CSR theory and Benhabib

What is the potential for moral universalism?

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Abstract

This paper is a comparative analysis of two separate theories of corporate social responsibility using the theory of moral universalism as established in the writings and research of philosopher Seyla Benhabib. In addition to Benhabib’s theory, two major human rights documents from the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Global Compact are utilized as a tool for analyzing the potential the theories of corporate social responsibility have to be universal.
1 Introduction:

1.1 Thesis question:

Moral universalism is an ideal theory for applying to and analyzing theories of corporate social responsibility. According to Seyla Benhabib, a Turkish-American philosopher and Eugene Meyer professor of political science and philosophy at Yale University, moral universalism “minimally entails the entitlement of individuals to basic human, civil, and political rights.”

There are many theories of corporate social responsibility, yet none are considered to be universal, much less moral universal. Corporations play a large part in today’s global society. Their supply chains span across different countries and cultures. Establishing a moral universal CSR theory, could set a standard that would be applicable to all stages of a global supply chain.

Looking into two of the more prominent theories of corporate social responsibility (Stakeholder theory and Triple Bottom-line), and setting them up against Benhabib’s theory of moral universalism, how do these two theories fully or partially, meet the standard of being morally universal?

1.2 Method and material

To answer the previous question, a comparative analysis will take place individually for each of the two prominent CSR theories mentioned previously (Stakeholder theory and Triple Bottom-line theory), against a theory of moral universalism, based upon Seyla Benhabib’s moral universal theory.

The first step in writing this paper was to find a theory of moral universalism that would be applicable in the area of corporate social responsibility. It was a struggle to find previous

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1 http://philosophy.yale.edu/people/seyla-benhabib
research involving both moral universalism and corporate social responsibility; in fact the only research found within the search was a published essay by a student at a university in the United States written from the perspective of business management. With little to no previous research which specifically involved both elements (moral universalism and CSR), the search was modified to first find a theory of moral universalism which led to the theory established by Benhabib. The next step was to specify the theories of corporate social responsibility that would be comparatively analyzed using Benhabib’s theory of moral universalism. The choice of the two theories of CSR chosen was based upon the wide availability of information available about them. Nearly every academic article about CSR theory involved at least one of the two theories; some of them explored the values of both.

To better understand Benhabib’s theory of moral universalism, I have read two of her books Situating the Self and Claims of Culture, as well as an article, written by her, defending her theory against the critique she received towards Situating the Self.

The knowledge of business ethics and CSR theories come from a book by P. Kamatchi, Business Ethics: Foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility and Governance, as well as several scholarly articles pertaining to the specific subject manner. This book was chosen based on its perspective of business ethics and CSR. Much of the literature available about corporate social responsibility is written from a business management perspective, and is therefore more oriented around the legal obligations that a business has, rather than the human rights perspective of protecting the rights of employees throughout the supply chain.

Also to be included in the research materials are various human rights organizations and documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN’s Global Compact and two reports from Fairfood International. The UDHR and the Global Compact are relevant to both the CSR theories, as well as Benhabib’s theory and will therefore appear in the comparative analysis as a supplement Benhabib.

1.3 Limitations

Corporate Social Responsibility has many different definitions, and while they can be similar, they are individually adapted to different corporations. When searching for the main theories of CSR, Stakeholder theory and Triple Bottom-line, seemed most prevalent as a basis for CSR
programs. As was stated in the previous section, the information available on specifically these two theories is most often written from an economic perspective, of what is best financially for the corporations. Searching for information directly related to both CSR theories and human rights was difficult, because most of the articles that were related to human rights were applied to specific cases and did not discuss which theory of corporate social responsibility was at the base of the case within scenario. The result is that I have had to apply the theories to the extent possible to a human rights perspective of corporate social responsibility.

The research may also be restricted by the fact that I have chosen to hold myself to one scholar’s theory of moral universalism, though it was a purposeful decision to do so. Seyla Benhabib does not directly write about the concept of corporate social responsibility, but her theory is readily applicable to the existing CSR theories. I chose therefore not to take her moral universalism theory exactly as she wrote about it, but applied it as a theory that works best with the topic of CSR. She has limits, for example, about what should classify as “culture”, which is discussed later. To make her point on cultural classification she uses specific examples of incidents in history, rather than a clear-cut definition of how to classify culture. The results, once again, in a need for interpretation of the text for the benefit of the research.

1.4 Disposition

This dissertation will consist of five chapters. This first chapter has, of course, been a presentation of the problem and question to be answered by the research analysis. It has established the method in which the paper will be written, explained the choice of material that will be utilized to answer the thesis question, and also presented potential limitations to the research.

The second chapter gives background information of key concepts which are necessary to understand in the analysis of the theories. In this chapter, the concept of a global supply chain will be discussed and an example will be given to illustrate what a supply chain may look like. This chapter will also establish what the term Corporate Social Responsibility will have for meaning in use throughout this paper, and will include examples, showing the importance of having a strong CSR theory.
The third chapter begins with a presentation of Seyla Benhabib, and an analysis of her theory of moral universalism using two of her more famous books plus an article she wrote in response the critique one of the two books received. After the presentation of Benhabib’s theory and analysis I will attempt to adapt her theory into usable criteria which will be utilized in a comparative analysis of the two CSR theories.

In Chapter four, the criteria that are established in chapter three will be utilized to analyze the two separate theories of CSR. The chapter will start out with a brief overview of the theories before going deeper into analysis. To avoid confusion throughout the paper, it is worth mentioning here that the term “stakeholder” is a common term in business ethics and CSR theories, due to the fact that all corporations have stakeholders (people directly affected by the decisions and actions of the corporation), though definition of the term may vary. The two theories to be analyzed in this chapter are: Stakeholder theory and Triple Bottom-line theory. Triple Bottom-line theory is a combination of three “bottom-lines” where two of the three have stakeholders in focus. To simplify in differentiating these two “bottom-lines” from the theory titled Stakeholder theory, I will place (Triple Bottom-line) in parentheses behind the “bottom-lines” when the term “stakeholder” is mentioned.

Chapter five is the concluding chapter. Using the analysis of the moral universal theory and the analysis of the two CSR theories, conclusions will be drawn regarding the thesis question.

1.5 Purpose

Launched in 2000, the UN Global Compact brings business together with UN agencies, labor, civil society and governments to advance ten universal principles in the areas of human rights, labor, environment and anti-corruption.

