethics, which means that it focuses on the end result of an action rather than the action itself. Utilitarianism is a form of consequentialism because it focuses on the consequences of an action rather than the action itself.

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#2. *The Challenge of Cultural Relativism: Cultural relativism is the idea that morality is relative to the culture in which it is practiced. Rachels argues that this view is problematic because it implies that no moral judgments can be made about the practices of other cultures.*

Cultural relativism is a challenging concept to grapple with, as it implies that there is no universal standard of morality. Instead, morality is relative to the culture in which it is practiced. This means that what is considered moral in one culture may be considered immoral in another. This can lead to difficult questions about how to judge the practices of other cultures, and

whether it is even possible to do so.

Rachels argues that this view is problematic because it implies that no moral judgments can be made about the practices of other cultures. He suggests that this is an untenable position, as it would mean that any practice, no matter how abhorrent, could be justified simply by pointing to the culture in which it is practiced. This would lead to a situation in which no moral progress could be made, as no culture could be judged as better or worse than another.

Rachels suggests that a better approach is to recognize that there are some universal moral principles that can be applied to all cultures. This would allow for moral progress to be made, as cultures could be judged on the basis of how well they adhere to these principles. This would also allow for moral criticism of other cultures,

as long as it is done in a respectful and understanding manner.

#3. *The Argument from Queerness: Rachels argues that the idea of moral facts being "queer" or non-natural is problematic because it implies that moral facts are not part of the natural world and therefore cannot be known or understood.*

The Argument from Queerness, as presented by James Rachels in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, is a challenge to the idea that moral facts are "queer" or non-natural. Rachels argues that if moral facts are not part of the natural world, then they cannot be known or understood. He claims that this would make morality arbitrary and unintelligible, and would render moral discourse and reasoning impossible. He further argues that if moral facts are not part of the

natural world, then they must be supernatural, and this would make morality dependent on religious belief.

Rachels argues that the idea of moral facts being "queer" or non-natural is problematic because it implies that moral facts are not part of the natural world and therefore cannot be known or understood. He claims that this would make morality arbitrary and unintelligible, and would render moral discourse and reasoning impossible. He further argues that if moral facts are not part of the natural world, then they must be supernatural, and this would make morality dependent on religious belief.

Rachels concludes that the idea of moral facts being "queer" or non-natural is untenable, and that moral facts must be part of the natural world in order to be intelligible and meaningful. He argues that if moral facts are part of the natural world,

then they can be known and understood, and moral discourse and reasoning can take place. He further argues that if moral facts are part of the natural world, then morality is not dependent on religious belief.

#4. The Argument from Relativity: Rachels argues that the idea of moral facts being relative to the individual is problematic because it implies that moral facts are not universal and therefore cannot be known or understood.

The Argument from Relativity states that if moral facts are relative to the individual, then they cannot be universal and therefore cannot be known or understood. This argument is based on the idea that moral facts are not absolute, but rather depend on the individual's perspective. For example, if one person believes that

stealing is wrong, while another believes that it is not, then there is no universal moral truth that can be applied to both individuals. This means that moral facts cannot be known or understood in an absolute sense, since they depend on the individuals perspective.

Rachels argues that this idea of moral facts being relative to the individual is problematic because it implies that moral facts are not universal and therefore cannot be known or understood. He argues that if moral facts are relative, then it is impossible to determine what is right or wrong in any given situation. This means that moral decisions cannot be based on any universal moral truth, but rather on the individuals own subjective opinion. This, in turn, leads to a lack of moral certainty and a lack of agreement between individuals on what is right or wrong.

Rachels argues that this lack of moral certainty is problematic because it implies that moral decisions cannot be based on any universal moral truth. This means that moral decisions are based solely on the individuals own subjective opinion, which can lead to disagreement and confusion. Furthermore, it implies that moral facts are not absolute, but rather depend on the individuals perspective. This means that moral facts cannot be known or understood in an absolute sense, since they depend on the individuals perspective.

