

The Problems of Moral Absolutism : An Analysis

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[Abstract: Moral absolutism holds that human actions should be guided and assessed by some absolute principles which are inviolable. That is, moral principles are context-neutral and applicable for all societies, cultures and for every human being. But we often find ourselves perplexed with the complexities of the situations in which we need to make a concrete decision and have to act accordingly. In this type of situations, only one simple principle may not be upheld without hesitations, since multiple considerations guided by equally significant principles are involved. Facing this type of situations while holding an absolutist outlook seems difficult. Thus, moral relativists claim that moral absolutism is not equipped enough to resolve the real-life issues or dilemmas which torment us often. This paper has analyzed the sources and types of moral absolutism and has suggested that moral absolutists have failed to provide proper justifications for their claims about the absoluteness or the inviolability of the moral standards and principles they consider to be absolute. This research also has pointed out and discussed the conceptual errors the absolutists have made in their proposals. Finally, this paper has shown that the problems of moral absolutism are not easy to resolve, since it requires to compromise the basic assumption, that moral principles are absolute and inviolable, on which the absolutist outlook relies on.]

Key Words: absolute principles, actions, context, counter-intuitive principles, moral absolutism, moral dilemma, moral relativism, universal principles, objective, subjective.

Introduction:

In ethics moral absolutism is a view which claims that moral principles are exceptionless. Though the moral absolutists have different opinions about the sources of these principles, they all do agree that human actions should be guided by the accepted set of absolute moral principles. It may appear that moral absolutism is helpful to maintain fairness while judging the moral value of a human-action since it applies to all human beings regardless of the context of the action. The absolute moral principles are the basis of all moral considerations and are considered applicable over all societies. On the contrary, moral relativism claims that moral principles are not universal since different cultures or societies uphold different values on which the moral considerations rely. Thus, what is considered moral in one society can be considered immoral and punishable in another. But this does not necessarily imply that moral relativists would support the view that morality is not objective and moral considerations are all relative. The relativists allow space for versatility of cultures and societies and include the context of an action as

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a factor while judging an action. They criticize moral absolutism for being an extreme view which denies the influence of innumerable conditions or situations on our actions (Hirst, 1914). Apart from the criticisms of the relativist critics, in practice we often find ourselves perplexed with the counter intuitiveness of the so called absolute moral principles (McConnell, 1981). These indicate that moral absolutism is not free from its flaws. This research has analyzed the sources and various forms of moral absolutism to show that the moral absolutists often fail to provide a clear explanation about the absoluteness of the moral principles. Either the absoluteness of these principles is dependent on mere assumptions or their nature is misunderstood. And it seems that if we try to resolve the issues regarding moral absolutism, addressed in this paper, moral absolutism fails to sustain as an absolutist moral view.

1. Various sources of moral absolutism:

It has been already mentioned that moral absolutism is a position which claims that there are fixed ethical standards and principles to judge moral issues and considers actions to be either moral or immoral regardless of the contexts. But the absolutists have different opinions about the sources of the absolute moral principles (Marbaniang, 1998). Some have conceded that moral principles are inherently present in the nature or will of God. Others hold that we draw the principles from the laws of the universe or they are rooted in the human nature or in some other fundamental sources.