According to the quote above, UN agencies, labor, civil society, governments and business corporations are working together towards the advancement of ten universal principles in four different areas, one of which is human rights. These ten universal principles will be discussed

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3 http://wwwcsrwire.com/members/12044-united-nations-global-compact
in further detail later on in chapter two. The Global Compact is found at the base of many theories of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Corporate social responsibility is, vaguely put, the responsibility that a corporation has to protect the human rights established by laws and treaties of those individuals who are employed by and contribute to the company. The company may also choose to include more protections than those which are established by law, though they are not required to do so. In most cases, a company’s CSR department is also the department which deals with environmental protections, in a way, an extension of human rights protections by ensuring clean water and cleaner air for the general populations of the production areas.

On their Global compact website, the UN boasts that more than twelve thousand businesses spread among one-hundred and seventy countries have signed onto the Global Compact. This means that there are twelve thousand businesses in this world that are committed to advancing the universal principles established by the Global Compact. Keeping in mind that within these principles are human rights protections, we can conclude that these twelve thousand businesses have then committed to the protection of the basic human rights of those individuals they are responsible for within their company and its supply chain.

Another important document to remember came into existence fifty-two years before the Global Compact, after the tragedy of the Second World War: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR consists of thirty articles, each one establishing a basic human right. Those countries having adopted the UDHR document, that have also incorporated it in its entirety or in part into their legal systems, have agreed that there are certain rights which are universal to all humans. Despite the establishment of these basic, universal human rights both within the UDHR and the ten universal principles within the Global Compact, there is no universal theory of corporate social responsibility. Instead there are multiple theories of CSR in existence.

A positive result of having multiple theories of corporate social responsibility to choose from, is that individual companies have the freedom to choose the CSR theory that best fits with the values of their individual companies, which leads to a CSR program that their company can stand behind and willingly continue. A negative result that comes with the lack of a universal

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4 https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc
theory of CSR, is the potential for a lack of continuity between the various different workplaces within a company’s global supply chain.

In the event that a company’s supply chain resides, from start to finish, within the same country, the need for a moral universal theory of CSR is not obvious, because the laws regulating the workers’ rights are the same from production’s start to finish. When taking consideration to a global supply chain, we can see that a problem arises from the lack of a moral universal theory of CSR. “A supply chain is a system of organizations, people, activities, information, and resources involved in moving a product or service from supplier to customer. Supply chain activities involve the transformation of natural resources, raw materials, and components into a finished product that is delivered to the end customer.” A global supply chain is when this system of organizations take place in multiple countries. The problem that we see with the global supply chain is that the laws and regulations of workers’ rights can vary from country to country, which means that the company may protect the rights of some of their workers along the supply chain more than they protect the rights of other workers within the same supply chain.

An example of a supply chain within the wine-making industry starts with the grape-growers. The grapes grown are then moved on towards those who press them, ferment them into wine and later bottle the liquid. Then the finished product is sent further along to those who export/import the wine and finally sent out to those who sell the final product. Any number of these tasks can be performed by the same company or each may be performed by a different company. This is a simplified and ideal supply chain. The beginning of the supply, for example, can have started one or more steps earlier to include those who produce the seed for the grape plants or the fertilizer for the soil. The supply chain can also include those who create the packaging (glass bottle, PET bottle, or bag in box) which means that the information can be extended even further to include those involved in supplying the necessary items used for creating the packaging materials. The complexity of a global chain varies from product to product, even when the product appears to be the same product. The supply chain of two nearly identical bottles of wine, the difference being different producers, can have very different supply chains due the different individuals involved at different stages of the supply chain.

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Without a valid and legally binding (Admittedly, any law regulating global supply chains would be a form of soft-law, due to the sovereignty of individual countries.) universal CSR document, one that would be all-inclusive for all populations, the only obligations that a corporation has are those which are required of them by law in their corresponding countries. This leaves room for much variation in the working conditions throughout a supply chain. The purpose of this paper is, however, not to establish the potential legal implications of a universal CSR document, rather it is to explore the possibility of a moral universal theory of CSR which could serve as a base in establishing a universal CSR document.
2 Background

2.1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a list of rights held by all people on the basis of being human, that are to be respected by all individuals, groups, and governments. The rights established by this document are considered applicable to all people throughout the world based on the common trait of being human. At the time that the document was drafted, the world was in the position of recovering from a second world war. While the concept of human rights existed long before the Second World War, the war made it obvious to many that these rights should be established and acknowledged openly, to hinder heads of state from making the decisions that were made against certain groups of people during the war. The strength of the resulting document is questionable, in some respects due to its universality. The point of making a universal set of rights was to get as many countries as possible to sign off on the document, which was potentially easy to do in the time-frame after the war, because most countries were searching for a way to prevent history from repeating itself. However, getting countries to sign the document was not easy, because it was seen as a document of “western values”, written by western leaders. The text was therefore written with room for interpretation, to allow for different cultures to identify with the rights included, thereby ensuring that more countries would likely sign the document.

2.2 Global Compact

The United Nations launched its Global Compact to work together with international corporations to acknowledge and protect the ten principles that they consider to be universal. There are currently over 4100 companies from 100 different countries who participate in the Global Compact.\(^6\) This compact is the basis or inspiration behind most theories of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

\(^6\) ibid.
The UN Global Compact is an agreement that is derived from other documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Labour Organization’s Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and the United Nations Convention against Corruption. The Global Compact consists of ten principles. The first two principles state that businesses should both support and respect international human rights as well as not involve themselves in human rights abuses. Principles three through six state that businesses must have freedom of association, elimination of all forms of forced or child labor, as well as elimination of discrimination in respect of employment. Principles seven through nine state the responsibility of businesses to take initiative for greater environmental responsibility and encourages innovation within that field. The last principle states that businesses should work actively against all forms of corruption, including extortion and bribery. These ten principles are considered universal, which is not difficult to understand considering that the basis for each one relates to one or more of the articles within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but what does it mean to be universal? What criteria exist for something to be considered morally universal?

2.3 What is CSR?

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a term for the obligations that a corporation has in terms of protecting the rights of those within its supply chain, as well as the protections of the environment from the harmful conditions that may arise as a part of business. There is no single definition of Corporate Social Responsibility and there is great variation in how it is interpreted for implementation. In the book Business Ethics: Foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility and Governance written by P. Kamatchi, there are seven different definitions of CSR quoted from six different authors. Some theories focus on the ethics of business and protection of human rights, while others focus on the necessity to turn a profit in a way that is most beneficial for environmental sustainability in order to ensure continued success of the corporation. Despite the variation in its interpretation and implementation, CSR is becoming a standard within international business ethics. Kamatchi sums it up well when he writes:

7 https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles
“Business is the major institution of the economic sphere and its key role is to provide the goods and services needed to maintain the standard of living within society. In a market oriented society, businesses compete with one another to satisfy the needs and demands of customers. Hence, it is the responsibility of the business to act responsibly towards society, which may be termed corporate social responsibility.”