#5. *The Argument from Divine Command Theory: Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on the commands of a divine being is problematic because it implies that morality is arbitrary and therefore cannot be known or understood.*

The Argument from Divine Command Theory, as presented by James Rachels in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, is that morality cannot be based on the commands of a divine being. Rachels argues that this idea is problematic because it implies that morality is arbitrary and therefore cannot be known or understood. He states that if morality is based on the commands of a divine being, then it is impossible to determine what is right or wrong without knowing the will of the divine being. Furthermore, if morality is based on the will of a divine being, then it is possible for the divine being to change its will, and thus change what is right and wrong. This would mean that morality is not fixed, but rather is subject to change, and therefore cannot be known or understood.

Rachels further argues that if morality is based on the commands of a divine being,

then it is possible for the divine being to command something that is wrong. This would mean that morality is not absolute, but rather is subject to the whims of the divine being. This would also mean that it is impossible to determine what is right or wrong without knowing the will of the divine being. Therefore, Rachels concludes that morality cannot be based on the commands of a divine being, as it implies that morality is arbitrary and therefore cannot be known or understood.

#6. The Argument from Egoism: Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on self-interest is problematic because it implies that morality is selfish and therefore cannot be known or understood.

The Argument from Egoism states that morality cannot be based on self-interest because it implies that morality is selfish.

This argument is problematic because it implies that morality is not something that can be known or understood. If morality is based on self-interest, then it is impossible to determine what is right or wrong, since each individual's self-interest is different. Furthermore, if morality is based on self-interest, then it is impossible to determine what is good or bad, since each individual's self-interest is subjective. This means that morality cannot be objectively determined, and therefore cannot be known or understood.

Rachels argues that this argument is problematic because it implies that morality is not something that can be known or understood. He argues that morality should be based on something more than just self-interest, such as a universal set of principles or values. This would allow for morality to be objectively determined, and therefore be known and

understood. Rachels believes that morality should be based on something more than just self-interest, and that it should be based on a universal set of principles or values.

#7. *The Argument from Contractarianism: Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on a social contract is problematic because it implies that morality is based on a hypothetical agreement and therefore cannot be known or understood.*

The Argument from Contractarianism, as presented by James Rachels in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, is that morality cannot be based on a hypothetical social contract. Rachels argues that a social contract is a hypothetical agreement between people, and therefore cannot be known or understood. He further argues that if morality is based on a hypothetical

agreement, then it cannot be known or understood either. This means that morality cannot be based on a social contract, as it cannot be known or understood.

Rachels also argues that morality cannot be based on a hypothetical agreement because it implies that morality is subjective and relative. He argues that if morality is based on a hypothetical agreement, then it is based on the subjective opinions of the people involved in the agreement. This means that morality is relative to the opinions of the people involved, and therefore cannot be known or understood.

Rachels concludes that morality cannot be based on a hypothetical agreement because it implies that morality is subjective and relative. He argues that morality must be based on something

more objective and universal, such as the principles of justice, fairness, and respect for persons. He argues that these principles are more objective and universal, and therefore can be known and understood.

#8. *The Argument from Subjectivism: Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on individual feelings is problematic because it implies that morality is subjective and therefore cannot be known or understood.*

The Argument from Subjectivism states that morality cannot be based on individual feelings because it implies that morality is subjective and therefore cannot be known or understood. This argument is based on the idea that morality is not a matter of opinion, but rather a set of universal principles that are applicable to all people.

If morality is based on individual feelings, then it is impossible to determine what is right or wrong in any given situation. This means that morality is not an objective truth, but rather a subjective opinion that is based on the individuals feelings. Furthermore, if morality is subjective, then it is impossible to determine whether an action is right or wrong in any given situation.

Rachels argues that this subjectivism is problematic because it implies that morality is not based on any objective truth, but rather on the individuals feelings. This means that morality is not a matter of fact, but rather a matter of opinion. Furthermore, if morality is subjective, then it is impossible to determine whether an action is right or wrong in any given situation. This means that morality is not an absolute truth, but rather a subjective opinion that is based on the individuals

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#9. The Argument from Naturalism: Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on natural facts is problematic because it implies that morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral and therefore cannot be known or understood.

The Argument from Naturalism, as presented by James Rachels in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, is that morality cannot be based on natural facts. Rachels argues that if morality is based on natural facts, then it implies that morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral and therefore cannot be known or understood. He further argues that if morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral, then it is impossible to determine what is right or wrong. This is because the facts that are used to determine morality are not necessarily moral, and therefore cannot be used to make moral judgments.