- a. God and moral absolutism: Those who connects absolutism with the nature or will of often describes humans as bounded to follow the rules of God since, He is the creator (Marbaniang, 1998). God has the right to make us follow His rules. We inherently know these rules and He has written His rules in our heart. These rules are unchangeable. Since, these rules follow from his unchanging nature, they are absolute. God cannot contradict himself and He is perfect. Hence, His rules, which flows from His very nature, are objective. Religions which ask to have faith on some divine Being associates moral absolutism with divine rules mentioned in various religious scriptures.
- b. Moral absolutism and Greek philosophy: Moral absolutism has its root in ancient Greek philosophy. Plato (1992) argues for moral absolutism and holds that the idea of “good” and “justice” are the standards that should be upheld. These ideas are objective or absolute and exist beyond the world we live in. Goodness itself is the highest form of reality. We need to compel our actions to the idea of good. If an action complies with the idea of good and justice, it will be considered a moral action.
- c. Moral absolutism and Chinese philosophy: Confucious and Lao Tzu, these two prominent Chinese philosophers, concede that humans need to rely on the laws of nature. Confucious (1999) provides us with the golden rule of reciprocity or *Jen*. This rule states that, “Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire” (Confucious, 1999, XV:24). He holds that the idea of humanness, goodness, man-to-manness belongs to this rule. This is the highest virtue and one can achieve peace and harmony by practicing this. Nature is built on a principle of reciprocal cooperation and humans should follow the natural law. Lao Tzu maintains that *Tao* is the ultimate source of reality (Mueller, 1910). *Tao* is perfect and peaceful and nothing can be told about it. *Tao* is real but ineffable. One can follow the path of *Tao* by avoiding aggressiveness, by following or doing what is natural and spontaneous. Thus, Taoism attempts to put human in harmony with nature. Good is complying with the natural course.

- d. Jainism and moral absolutism: This atheistic school of Indian philosophy derives the moral codes from the idea of abstinence from the worldly attachments (Jain, 2019). The followers of Jainism hold that bad is what binds our souls to our body or to the world. The world is full of sufferings and actions like lying, killing, stealing increase the sufferings of others and the self by attaching our souls to the world. The only Good is abstinence from the world.
- e. Immanuel Kant's categorical imperatives: Kant (2019) constructed a rational theory of moral absolutism and came up with the categorical imperatives. He assumed that moral obligation stems from reason. Moral rules are not based on experience, but on reason. Morality is a matter of good intention rather than the result. Our reason reveals that moral codes are universal and necessary. Thus, moral principles need to be a-priori, since, only a-priori judgements are universal and necessary. Moral principles are like principles of geometry and no exceptions are possible to allow. Kant (2019) has three formulations of his categorical imperatives:
 1. Act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.
 2. Act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.
 3. Every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a lawmaking member in the universal kingdom of ends.

These three can be deduced from one imperative- Act as if the maxim of thy action were to become by the will a universal law of nature (Kant, 2019). It seems that Kant has focused on rational compliance with the universal laws of nature as the source of morality.

- f. Ethical intuitionism of Sidgwick, Prichard and Ross: H. Sidgwick (1981) maintains that moral principles are intuitive or non-inferential. The knowledge of these principles is self-evident to the knower. There are some criteria for this type of knowledge—1) these principles must be expressed in clear terms, 2) the different principles should be mutually consistent with each other, and 3) expert consensus on them is required (Sidgwick, 1981). The commonsense moral principles may not fulfill these criteria. Abstract principles like “what is good for me must be good for all persons” may pass the test. But, the less general intuitive principles, like the duty to keep one's promises or to be just, are not universal and in some situations different duties may stand in conflict with each other. According to Sidgwick (1981), we can resolve such conflicts by considering the consequences of the conflicting actions. This view is known as ethical intuitionism.
- H. A. Prichard (1919) supports ethical intuitionism and holds that moral obligations are self-evident. We do not need to look for any justification for a principle of obligations that can be stated as, “One ought to do the act A” or “A is obligatory.” If we want a justification for this principle, we would see that this principle can be justified by respective evaluative statement or descriptive statement like, “The act A is Good” or “A is a virtue”. Prichard (1919) claims that obligatory statements (moral statement) cannot be derived from the evaluative or descriptive statements (non-moral statements). If one attempts to do so, it will be a mistake and moral philosophers often make that. According to Prichard (1919), since common sense morality is itself a body of foundational

knowledge, it is not needed to derive obligatory statements from the non-moral premises.