Environmental responsibility is a recurring issue in local and global politics, and both governments and the general public have developed an interest in monitoring the industries that have the most negative effect on our environment, such as chemical dumping from large factories that leads to contamination of the main water sources for unsuspecting populations.

The social responsibility or ethical responsibility of a corporation towards those within its supply chain is becoming more common as information of corruption and abuses become more easily available. This is largely due to the fact that the internet allows for the information to be quickly spread from our computers, tablets, and smart phones. Through blogs, social media, and podcasts, which are only a few examples of information-sharing media in existence, groups like Human Rights Watch, Swedwatch, and Fairfood International, are able to easily communicate to the general public about some of the major human rights violations in the world. Because Fairfood International has their main focus on human rights violations within the supply chain, and the protection of workers’ rights throughout the supply chain is an important part of corporate social responsibility, Fairfood’s publications are relevant as a source for examples showing what makes CSR policy so important. For this reason I have chosen two of their publications that show human rights violations that could be avoided by a strong, sustainable and moral universal CSR plan.

“Fairfood International is an innovative, fact-based advocacy organization that strives to achieve a fair and transparent food supply chain. Our mission is to improve the socio-economic conditions of vulnerable workers in the food industry, such as smallholder farmers and fishers. In addition, Fairfood

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On Fairfood’s website, one can discover published articles, blogs, and press releases related to human rights violations within the food industry. Two examples of human rights violations brought into the spotlight by Fairfood International are: the forced labor for those working on shrimp boats off the coast of Asia and the disregard of health and safety for those working on the sugar plantations in Latin America. In order to establish relevance of moral universalism within business ethics and an understanding of the conditions that make corporate social responsibility a necessity, a deeper explanation of these two examples will follow.

2.3.1 Example 1- Asian shrimp industry

In this first example, the focus is on the Asian shrimp industry. This industry is considered to be an informal labour source, which according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), is understood to mean a workplace with poor employment conditions that contributes to increasing poverty. Those who appear to be most taken advantage of, according to Fairfood, are the Burmese migrants who are coming to Thailand. They come to Thailand, hoping to find work, because jobs are so scarce in their home country. Those who work within the shrimp industry often have wages below the local minimum wage, and even those who make the minimum wage fall below the poverty line. The workers do not receive any wage specification, and there are hidden fees that are removed from the paychecks for things like working materials (examples: uniforms, knives, or protective gear) or yearly working visa fees. They receive no vacation time from work, and it is considered unacceptable for an employee to become pregnant, so once a woman who has become pregnant becomes incapable of performing the tasks of the job, her only option is to resign from the workplace.

Due to these working conditions, most of the workers within this industry must work sixty-hour work weeks in order to afford housing and food. For these people, getting sick is not an

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option. The human rights violations in this example are UDHR articles 23\(^{12}\) (the right to just and favorable conditions at work, protections against unemployment, and equal pay without discrimination), 24\(^{13}\) (the right to leisure and reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay), and 25\(^{14}\) (the right to a standard of living that is adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family including food, clothing, housing and medical care, and special care and assistance for mothers and children).

Fairfood states that according to their research Asia (mainly Thailand, Bangladesh, Vietnam and India) is the main supplier of tropical shrimp to the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Germany\(^{15}\), and their main purpose of including this in their report, is to show Europe that there is an opportunity to change the working conditions for the shrimp industry workers in Asia. This change can be set in motion if the grocers in these three countries begin demanding fair wages and fulfillment of basic human rights throughout their supply chain, following up to ensure that their demands are met, and purchasing only from those shrimp companies which live up to a high standard of human rights and environmental protections. \(^{16}\)

### 2.3.2 Example 2- Latin American sugarcane industry

The issue in Latin America is not focused as much on wages, as it is upon the health of the workers in the sugarcane plantations, though, admittedly, their salary and working hours are relevant to explanation of why they have such poor health. The conditions required for growing the sugar cane are not ideal conditions for people. The sun is often sweltering down upon the fields, where the dirt amplifies the heat; the sugarcane requires large amounts of water, and it is not uncommon for the plants to have priority to the water available over those individuals working in the field. The plantation workers work long hours in the sun, with too little water, no shade, and no breaks. Many of them suffer from chronic kidney disease of non-traditional causes (CKDnT) as a result from working in the fields. One worker is quoted, “The shift is very

\(^{12}\) United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 23
\(^{13}\) Ibid. Article 24
\(^{14}\) Ibid. Article 25
\(^{16}\) Ibid. p 27
hard—we work for 18 hours. It should not be like this. We do not have time to eat, we eat between the machines, constantly exposed to the dust and the sun.”

In this example, the three human rights mentioned in example one (UDHR articles 23-25) are also violated in this situation. There is also a violation of the third article of UDHR “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person”18. The workers in this field do not have favorable working conditions, enough time for leisure, or a standard of living that allows for them to be able to sit and take a lunch break. Rather than fulfilling the right to life and liberty, this job is causing major health issues as a direct result of the working conditions.

In this example, Fairfood’s recommendation for a solution is that companies further along the sugar cane supply chain (their own examples are spirits corporations Diageo and Bacardi) ought to take more responsibility for the conditions that their own demands create for those furthest down the supply chain, and to create corporate policies that ensure the safety of workers throughout the full supply chain. In their example, Diageo and Barcardi can refuse to buy their sugar from plantations with poor working conditions, to encourage the plantation owners to take better care of their employees.19

2.3.3 CSR and the supply chain

“It is now increasingly recognized that what is not good for the public good is not for the good of the business.”20

What significance do the previous two examples have in discussion of corporate social responsibility theory? They are significant in the manner that they highlight what makes it necessary to have a universal CSR theory. The demands that the corporations/consumers have at their end of an international supply chain has an effect on the quality of life for the

18 United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 3
farmers/producers at the bottom of the same supply chain. When that effect is negative, and basic human rights are being violated, it is important that corporations ask how they can solve that issue. The grocery stores from example one are not directly violating the rights of the workers on the tropical shrimp boats, but they do have the power to decide from which company they purchase the shrimp intended to be sold in their stores. Refusing to buy shrimp from the companies which are negligible in providing fair working conditions, would encourage those and other shrimp-boat employers within the shrimp industry to review their policies to gain a competitive edge in the market and prevent loss of income.