Rachels also argues that if morality is based on natural facts, then it implies that morality is determined by the natural world, and not by any moral principles. This means that morality is determined by the laws of nature, and not by any moral

code or set of principles. This means that morality is determined by the physical world, and not by any moral code or set of principles. This means that morality is determined by the physical world, and not by any moral code or set of principles.

Rachels concludes that morality cannot be based on natural facts because it implies that morality is determined by the physical world, and not by any moral code or set of principles. He argues that morality must be based on moral principles, and not on natural facts. This means that morality must be based on moral principles, and not on natural facts. This means that morality must be based on moral principles, and not on natural facts.

#10. *The Argument from Pragmatism: Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on practical considerations is problematic*

because it implies that morality is based on what works and therefore cannot be known or understood.

The Argument from Pragmatism is an argument against the idea that morality is based on practical considerations. Rachels argues that this idea is problematic because it implies that morality is based on what works and therefore cannot be known or understood. He argues that this is a problem because it implies that morality is not based on any objective truth, but rather on what works in a particular situation. This means that morality is not something that can be known or understood, but rather something that is determined by the situation. Furthermore, Rachels argues that this idea of morality being based on practical considerations is not only problematic, but also dangerous because it implies that morality is not based on any

universal principles, but rather on what works in a particular situation. This means that morality is not something that can be known or understood, but rather something that is determined by the situation.

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understood in an absolute sense, but rather something that is determined by the situation and can change depending on the context.

#11. *The Argument from Evolution: Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on evolutionary processes is problematic because it implies that morality is based on survival and therefore cannot be known or understood.*

The Argument from Evolution, as presented by Rachels, is that morality cannot be based on evolutionary processes because it implies that morality is based on survival and therefore cannot be known or understood. Rachels argues that this is problematic because it implies that morality is not based on any universal principles, but rather on the particular needs of a species at a given time. This

means that morality is not absolute, but rather is constantly changing and adapting to the needs of the species. Furthermore, Rachels argues that this view of morality is incompatible with the idea of moral responsibility, since it implies that individuals are not responsible for their actions, but rather are simply responding to the needs of their species. Finally, Rachels argues that this view of morality is incompatible with the idea of moral progress, since it implies that morality is not something that can be improved upon, but rather is simply a product of evolutionary processes.

In conclusion, Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on evolutionary processes is problematic because it implies that morality is based on survival and therefore cannot be known or understood. Furthermore, this view of morality is incompatible with the idea of

moral responsibility and moral progress, since it implies that morality is not something that can be improved upon, but rather is simply a product of evolutionary processes. Therefore, Rachels argues that morality must be based on some universal principles in order for it to be meaningful and for individuals to be held responsible for their actions.

#12. *The Argument from Intuitionism: Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on intuition is problematic because it implies that morality is based on subjective feelings and therefore cannot be known or understood.*

The Argument from Intuitionism is an argument against the idea that morality is based on intuition. Rachels argues that this idea is problematic because it implies that morality is based on subjective

feelings and therefore cannot be known or understood. He claims that if morality is based on subjective feelings, then it is impossible to determine what is right or wrong in any given situation. Furthermore, he argues that if morality is based on subjective feelings, then it is impossible to determine whether any particular action is moral or immoral.

Rachels also argues that if morality is based on subjective feelings, then it is impossible to determine whether any particular action is good or bad. He claims that if morality is based on subjective feelings, then it is impossible to determine whether any particular action is morally permissible or not. Finally, he argues that if morality is based on subjective feelings, then it is impossible to determine whether any particular action is morally obligatory or not.

In conclusion, Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on intuition is problematic because it implies that morality is based on subjective feelings and therefore cannot be known or understood. He claims that if morality is based on subjective feelings, then it is impossible to determine what is right or wrong in any given situation. Furthermore, he argues that if morality is based on subjective feelings, then it is impossible to determine whether any particular action is moral or immoral, good or bad, permissible or not, or obligatory or not.

#13. *The Argument from Moral Realism: Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on objective facts is problematic because it implies that morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral and therefore cannot be known or understood.*

The Argument from Moral Realism is an argument that suggests that morality is based on objective facts. This argument is problematic because it implies that morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral and therefore cannot be known or understood. For example, if morality is based on facts such as the laws of nature, then it is difficult to understand how these facts can be moral. Furthermore, if morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral, then it is difficult to understand how these facts can be used to determine what is right and wrong.