W. D. Ross (2002) is influenced by Prichard's (1919) work and endorses a plurality of absolute moral principles. Like Prichard, he maintains that we know some principles which are generally acceptable without following any inferential procedure. The knowledge of these principles is immediate to the knower. In conflicting situations, we can decide which principle to follow by considering the normative values of the competing principles. The *prima facie* duty is the one which has the highest normative value. This is an absolutist account of morality, because, it claims universal applicability.

It seems that the absolutist theories are grounded on some assumptions which are not indisputable. No matter what the source is, it does not justify the moral principles to be absolute. If moral laws are unchangeable like the nature of God, then what causes the situations in which the most abstract moral principles collide with each other. Since the principles flow from God's nature, each is equally important to be maintained. How would we make decisions in situations in which we can only maintain one of two counter-intuitive moral principles? Violation of one principle over other makes that principle relative. Plato's (1992) view on morality is ambitious in considering all humans are equally capable of understanding the idea of absolute good and acting in accordance to that. Human conditions and the given situations both are extremely varied. An act which seems to be good in compliance to the idea of absolute good may seem quite opposite in another situation. Confucius's (1999) golden rule of reciprocity seems to deny the basic human nature. In a world of scarce resources, we often have to fight and compete with each other for bare survival. There are people, living and dwelling among us, who love to hurt themselves because that bring pleasure to them. They may reach to an extreme point that may cause severe injury or death and we cannot deny the necessity of intervening on that situation. We cannot follow the principle of reciprocity in this type of situations and conclude that since we all seek pleasure without any intervention, we should not intervene one when he is hurting himself to achieve pleasure. Lao Tzu's way of *Tao* suggests us to comply with the natural courses. He defines an act is good if it complies with nature and anything is bad if it is artificial (Mueller, 1910). He hasn't talked clearly about natural sufferings. Again, it is questionable whether it is good for a child to see his parent alive on life-support or to allow him/her die without prolonging life artificially. One may perceive a natural course to be good while others may not. Jainism holds that abstinence from the world is good (Jain, 2019). The world is full of distress and action that binds our souls to the body are bad or wrong. Does our abstinence make world better? It seems not. If we want to make our world better, we have to find a way to help ourselves and others and act upon it. We need to be proactive rather than complaining about the sufferings. Kant's (2019) aim is to provide us with principles that would not rely on any religion and culture. But the categorical imperatives do not seem useful in counter-intuitive situations. Kant claims, in his essay 'On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy' (1797), that it is wrong to lie even if one lies to save an innocent life. It seems that he has prioritized some rules over others but hasn't provided a proper explanation. The moral intuitionists (Sidgwick, 1981 and Prichard, 1919) only make some claims about the absolute nature of moral principles but fails to provide any justification except describing moral principles as non-inferential. Ross's (2002) solution to contradictory duties leads us towards subjective perception of consequence which goes against the so-called absolute nature of these principles. It seems that the problem

regarding maintaining the absolute principles in counter intuitive situations cannot be resolved without compromising the true nature of moral absolutism. The root of this problem lies within the very attitude of the moral absolutists who deny the subjective nature of our understandings of the moral principles and claim moral principles, stemming from various sources, to be absolute and inviolable without explaining why they are so.