Those companies putting pressure on the sugarcane industry (Bacardi and Diageo in the example) can also make demands that the sugar they purchase is produced by workers who have access to plenty of clean water and are allowed breaks from the direct sunlight. The decisions of individual corporations to act in this manner, to place ethical demands on their suppliers is based on the individual corporation’s CSR policy, and such policies are becoming increasingly important as is noted by P. Kamatchi. Kamatchi’s point is that a business is a part of the social structure, and that without the support of the public a business is doomed to fail. Therefore successful corporations know that it is in their best interest to have strong CSR policies that maintain a healthy social image of their business operations, because this is how to get the public support. Without this public support, business corporations run the risk of smaller financial gain.

In order to ensure fair working conditions for entire supply chains, there needs to be a method of action. There needs to be a clear meaning of the term “fair working conditions”, and there needs to be clear information of what is included in a corporation’s supply chain, and what is included in corporate social responsibility.

It makes sense to establish a universal CSR agreement to protect against universal human rights violations, because we humans are all included in the basic rights established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and therefore we should also all be entitled to whatever protections of those rights exist. However, a problem arises when we start to discuss culture. While culture was not directly mentioned in the two examples, it is a common defense as to why workers of different levels of the supply chain have different working conditions. Culture can be used as a defense for having a six-day working week as opposed to a five day, or it can be used to explain the difference in wage ratios compared to cost of living. As an example it can be noted that the minimum wage in Thailand is far below the cost of living. A company
who pays the minimum wage in Thailand is following the law and is, according to the law, paying a fair wage, but if it is not enough to cover monthly expenses then can these wages be considered morally fair? The real question to ask in this scenario would be: Is a low minimum wage in Thailand a cultural attribute? Should an international corporation who, within their supply chain, has farmers or producers that are paid non-livable wages, be able to excuse this fact on a basis of culture? The answer is important because UDHR article 27 ensures the right to culture, and it is important that those things which violate other basic human rights are not able to be protected by the label of culture. Therefore what is necessary is a theory of CSR that protects these basic human rights while still preserving culture.

There is an argument to be made for a contextual or relativist approach to CSR theory in order to protect the right to culture, but as I have attempted to establish, some of the points that are claimed under the category of culture, might not be considered culture. That which ought to be considered culture might not need a contextualist theory to protect it. There could be a way to establish a moral universal CSR theory that would both protect the basic rights of everyone throughout a supply chain, while still protecting their right to culture. If this is a possibility, then that theory would be much stronger than what contextualism has to offer.

2.4 Universalism according to Seyla Benhabib

In searching for a theory of universalism that would fulfill the need for cultural respect I was led to the work to Seyla Benhabib, who has a strong theory of moral universalism. Seyla Benhabib is a Turkish-American philosopher and director of the Ethics, Politics, and Economics at Yale University. She is a supporter of universalism and has written the books, *Situating the Self* and *The Claims of Culture*, among others, defending the theory of universalism. According to Benhabib’s moral universalism theory cultural differences are not restricted, because according to her, the cultural identity stands outside of the universal standards. Benhabib makes relevant arguments for moral universalism, and though her theory has been under scrutiny, she has managed to defend her theory against the critique in a manner that strengthens her argument for universalism. The next chapter will consist of an analysis of Benhabib’s theory of moral universalism, using the previously mentioned books and article as a guideline. The chapter will conclude with a set of criteria to be utilized for analyzing the potential of the two CSR theories becoming moral universal theories of CSR.
3 Theory:

As was stated earlier, moral universalism is a theory defended by Seyla Benhabib, and it is Benhabib’s version of moral universalism that is most relevant to use as a base for discussing theories of corporate social responsibility. Benhabib’s writings on moral universalism are focused more on defending universalism against other moral and ethics theories, and are generally speaking focused on the basic human rights and violations thereof, rather than the topic to be discussed: theories of corporate social responsibility. What makes Benhabib’s writings relevant in the discussion about corporate social responsibility is her discussion of two common topics within moral universal CSR theory: women’s and cultural rights. The next two sections of this chapter are an analysis of two of Benhabib’s works, each given its own section, that make her theory of moral universalism easier to understand. The first to be analyzed is the article in which she defends her stance in her book Situating the Self. The following section will be an analysis of The Claims of Culture.

3.1 In Defense of Universalism. Yet Again! A response to Critics of Situating the Self

Situating the Self was written in 1992 and received much critique, so in 1996 Benhabib wrote an article in which she defends the points that she made in the book against the critique which it has received. In her article, she specifies that, “By Universalism I mean the principle that all human beings, by virtue of their humanity, are entitled to moral respect from others, and that such universal moral respect minimally entails the entitlement of individuals to basic human, civil, and political rights.”21 Those opposing Benhabib’s theory claim that it is a contextual approach that is more applicable in ethics, based on views of feminism, postmodernism and deconstructionism.

Contextualism, according to BBC, is also known as situation ethics. According to contextualism what is right or wrong is dependent upon the situation. Supporters of contextualism would say that there are no universal rights or universal moral rules.22 It is important to discuss the concept of contextualism when discussing Benhabib’s moral universalism, because it is a theory that is

22 http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/situation_1.shtml
commonly argued as a better alternative to her moral universal theory. One of the main critiques against universalism in general is that it is likely to favor one culture over others. This was an issue with the UDHR, which many non-western countries view to be a document filled with “western” ideals that collide with their own cultural values. The support for contextualism grows from the fact that it allows for ideals to be adapted by countries in the manner that they fit in with the culture, rather than go against it. In other words, it is out of respect for the right to one’s own culture that makes contextualism a necessary option.

When defending universalism against those who view contextualism as a more applicable theory, Benhabib states that it is the current (1996) breaches of human rights that make universalism the necessary option. She challenges the theory that cultural rights make contextualism necessary, by challenging the concept of culture itself, and what culture includes. In order to demonstrate what she means by what should or should not be included in culture, she gives the reader concrete examples of that which should and should not be considered cultural attributes. Focusing on the examples she gives, historical events that should not be considered as cultural attributes are: the ethnic cleansing and rapes of the Muslim women in Bosnia, the opposition in Tiananmen Square, China, and minorities in countries from the former Soviet Union. She continues this point in her book, *Claims of Culture*, which will be discussed in the next section.