Rachels argues that this argument is problematic because it implies that morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral and therefore cannot be known or understood. He suggests that if morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral, then it is difficult to

understand how these facts can be used to determine what is right and wrong. Furthermore, he argues that if morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral, then it is difficult to understand how these facts can be used to determine what is good and bad.

Rachels argues that the Argument from Moral Realism is problematic because it implies that morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral and therefore cannot be known or understood. He suggests that if morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral, then it is difficult to understand how these facts can be used to determine what is right and wrong. Furthermore, he argues that if morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral, then it is difficult to understand how these facts can be used to determine what is good and bad. In conclusion, Rachels argues that the

Argument from Moral Realism is problematic because it implies that morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral and therefore cannot be known or understood.

#14. *The Argument from Moral Skepticism: Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on skepticism is problematic because it implies that morality is based on doubt and therefore cannot be known or understood.*

The Argument from Moral Skepticism, as presented by James Rachels in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, is that morality cannot be based on skepticism. Rachels argues that if morality is based on doubt, then it cannot be known or understood. He claims that this would lead to a situation where moral decisions are made without any real understanding of

the consequences, and that this would be a dangerous situation. He further argues that if morality is based on doubt, then it would be impossible to make any moral progress, as any progress would be based on guesswork rather than on knowledge.

Rachels argues that skepticism is not a reliable basis for morality because it implies that morality is based on doubt and therefore cannot be known or understood. He claims that this would lead to a situation where moral decisions are made without any real understanding of the consequences, and that this would be a dangerous situation. He further argues that if morality is based on doubt, then it would be impossible to make any moral progress, as any progress would be based on guesswork rather than on knowledge.

Rachels concludes that morality must be based on something more than skepticism,

and that it must be based on knowledge and understanding. He argues that morality must be based on facts and evidence, and that it must be based on a rational understanding of the consequences of our actions. He claims that this is the only way to ensure that our moral decisions are based on knowledge and understanding, and that this is the only way to make moral progress.

#15. *The Argument from Moral Pluralism: Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on multiple moral systems is problematic because it implies that morality is based on conflicting values and therefore cannot be known or understood.*

The Argument from Moral Pluralism, as presented by James Rachels in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, is that the idea of morality being based on multiple

moral systems is problematic because it implies that morality is based on conflicting values and therefore cannot be known or understood. Rachels argues that if morality is based on multiple systems, then it is impossible to determine which system is correct or which values should be followed. He further argues that if morality is based on conflicting values, then it is impossible to determine which values are right or wrong. This leads to the conclusion that morality is ultimately unknowable and that it is impossible to make moral judgments.

Rachels argues that this is a problem because it implies that morality is ultimately subjective and that it is impossible to make any meaningful moral judgments. He further argues that if morality is subjective, then it is impossible to make any meaningful moral progress. This means that moral progress is

impossible and that morality is ultimately arbitrary. This leads to the conclusion that morality is ultimately meaningless and that it is impossible to make any meaningful moral decisions.

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#16. *The Argument from Moral Relativism: Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on relative*

values is problematic because it implies that morality is based on subjective feelings and therefore cannot be known or understood.

The Argument from Moral Relativism is an argument against the idea that morality is based on relative values. Rachels argues that this idea is problematic because it implies that morality is based on subjective feelings and therefore cannot be known or understood. He argues that if morality is based on subjective feelings, then it is impossible to determine what is right or wrong in any given situation. Furthermore, he argues that if morality is based on subjective feelings, then it is impossible to make any meaningful moral judgments.

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because there is no objective standard by which to judge the morality of any action.

Rachels concludes that morality cannot be based on relative values because it is impossible to determine what is right or wrong in any given situation. He argues that morality must be based on an objective standard in order to be meaningful and to be able to make meaningful moral judgments. He argues that morality must be based on an objective standard in order for it to be meaningful and to be able to make meaningful moral judgments.