2. Types of moral absolutism:

Now I will analyze various forms of moral absolutism. There are three basic types of moral absolutism—a) unqualified absolutism b) conflicting absolutism and c) graded absolutism (Marbaniang, 1998). Unqualified absolutism claims that the conflicts between moral principles are only apparent. What is right is right in every situation and what is wrong is always wrong. This view denies that there can be any exceptional situation in which we can compromise one principle over another. Moral principles are objective and universal which should be followed without any question. St. Augustin, Immanuel Kant and John Murray are the proponents of this form of absolutism (Marbaniang, 1998). Contrary to this view, conflicting absolutism holds that real moral conflicts exist in this world. Whatever choice we make in these situations we are responsible for that. We have to take the burden of violating one moral principle while upholding the other. This type of absolutism often relies on various religions and suggests that one needs to ask for God's forgiveness after violating one of His laws (Marbaniang, 1998). Graded absolutism suggests that moral laws are absolute in their sources. In conflicting situations, moral laws are absolute in terms of priority or order. The higher moral laws should be held over the lower moral laws. In cases of violating lower moral laws, while upholding the higher moral laws, one will not be held responsible (Marbaniang, 1998). Apart from these three types of moral absolutism there are atheistic or agnostic absolutism and theistic absolutism. Atheistic or agnostic absolutism does not consider God's laws to be the source of absolute moral principles. Atheistic or agnostic philosophers have different opinions about the source of absolute moral principles but they all are alike in claiming that moral principles are based on or originated from some perfect, objective assumptions (Jainism) or the way of the world (*Tao*) or some basic human faculties (reason, sense of duty, etc.). We have seen in the previous section that none of these views are capable of providing a proper justification of the absoluteness of the moral principles. On the other hand, theistic absolutism posits that every law is given by God but there are hierarchy of moral laws. But this seems contradictory. If some law is absolute, it is not replaceable or cannot be prioritized over other moral laws. What is absolute cannot be relative. Thus, theistic absolutism seems problematic. The unqualified absolutism is too strict to be applied in actual situations. In an unjust, unpredictable world, human actions are extremely influenced by many unignorable, complex set of factors. Denying these factors may help maintaining the theoretical purity of absolutism but at the same time this will make this view escapist (since this view ignores the reality of conflicting moral situations) and impractical. The conflicting absolutism accepts the reality of conflicting moral laws. But it suggests that after violating a law, while upholding another, one should ask for God's forgiveness. If God is the source of ultimate moral laws, then there can be no scope for humanity to choose one law over the other since this will question the absolute nature of God's laws. Hence, the conflicting absolutism is not acceptable if we wish to maintain the absolute nature of moral principles. The graded absolutism tries to maintain the absolute nature of moral laws while allowing one some space to choose over the laws in a conflicting situation. This view considers moral laws as absolute in the

source but there exists an order of priority—some laws are higher and some are lower. This definitely does not confirm the absolute nature of moral laws. If something is absolute, it is perfect by definition. No order of priority or degree of importance can be attributed on something absolute. Therefore, graded absolutism cannot sustain as an absolutist moral outlook.

It seems that moral absolutism is convenient to hold only in simple situations in which we do not need to struggle with counter-intuitive moral principles. In complex cases if we try to prefer one absolute principle over the other, this violates the absolute nature of those principles. If we are looking for a way out to this problem, we need to find the reason which causes that. The following section focuses on this issue.

3. The Problems of moral absolutism:

Moral absolutism, no matter what the source of obligation is, has been preferred by many because of practical reasons—this makes law-making easier and helps to decide, conclusively, over issues connected to jurisdiction and other formal institutions. In case of theoretical considerations, moral absolutism seems to provide grounds to the normative ethics (Gillespie, 2016). But the problem of counter-intuitiveness of moral principles remains a challenge for moral absolutism (Garnet, 1944). We have already seen (in section 1 and 2) that no form or type of absolutism can provide a solution to this problem without losing its consistency as an absolutist view and violating the idea of absolute. In my consideration, this problem arises from the difference between our understanding of the nature of moral principles and the concepts on which they rely on. Sometimes, the moral absolutists seem to be indifferent towards the conceptual differences of the terms—‘universal’ and ‘absolute’ and towards the subjective nature of human understanding. In addition, some absolutists have claimed some principles or standards to be absolute without providing a proper justification for those claims. Here I have discussed these issues in detail.

- ‘Universal’ and ‘absolute’ are not the same: The idea of ‘universal’ should not be confused with that of ‘absolute’. When we claim something is ‘absolute’ it means that there is no possibility that things could be otherwise. Absoluteness is associated with absence of choice. It confirms the impossibility of being disturbed or violated. An absolute moral principle is one that permits no exception (Barcalow, 2001, p-310). On the other hand, when we claim something to be ‘universal’ it simply means that the principle or the situation is applicable in every situation (Barcalow, 2001, p-311). All moral principles are universal, but not all are absolute. In most cases, only rather specific and detailed principles can plausibly be considered absolute. Universality is not the same as absoluteness.