The previous examples were given in an article from 1996, but the relevance of the argument is applicable to today. These types of major human rights violations show us why universal human rights are necessary. The UDHR was written and agreed upon as a result of the Second World War. This historical tragedy is not so unlike the three examples of history given by Benhabib. It is worth noting, however, that one major difference is that it is a historical event that was of great significance not only to the non-western countries of the time, but of great significance especially for the western countries. The reason this is worth mentioning is that it is questionable whether or not these western countries responsible for organizing the UDHR would have found the document equally necessary had they not been so deeply affected by this historical tragedy within their own borders. This major historical event triggered the idea in the western countries that it would be ideal to establish a series of universal human rights that affect all humans, and that their governments have the responsibility to protect. They realized that official documentation of specific human rights were necessary to ensure the sustainability of

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23 Ibid. P 173
these rights in the times they are overlooked. Returning to examples given by Benhabib, just as the events in the second world war illustrated the need for establishing universal human rights, the events mentioned by Benhabib from Bosnia, China, and the former Soviet Union show just as clearly the need for universal protections, so as to protect not only the western culture, but the individuals in every country no matter what culture they identify with.

The Fairfood examples mentioned previously, in the second chapter, are similarly important in that they illustrate the need for official documentation for implementation of a set of universal workers’ rights, in the same manner that Benhabib has demonstrated a need for moral universalism in general. Holding workers in a constant state of poverty or placing demand that is too high while keeping cost low which ultimately results in the fact that workers are forced to work eighteen hour workdays without breaks is not a sustainable working strategy.

3.2 The Claims of Culture

Benhabib’s book, The Claims of Culture, is important to this discussion because, as the name suggests, she analyzes the role of culture within universalism. In chapter two, “Is Universalism Ethnocentric?” she discusses what she refers to as “strong contextualism”, giving credit to Richard Rorty and Michael Walzer. She quotes Walzer saying, “One characteristic above all is central to my arguments. We are (all of us) culture producing creatures; we make and inhabit meaningful worlds. Since there is no way to rank and order these worlds with respect to their understanding of social goods, we do justice to men and women by respecting their particular creations.” Benhabib is in disagreement with Walzer on how to interpret culture. According to her, there is differentiation between the moral, the ethical and the evaluative. By this she means that there are different types of culture:

1. The moral is that which is concerning what is right for all based on the fact that we are human,
2. the ethical is concerning what is right for us as a member of a certain group or society,
3. and the evaluative concerns what is valuable to individuals.

24 Walzer, Michael 1983, Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality, New York, Basic books p 314
The differentiation is important, because as Benhabib explains, there are certain cultural norms which have changed label. One example given is women’s rights being considered to be ethical because the rights of women have been interpreted differently in different countries around the world. In modern times, women’s rights would fall under the moral category, because, despite some discrepancies most would agree that women’s rights are also human rights.

This differentiation of types of culture is the reason that it is possible to have a theory of moral universalism. It is unnecessary for us to take into consideration cultural differences when it comes to universal human rights, because they are cross-cultural. The universal human rights fall under the first category which are pertaining to all on the basis of being human. It is in the evaluative that there is room for cultural interpretation, which is illustrated with examples such as “one can condemn the ancient Chinese tradition of foot binding of women while admiring Chinese calligraphy, pottery and dedication to the value of honest work. Likewise, one can condemn the controversial rite of sati (widow burning) while praising Indian erotic traditions, Indian pluralism, and the everyday sense of the aesthetic. In other words we do not approach cultural traditions and worlds as wholes.”

What Benhabib means is that we need to make these classifications of cultural traditions to separate what has simply become a tradition, and what is actual culture. Using one of Benhabib’s examples, most would agree that the rite of sati ought to be classified as tradition rather than culture, because it blatantly violates the basic human right to life for the widow. It would be just as easy to agree upon the fact that India’s erotic traditions, pluralism and everyday sense of aesthetic classify as culture, not only based on the fact that these are things that make India uniquely India, but also based on the fact that no one’s rights are directly violated due as a result of these traditions.

Benhabib cautions that one must be careful in the evaluative sector of these cultural classifications, as pronouncing cultural differences increases the risk of creating an “us” vs “them” situation. Benhabib argues that in contextual theory, cultures become locked into the “us” vs “them”, because within contextual theory, people are being labeled as participants of the cultures that are approved of or they are labeled as participants in cultures who of both good and conflicting opinions of. In the discussion of culture, there is a benefit in considering homogeneity of culture within individual countries’ borders. The reason it is relevant in the

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discussion is the fact that through globalization and voluntary/involuntary migration, most societies are no longer homogenous to the extent that all citizens living within a specific country have the same traditional and cultural values.

To extend the point of Benhabib’s three cultural classifications, if the moral is kept universal, then the positive pieces of culture are able to be maintained, while the immoral/negative pieces would no longer be considered culture, but rather happenings that are not condoned by any culture on the basis of being universally immoral.26

3.3 Benhabib’s Universalism as a tool

*By Universalism I mean the principle that all human beings, by virtue of their humanity, are entitled to moral respect from others, and that such universal moral respect minimally entails the entitlement of individuals to basic human, civil, and political rights.*27

If Benhabib means by this definition that the basic human, civil, and political rights are to be held morally universal, then, using her definition as a tool, we can test theories of corporate social responsibility against the basic human, civil, and political rights to test their potential of universalizability. First, it is necessary to have a standard of human, civil, and political right, and because Benhabib does not give a clear definition of what is meant by “basic human, civil, and political rights”, it seems logical to utilize official documents such as the UN Global Compact and UDHR. The rights established by the UDHR and the stipulations of the UN Global Compact will therefore be used in an analysis to establish whether a CSR theory is to be considered universal. In addition to establishing compliance with these documents, the analysis of the two CSR theories may require a reflection upon Benhabib’s three classifications of culture.

26 Ibid P39-40
'Universalism' in morality implies first of all a commitment to the equal worth and dignity of every human being in virtue of her or his humanity; secondly, the dignity of the other as a moral individual is acknowledged through the respect we show for their needs, interests and points of view in our concrete moral deliberations. Moral respect is manifested in moral deliberation by taking the standpoint of the other, as a generalized and concrete other, into account.28

There is importance in the previous quote when analyzing Benhabib’s theory for use in analyzation of another theory. An important aspect of Benhabib’s theory is her standpoint on “the other”. As is stated in the last sentence of this quote, it is not enough for a person or a group to make decisions for a fictitious “other”, rather it ought to be based on a concrete other, and ideally that concrete other should have a say in what should be considered universally moral in the event that they are affected by it.

