

RAWLSIAN ETHICAL ACT CONTRACTARIANISM

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ABSTRACT

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.