The moral absolutists have tried to claim the universal moral principles to be the absolute principles. For doing so they have tried to ignore the complex nature of human action. In reality our actions are not context neutral and our understanding of morality is highly influenced by our social and cultural surroundings. The absolutists do not necessarily claim that their code is the true and valid one. But they do insist that there is one true moral code that is the same for all people in all ages. Thus, their claims about moral principles lead to the decision that moral principles are ‘absolute universals’. That is, moral principles are inviolable and applicable everywhere. This would be possible if and only if all things remain the same regarding our actions which are to be judged by following such moral principles. This sounds quite implausible since

we are acting as agents under diverse situations. Moral principles are universal in the sense that they are held applicable in general situations. But if some principle is universally accepted, this does not imply that the principle is immune to change or alteration. The moral absolutists have considered moral principles as absolute principles, while moral principles are of universal nature.

- Absolutism is not free from subjectivism: The absolutists criticize moral relativism by arguing that the relativist account of morality cannot provide us with objective, normative values based upon which we can judge an action. They hold that an objective standard is the pre-requisite of a sound moral approach. But the problem is that which is the best moral position or standard cannot be defined objectively. Whether it is reason or duty, the domain is really vague and this allows space for the subjective understanding of those standards and values. Kant (2019) relies on reason and attributes a special status on human beings since he perceives humans as rational beings. But how can we determine the degree of rationality? How can we make our decisions and actions complying to the law of the universe? Answer of these questions are not easy to be found and if found, their understanding varies among persons. Ross (2002) has suggested that we have to rely on our perception to determine the normative value of conflicting duties. Since our perceptions are influenced by various factors, we all do not have the same perception of a phenomena. Thus, our decisions regarding prima facie duties will be different (Duff, 1980). That is, our decisions regarding duties will vary from person to person. It seems that subjective considerations are inherently present in absolutist moral theories. In addition, we are not certain about the universal grasping of the meanings of the moral terms like, good, just, duty, virtue, etc. We are not equipped with the universally acceptable idea of these terms. Moral philosophers have defined these terms to make them workable within their theoretical models and have given different interpretations of these terms. Some philosophers, even, have raised questions about the definability of various moral terms and have pointed the problems of defining some moral terms in a certain way (See Moore, 1903; Yeşilkaya, 2022). The differences in understanding of the moral terms, which are crucial for a moral outlook, make a way for the subjective considerations in moral theories which are claimed to be free from subjectivism. It is beyond doubt that moral absolutism is not free from subjectivism. An outlook cannot be considered objective and absolute unless the terms on the basis of which that outlook has been constructed are well-defined and are universally accepted.
- The implausibility of the hierarchy of absolute moral principles: To solve the problem of conflicting principles or conflicting duties, the conflicting absolutism and graded absolutism seem to offer some insights to the nature of absolute principles. Conflicting absolutism accepts that we live in a fallen world where moral conflicts exist and there are conflicting duties. An agent must take the responsibility of his action and no one is exempted from the punishment of violating God's law. In the case of conflicting duties an agent must choose the one which will lessen the evil. After that he needs to ask for the forgiveness from God for violating the other duty since he was responsible to that principle as well. Whatever the punishment/resentment is, in this type of cases, an agent has to make a choice by measuring the possible outcomes of maintaining certain principle over the other. It's like a competition in which we follow some criteria to sort the best one from the two or more competent candidates. But absolute

principles or duties cannot be in competition with each other since that violate their status of being absolute.