The discussion of the “concrete other” is a red thread throughout Benhabib’s works and it is what separates her theory of universalism from Habermas’ theory of universalism. “Benhabib takes issue with Habermas' notion that this discourse will take place only among generalized others. Benhabib instead argues that communicative ethics should 'institutionalize... an actual dialogue among actual selves who are both "generalized others", considered as equal moral agents, and "concrete others", that is individuals with irreducible differences'.”29 The discourse discussed in this quote is referring to a point Benhabib makes earlier in the book about the Habermasian notion of communicative ethics. The discourse is the principals of action that enough people have in common that they can be seen as valid or universal for a larger group of individuals.

In the next section, which is where Benhabib’s theory is to be used as a tool in analyzing the two theories of corporate social responsibility, the criteria will be based upon Benhabib’s definitions of what universalism and moral universalism are. In the first definition stated in 3.3 Benhabib states that universal moral respect means an entitlement for basic human, civil, ad political rights. Because she does not explain what is meant by basic human, civil, and political rights, I found it relevant to assume that those human, civil and political rights established by the UDHR and Global Compact are applicable as definitions of those terms. Benhabib’s

28 Benhabib, S., Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics, Cambridge: Polity Press, p 185
29 Ibid. p 169
classification of culture also plays an important role in the analyzing the CSR theories, because cultural characteristics are not homogenous throughout a global supply chain.
4 Analysis

4.1 Introduction to Stakeholder Theory:

R.E. Freeman is considered to be the father of the Stakeholder Theory. A simplified definition of this theory is that according to it, companies have only a responsibility toward their stakeholders, to create as high of a profit as possible, to give them value for their involvement within the company. It is important to know what is meant by the term stakeholder. The above image is a visual definition of what is included under the term “stakeholder” in Stakeholder theory. A stakeholder can be an individual or a group and is not only those with financial involvement within the corporation, but all who have a critical eye on the actions of the corporation based on the fact that they are in some way affected by the decisions made within the corporate supply chain.

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With this broadened definition of the term stakeholder, the term is able to include not only employees and business owners/stockholders, but also includes those individuals who exist along the supply chain and their surrounding communities, as well.

There are some variations between definitions of Stakeholder theory and how it ought to be implemented. Two major issues within this theory, and within CSR in general, are the questions of who exactly corporations have responsibility for and how far the responsibility of a corporation stretches. Finding the solution to these issues requires an open dialogue between the different stakeholders, who must come to an agreement about which method of implementation is the best alternative for the corporation and its stakeholders.

Depending on the size of the company, this dialogue can be complex. Homogeneity among stakeholders is not guaranteed, even in smaller companies with fewer stakeholder to consider. For global corporations which can include multiple countries and thereby also multiple cultures and multiple legal systems, the possibility of homogeneity becomes even more difficult. The difficulty in coming to an agreed upon policy of corporate social responsibility increases even more when the multiple countries take place within different cultural regions of the world, such as production in rural Argentina and sale of the final product on store shelves in Sweden. The working conditions for the farmers and wine producers in Argentina are unlikely to be equal to the working conditions for those working in the stores in Sweden, partially due to the fact that the legal system that regulates workers’ rights is not the same, partially because the actual work they perform is not the same, and also because the cultural traditions are not the same.

R.E. Freeman stated in an interview that if a corporation is striving for success that it is essential that they are attentive to all of their stakeholders. He states two examples to show what importance different stakeholders have: the first example is that a company who sells a product that no one wants to purchase (thereby not listening to the customer stakeholder) is not likely to be successful, because no one is interested in their product; the second example is that a company merely makes demands of their suppliers and therefore the suppliers work hard towards meeting those demands, but not towards going a step further to ensure success throughout the rest of the company.31

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31 R.E. Freeman, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIRUaLcvPe8
The Triple Bottom-line theory is dependent upon codes of conduct and reporting initiatives. According to this theory, corporate governance, ethics management, and sustainability are interrelated and dependent upon one another. While the main goal of the previous theory was to increase profits for the stakeholders, the main goal of this theory is to achieve sustainability. As is seen in the figure above (taken from CSR ambassadors page describing Triple bottom-line\textsuperscript{33}), the three focal points are people, planet, and profit. These three are inter-related, so that the status of each area has an effect upon the other two. According to this theory it would not be possible to reach a state of sustainability without actively engaging in all three areas.

The three central concepts of Triple Bottom-line theory are stakeholder engagement, organizational integrity, and stakeholder integrity. Please note that while the term stakeholder reappears in the discussion of Triple Bottom-line theory, it is not in relation to the previously

\textsuperscript{32} http://www.csrambassadors.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/triple-bottom-line-1.png

\textsuperscript{33} http://www.csrambassadors.com/corporate-social-responsibility-csrambassadors/triple-bottom-line/
mentioned Stakeholder theory. Stakeholder is simply a common term used to refer to those who have an interest (economic or otherwise) in a corporation.

4.2.1 Stakeholder Engagement (Triple Bottom-line):

Stakeholder engagement is about involving the stakeholders in establishing the values within the code of conduct. By involving those directly affected by the code of conduct in the establishment of its content, the corporation ensures that the code of conduct is reflective of the different cultures and various needs within the stakeholder community. For a corporation to heighten its chances of stakeholders following its code of conduct, it is essential that it take care in this stage to listen to the feedback from all stakeholders about which points are most important and which areas the corporation may be at risk of falling behind.

To clarify, a code of conduct is a set of values or rules that serves as a guideline in establishing responsibilities corporations have towards others in their business practices. To establish a code of conduct corporations may seek out a third party organization that works specifically with regulation of CSR programs and establishing codes of conduct, or they may choose to establish the rules on their own. Often the rules or policies established in a code of conduct have a basis in local or international law, and usually cover those parts of the law that the corporation, in its normal business practices, is most at risk for failing to follow. A code of conduct is somewhat of a safe-measure to follow already existing laws and regulations. For triple bottom-line theory, establishing a code of conduct is viewed as an essential part of a program of corporate social responsibility.

3.2.2 Organizational Integrity (Triple Bottom-line):

The first stage (Stakeholder Engagement) was about establishing the code of conduct by engaging the stakeholders. The focus of the second stage (Organizational Integrity) is the correct implementation of the established code of conduct. It is important that once the code of conduct has been established it is implemented both internally and externally.

An internal implementation is important because it guarantees fair working conditions and human rights protections for those directly employed with in the corporation, and sends a
message to those further down the supply chain that the same expectations the corporation has on its suppliers are expectations upheld by the head of the corporation itself. The external implementation of the code of conduct is the expectations that a corporation places upon the suppliers along its supply chain. It is an attempt to guarantee fair working conditions and human rights protections for both those who have places of employment along the supply chain, as well as those communities who are directly affected by corporate decisions. By establishing a code of conduct that is easily followed by the main portion of the corporation and its stakeholders or suppliers along the supply chain, the corporation establishes a stronger bond of trust between all parties.