#17. *The Argument from Moral Objectivism: Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on objective facts is problematic because it implies that morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral and therefore cannot be known or*

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The Argument from Moral Objectivism is an argument that suggests that morality is based on objective facts, which are facts that are not necessarily moral and therefore cannot be known or understood. Rachels argues that this idea is problematic because it implies that morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral and therefore cannot be known or understood. He argues that this is a problem because it implies that morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral and therefore cannot be known or understood. Furthermore, he argues that this idea is problematic because it implies that morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral and therefore cannot be known or understood.

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#18. The Argument from Moral Universalism: Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on universal values is problematic because it implies that morality is based on values that are not necessarily shared by all and therefore cannot be known or understood.

The Argument from Moral Universalism, as presented by James Rachels, is that morality cannot be based on universal values because these values are not necessarily shared by all. This means that morality cannot be known or understood by everyone, as it is based on values that are not necessarily shared by all. Rachels argues that this is problematic because it implies that morality is based on values that are not necessarily shared by all, and therefore cannot be known or understood. He further argues that this means that morality is not universal, and therefore cannot be used as a basis for making moral decisions.

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used as a basis for making moral decisions. He also argues that this means that morality is not absolute, and therefore cannot be used as a basis for making moral decisions. Finally, he argues that this means that morality is not objective, and therefore cannot be used as a basis for making moral decisions.

Rachels argument from moral universalism is an important one, as it highlights the difficulty of basing morality on universal values. It is important to consider the implications of this argument when making moral decisions, as it suggests that morality is not necessarily based on universal values, and therefore cannot be used as a basis for making moral decisions. It is also important to consider the implications of this argument when discussing morality, as it suggests that morality is not necessarily based on universal values, and therefore cannot be

used as a basis for making moral decisions.

#19. *The Argument from Moral Naturalism: Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on natural facts is problematic because it implies that morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral and therefore cannot be known or understood.*

The Argument from Moral Naturalism, as presented by James Rachels, is that morality cannot be based on natural facts. Rachels argues that if morality is based on natural facts, then it implies that morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral and therefore cannot be known or understood. He further argues that if morality is based on facts that are not necessarily moral, then it is impossible to determine what is right or wrong. This is because the facts that are used to

determine morality are not necessarily moral, and therefore cannot be used to make moral judgments.

Rachels also argues that if morality is based on natural facts, then it implies that morality is determined by the natural world, and not by any moral principles. This means that morality is determined by the physical laws of nature, and not by any moral principles. This means that morality is determined by the physical laws of nature, and not by any moral principles. This means that morality is determined by the physical laws of nature, and not by any moral principles. This means that morality is determined by the physical laws of nature, and not by any moral principles.

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In conclusion, Rachels argues that morality cannot be based on natural facts because it implies that morality is determined by the physical laws of nature, and not by any moral principles. This means that morality is determined by the physical laws of nature, and not by any moral principles. This means that morality is determined by the physical laws of nature, and not by any moral principles. This means that morality is determined by the physical laws of nature, and not by any moral principles.

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#20. The Argument from Moral Constructivism: Rachels argues that the idea of morality being based on constructed values is problematic because it implies that morality is based on values that are not necessarily shared by all and therefore cannot be known or understood.

The Argument from Moral Constructivism, as presented by James Rachels, is that morality cannot be based on constructed values because such values are not necessarily shared by all and therefore cannot be known or understood. Rachels argues that if morality is based on constructed values, then it is impossible to

determine what is right or wrong in any given situation. This is because the values that are used to construct morality are subjective and not necessarily shared by all. Furthermore, even if the values are shared, they may not be understood in the same way by different people. Therefore, Rachels argues, morality cannot be based on constructed values because it is impossible to determine what is right or wrong in any given situation.

Rachels further argues that if morality is based on constructed values, then it is impossible to determine what is good or bad in any given situation. This is because the values that are used to construct morality are subjective and not necessarily shared by all. Furthermore, even if the values are shared, they may not be understood in the same way by different people. Therefore, Rachels argues, morality cannot be based on constructed

values because it is impossible to determine what is good or bad in any given situation.

Rachels concludes that morality must be based on something more than constructed values. He suggests that morality must be based on universal principles that are shared by all and can be known and understood by all. This would ensure that morality is based on something that is shared by all and can be known and understood by all. This would also ensure that morality is based on something that is consistent and can be applied in any given situation.

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