Graded absolutism is a view which holds that there are higher moral laws and lower moral laws. These moral laws are absolute in their sources and in their order of priority. In times of moral conflict an agent will not be held responsible or punished if he violates the lower ones. But how do we define some absolute laws as higher or lower without defining the highest absolute? If some laws are absolute, they are absolute. There cannot be the highest absolute in terms of which we would define higher or lower absolute principles. Thus, absolute principles cannot be conflicting or there can be no hierarchy.

- Jumping from assumptions to inviolable principles: The moral absolutists seem to have a goal to provide a strong, normative basis for moral evaluations. There is no doubt that it could be better if we were equipped with the sufficient knowledge of all possible situations in which an agent might perform an action. Unfortunately, our limited capacity to comprehend and limited access to the knowledge of possible situations, we cannot determine any absolute standard that may work invariably. But the absolutists, in a hurry or out of their keen intention to provide a solid foundation for morality, have ignored these limitations. Whatever standards they have tried to fix are troubled with counter intuitive situations or fall short of proper theoretical clarification. Whether it is divine law, idea of Good, laws of nature, intuition or reason, every standard has its drawbacks. Either they are grounded on mere beliefs, or on an obscure, subjective notions. The interpretations of natural laws, intuition and reason are not free from the stains of subjectivism. The so-called absolute standards or principles are the results of simple assumptions. But the absolutists have claimed, without providing proper justification, that these principles are absolute or inviolable.

It is clear that the absolutists have assumed that if everything remains the same the principles in question may work without any change and unintentionally. But this is not the reality we deal with. In cases of conflict, we may prioritize one rule over the other. If some rule seems ineffective or incapable of covering new issues that arise in the emerging society and the ever-changing world, we may redefine the rule. Thus, moral principles become more useful and more competent to resolve moral conflicts, when they are considered as rules but not as inviolable principles. We all do agree that we need some objective rules or laws to rely on while judging the moral value of an action. But these rules cannot be claimed to be inviolable.

4. The challenge of revising moral absolutism:

Now we may expect that the problems of moral absolutism, discussed above, can be resolved by making a little alteration to the view. Unfortunately, this does not seem possible. If we try to resolve the issues, moral absolutism will not remain an absolutist outlook any more. Because, no moral principles or standards have passed the test of inviolability yet. We have seen that the standards that the moral absolutists have held absolute do not possess the quality of being absolute. Moreover, various questions can be raised regarding the understanding of these standards or principles. Not only the concepts involved in the absolutist theories lacks clarity, but also there are debates about the relative nature of some standards (discussed in section 2 and 3). If we take all these considerations into account then, moral absolutism is far from what we expect it to be

when we call it by that name. Because, if a theory is an absolutist one, it must be able to provide such standards or principles which can satisfy the idea of being absolute. Mere assumptions or declarations cannot justify the absoluteness of moral principles. If no theory is able to provide proper justification and conceptual clarifications then we have to admit and accept the fact rather than sticking to some dogmatic belief that this or that moral outlook is absolutist. Moral rules can be objective and universal in terms of local applications in some extended cases. But they do not have the quality of being “absolute principles”. Again, we have seen (in section 2 and 3) that if we try to resolve the problem of counter-intuitive moral principles, we need to give up the assumption that moral principles are of absolute nature. And if moral absolutism tries to get rid of this assumption, it is not moral absolutism anymore.

Conclusion:

This research has shown that no form of absolutism can remain consistent and practical at the same time. The root of this problem lies on the problematic assumptions held by the absolutist philosophers. By following some abstract, general principles that should be followed universally, the absolutists have tried to deal with the extremely complex nature of human activity. They have ignored the uniqueness of every situation in which moral agents, who are also unique in terms of their thoughts and capacities. Moreover, while attributing absoluteness on moral laws, they have blurred the distinction between the notions of universal and absolute and overlooked the subjective nature of human understanding. This research has shown that there is no problem in maintaining some universal standards which may guide human actions in various situations. But it is problematic to hold that these universal rules should be applied without any exception. The moral rules need not to be inviolable to be the ground of our decisions and actions; they need to be universal or objective. These rules may have objective nature without being absolute. Finally, this research has suggested that the problems of moral absolutism cannot be resolved by revising the assumptions or hypotheses on which moral absolutism is grounded. If the basic assumption of moral absolutism, that moral principles are absolute principles, is changed or compromised, this would cause the abolition of moral absolutism.