4.2.3 Stakeholder Integrity (Triple Bottom-line):

The third stage (Stakeholder Integrity) is about the credibility of the code of conduct. As a first measure to ensure stakeholder integrity the definition of the term “stakeholder” is broadened to include employees, customers, suppliers, activist groups, governments and more. The idea behind this broadening of the definition is to distribute the power of oversight from a few stakeholders among many stakeholders. This distribution is thought to prevent any one stakeholder from becoming corrupt with power.

An example of potential corruption is given in the article, “Triple Bottom-line reporting as social grammar: integrating corporate social responsibility and corporate codes of conduct”. The author’s example is that there is a risk that the external agencies which are hired in to perform third party audits, may not be knowledgeable enough of the given industry to make a fair audit. There is also a risk that the external agency may be too knowledgeable of the given industry, which can lead to a result that is biased or corrupt. The external agency is often a local agency, as they are most familiar with the working regulations of the local community; if the community is one where bribery is commonplace and the agency is well-known, it may be easy for a supplier at the bottom of the supply chain to bribe the agency to give a better rating in the report than is reality for the working environment.

4.3 Analysis

Before beginning the analysis of these theories, it is important to remember that the theories are not being analyzed against each other, rather, both theories are to be analyzed against an interpreted variation of Seyla Benhabib’s moral universalism. Going back to the main question, the main goal is to establish which of these theories, fully or partially, have potential as a moral universal CSR theory.

4.3.1 Stakeholder as a term

The first point to be made in analyzing these two theories is that both theories have established a broadened definition for the term “stakeholder” to include individuals and groups other than those who are affected financially by corporate decisions. In fact, both theories include all individuals who are affected in some way by corporate decisions to be a stakeholder. This is crucial when establishing a corporation’s responsibility towards those within its supply chain. By establishing a responsibility towards everyone along the supply chain, rather than only those whom a corporation has economic responsibility towards, it is established that all of these “stakeholders” are also holders of human rights, which are to be protected.

4.3.2 Application of the theories

Next up for discussion is the application of these theories. Neither of the theories has the potential to be implemented as they are written, as neither has a clear-cut set of guidelines to utilize for determining a set of rules. They are theories, meant to be merely the base of a corporation’s CSR planning, and are meant to establish what elements are important in that planning. The point is for corporations to utilize the main points of the theories and the knowledge of their industry to establish an open the communication lines with the corporate stakeholders, with the intention of creating a program of Corporate Social Responsibility that will contribute to the success of the entire corporation from the beginning of the supply chain to the end.
Though the theories may not be applicable standing alone, there are examples of initiatives that have applied these theories in their guidelines. Stakeholder theory is, for example, included in the ISO 26000 standards, which is a standard intended for guidance on social responsibility. Triple Bottom-line theory is the basis for the Fair Trade certification, which has shown world-wide success.

4.3.3 UDHR

Because the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is already established as universal, and it has been signed by enough countries throughout the world and incorporated into many law systems, the rights it guarantees ought not to need the protections given by a program of corporate social responsibility. This is unfortunately not always the case. The stakeholder theory does not outwardly establish human rights protections, but rather places that burden upon its stakeholders. Triple bottom-line takes a different approach toward protections of human rights within a corporation, and while specific rights are not written into the theory, they are generally included within one of the three bottom-lines to ensure the overall well-being of the corporation. Human rights is also a section within the UN Global compact and will be discussed again in the next section.

4.3.4 UN Global Compact

In Chapter 2, there was a brief overview of the ten principles of UN Global Compact. Those ten principles are divided into four categories: human rights, labor, environment, and corruption. These four categories are present within both Stakeholder theory and Triple Bottom-line theory. A discussion of each will follow under the respective headings.

4.3.4.1 Human Rights

Human rights protections within the stakeholder theory are not stated outright. This theory of corporate social responsibility is dependent upon communication between stakeholders. Achieving homogeneity among a large number of stakeholders is bound to be a difficult, if not impossible, task; without set guidelines for human rights protections established in the theory
it is entirely up to the corporation to ensure those rights established by law or binding document are followed and it is up to the corporation and its stakeholders to decide if they take those protections a step further.

Within the triple bottom-line theory, the main goal is to achieve a point of sustainability. Within this theory the company has a responsibility to strive after protections of human rights, as well as environmental protections and responsibility toward the stakeholders of the company. This theory illustrates the connections of these three areas and as was shown in the diagram for triple bottom-line theory, it shows the benefits of ensuring all three areas are taken care of.

4.3.4.2 Labor

Labor protections within stakeholder theory are as unapparent as human rights protections are. The good news when it comes to protections involving labor, is that many of the human rights related to labor are such rights that are included in systems of law or documents such as the UDHR. There are, however, countries where child labor (which is one of the protections found within the labor category of the Global Compact) is commonplace, and while it is plausible to hope that the stakeholders within a corporation would be interested in protecting the rights of children from child labor, there is no guarantee that the concern is a higher priority than is a higher profit.

Within the organizational integrity corner of the triple bottom-line triangle, there lies the code of conduct. This code of conduct is an official document drawn up by either the corporation itself or by an unbiased third party who specializes in corporate social responsibility. The point of a code of conduct is to establish a set of rules to be followed along the entire supply chain ensuring human rights protections such as a ban of the use of child labor within the corporation. Just as in stakeholder theory, the corporation has an opportunity with its code of conduct to not only ensure protections of established rights, but also to improve upon the working conditions to a larger extent than is required by law.

4.3.4.3 Environment

Once again within the stakeholder theory, we see an issue with the lack of an established set of principles for ensuring human rights protections, or in this case environmental protections.
Within the area of environmental protections, the discussion involves examples such as the usage or possible contamination of fresh water within a community. Unless the stakeholders of a corporation are insistent upon ensuring that the environment affected by their production line is taken care of, it is once again the law in the individual countries that the corporation is bound to follow.

However, within the triple bottom-line theory, once again using the diagram earlier in this chapter, it is shown that in taking care of the environment the corporation also ensures that the stakeholders of the corporation have access to things such as fresh drinking water. They also gain the benefit of increasing their chance for a profit due to the fact that they both maintain that the resources available from nature remain available to them, which in turn give them the opportunity to maximize on their profit for their stakeholders. It is in this way that the theories seem to be most apparently different. Stakeholder theory’s main priority is towards their stakeholders and running the corporation in the manner that the stakeholders would have the corporation run. Triple bottom-line’s main priority is still towards its stakeholders, but their approach is to take care of the corporation as a whole to establish sustainability which in the end maximizes profits.

