

Public Abstract

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Assuming that contractarianism is appropriate for developing an ethical theory, which contractarian ethical theory is best? My dissertation provides an answer to this question. Drawing on the work of Rawls, I provide an ethical theory which most importantly employs a veil of ignorance. My account contrasts with both Gauthier's Hobbesian style ethical theory as well as with Scanlon's Kantian-inspired theory. As such, I explain the deficiencies of each account with respect to certain problems typically endemic to contractarianism. Because there have been various objections to contractarian accounts employing a veil of ignorance, I argue that these objections pose no serious problem for my account. Another feature of my account is that it is an act-based theory opposed to a rule-based one. Typically, contractarianism has been formulated as a view in which contracting agents agree upon rules (or: principles), and it is with these rules that actions are then evaluated as morally permissible or impermissible. In contrast to the typical rule-based view, I contend that the contracting agents agree upon actions.