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[সার-সংক্ষেপ : নৈতিক নিরঙ্কুশতাবাদ অনুসারে মানুষের কর্ম কিছু নিরঙ্কুশ নৈতিক নীতি, যেগুলো অলঙ্ঘনীয়, দ্বারা পরিচালিত ও মূল্যায়িত হতে হবে। অর্থাৎ নৈতিক নীতিগুলো হলো প্রসঙ্গ-নিরপেক্ষ এবং সকল সমাজ, সংস্কৃতি ও সকল মানুষের ক্ষেত্রে একইভাবে প্রযোজ্য। কিন্তু আমরা প্রায়শই এমন কিছু জটিল পরিস্থিতিতে নিজেদেরকে সিদ্ধান্তহীন অবস্থায় আবিষ্কার করি যেখানে একটি যথাযথ সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণ ও সে অনুযায়ী কর্ম সম্পাদন করাটা কঠিন। এমন ধরনের অবস্থাপ্রেক্ষিতে দ্বিধাহীনভাবে একটি মাত্র নিরঙ্কুশ নীতি অবলম্বন করা সম্ভব নয়। কারণ, সেখানে একইরকমভাবে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ একাধিক নিরঙ্কুশ নীতি অনুসরণে একাধিক করণীয় বা বিবেচনার আবশ্যিকতা জড়িত থাকে। নৈতিক নিরঙ্কুশতাবাদী মনোভাব বজায় রেখে এমন পরিস্থিতিতে যথাযথ সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণ করা বা কোনো কর্মের যথাযথ নৈতিক মূল্যায়ন করাটা কঠিন হয়ে পড়ে। সে কারণে, নৈতিক আপেক্ষিকতাবাদীরা দাবী করেন যে, নৈতিক নিরঙ্কুশতাবাদ আমাদের জীবনের বাস্তব সমস্যা বা নৈতিক সংকটগুলো, যা প্রায়শই যন্ত্রণাদায়ক হয়ে ওঠে, থেকে উত্তরণের পথ বাতলে দেবার ক্ষেত্রে সক্ষম নয়। এই প্রবন্ধটিতে নৈতিক নিরঙ্কুশতাবাদের বিভিন্ন উৎস ও ধারণা বিশ্লেষণ করা হয়েছে এবং দেখানো হয়েছে যে নৈতিক নিরঙ্কুশতাবাদীরা যে আদর্শ বা নৈতিক নীতিগুলোকে নিরঙ্কুশ বলে দাবী করেন, সেই আদর্শ বা নৈতিক নীতিগুলোর নিরঙ্কুশতা বা অলঙ্ঘনীয়তার যথাযথ ব্যাখ্যা প্রদান করতে তাঁরা ব্যর্থ হয়েছেন। এই প্রবন্ধটিতে নৈতিক নিরঙ্কুশতাবাদীরা তাদের প্রস্তাবনাসমূহে যে সকল ধারণামূলক ভ্রান্তি ঘটিয়েছেন সেগুলো নির্দেশ করে সে সম্পর্কে আলোচনাও করা হয়েছে। সবশেষে, এই প্রবন্ধটিতে দেখানো হয়েছে যে নৈতিক নিরঙ্কুশতাবাদের সমস্যাগুলো সমাধান করা সহজ নয়। কারণ, এই সমস্যাগুলো সমাধান করতে হলে নৈতিক নিরঙ্কুশতাবাদের মূল নীতি, যে নৈতিক নীতিসমূহ নিরঙ্কুশ বা অলঙ্ঘনীয়, তার সাথেই আপোস করতে হয়।]