4.3.4.4 Corruption

Because the main goal of Stakeholder theory lies within a corporation’s responsibility to maximize profit for the sake of the stakeholders, there is a risk that corporations will do whatever is necessary in order to achieve this goal. This means that, in the event that it creates a significantly greater profit, a corporation may make the decision to go against its own policy of corporate social responsibility. Freeman, mentioned in 3.1 as the father of the stakeholder theory, holds the belief that for a corporation to be successful all stakeholders should be actively involved within the decisions made that affect them. This idea has the power to either, work against or increase the risk of corruption.

Hypothetically speaking, the stakeholders may unanimously decide that the most important task of the corporation is to increase their profits no matter the other consequences of this decision. According to Freeman, the head of the corporation would be (according to stakeholder theory) be required to do as the stakeholders wish and ensure the maximized profits, which greatly increases the risk for corruption. However, in another hypothetical situation, the very same
stakeholders may unanimously decide that the most important task is maximizing profit only in the event that it does not violate human rights, such as use of child/slave labor or inadequate time off/pay. In this scenario, the risk of corruption is somewhat decreased, because the stakeholders have voiced their opinion that, while making the highest profit possible is not to be accomplished at the cost of others human rights.

Triple Bottom-line reporting is often criticized, mainly within three categories: greenwashing, western-bias, and lack of oversight. Because a code of conduct is reliant upon self-reporting there is a risk that corporations take only those measures required of them by the code of conduct and stakeholders in order to make themselves look good. If the corporation is based out of a western culture, yet actual production takes place in a non-western culture, it is possible that the code of conduct is written from a western perspective that does not take consideration to the different cultures within the same corporation. The greatest risk is that there will be a lack of oversight. This basically means that the corporation might not have the resources, by way of people or funding, to have the degree of surveillance necessary to ensure that the code of conduct is followed as it should on all levels.

4.3.5 Seyla Benhabib

As was stated previously, Benhabib’s definition of universalism includes an entitlement of basic human, civic, and political rights. It is for this reason that the UDHR and Global Compact have been included to the extent they are within this analysis.

The interest in talking about Benhabib’s universal theory within the realm of establishing whether or not a CSR theory can be considered universal becomes more apparent in her discussion of culture. This is because the rights that are established by the UDHR and the Global Compact are not only documents that are already considered to be universal, but those same established rights when set up against Benhabib’s classification of culture, would not classify as cultural traits, but rather as necessary moral obligations. Benhabib’s classifications of culture are more focused upon the positive traditions that accent the individuality of individual countries: the types of traditions that set them apart from one another. Because human rights are a moral obligation and are established within universal documents, the content of them cannot be negated by making a claim of culture.
In this regard, and including the analysis from the UDHR and Global Compact, it is now time to discuss the theories’ approach to culture, as their approach towards the human, civic, and political rights has already been discussed. Because of its reliance on communication between stakeholders, the stakeholder theory has the potential for more flexibility in its regard for the different cultures along its supply chain. The potentiality of this is however based upon the decisions made by the stakeholders within the company, which means that, as was the case with the other areas of importance (human rights, labor, environment), these protections are not guaranteed within the theory, but must appear within the framework built by the stakeholders.

In the people section of the triple bottom-line theory’s diagram, the importance of dealing with community and quality of life is included. What dealing with community or quality of life are defined as is uncertain. Benhabib touches lightly on the topic of corporate social responsibility in chapter three of the Claims of Culture. First she states that she rather uses the term “corporate identities, because even “cities, towns, and financial or industrial corporations have a ‘corporate identity’”35 She then continues to state that “what is important is the relationship between group identities based on their individual members’ experience of language, gender, race, ethnicity, religion and culture.36 These characteristics are the characteristics that are discriminated against in some instances while being celebrated in the next. When they are being discriminated against, these characteristics are brought to light “by allocating them to public resources and deeming them officially established corporate identity forms.”

36 Ibid.
5 Conclusion:

Looking into two of the more prominent theories of corporate social responsibility (Stakeholder theory and Triple Bottom-line), and setting them up against Benhabib’s theory of moral universalism, how do these two theories fully or partially, meet the standard of being morally universal?

This question has been the main goal of this entire paper. What conclusions can be drawn in response to this question? In order to work the way up to the answer of this question there has been a variety of topics up for discussion. In the first two chapters it was established what corporate social responsibility is and the important role it plays in protecting the human rights of individuals throughout a global supply chain. While the concrete examples of human rights violations within a global supply chain, and the potential solutions for these violations, were not necessary for answering the thesis question, these examples played an important role in illustrating the reason that a theory of moral universalism could be a positive influence within the realm of corporate social responsibility.

In the comparing of the individual theories, it seems as though there is no answer to the thesis. It seems this way mainly due to the fact that many of the theories were so vaguely worded that there is much room left for individual interpretation. In some ways this vagueness is a positive, because it leaves room for cultural interpretation throughout a supply chain, and in others the vagueness leaves too little room for a concrete criteria of what is required for a theory to be considered morally universal.

The actual analysis of the theories leaves something to be desired, but what seemed to come forward is the stable flexibility of the triple bottom-line theory. The guidelines for this theory are solid enough that it has a good base from which to start a line of communication within the various topics, yet it is broad enough to make it applicable in different types of situations within those same topics. Another important point to have come forward in the analysis is the flimsy nature of the stakeholder theory. Trying this theory against the other theories illustrated very well the large responsibility that stakeholders within a corporation have.

Overall it would seem that if any of the theories have potential to be considered morally universal, then it would be the triple bottom-line theory. However, there are many different theories of CSR and, as was stated before, it is up to the corporation to choose which theory (if
any) fit within their own business practices. Beyond human rights abuses the principles of corporate responsibility are not a legal requirement for running a business. What this means is that the vagueness of the stakeholder theory may be the exact part of the theory that makes it attractive to corporations. It does, after all, provide the sense of freedom for running the corporation as its stakeholders see fit, rather than adapting to a document written to support several corporations of different types. Based on this information, I would say that the answer to the question is that both of these theories meet the potential of being a universal theory in partiality, though based on the reasons already mentioned the theory of triple bottom-line comes the closest based on the criteria established for meeting moral universalism.
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