

# PLURALISM

(Ethical Pluralism)

## “MULTIPLE TRUTHS”

MAIN IDEAS: There are truths about right and wrong and multiple perspectives can each have a piece of those truths. There are a few ways to address differences about what is right that are better than other ways. These “focus areas” can be partial, agree at times and conflict at times. Pluralism serves as a “middle ground” between Absolutism and Relativism.

## QUESTIONS?

### A PLURALIST MAY ASK:

Which perspectives hold a piece of the truth?

How can I balance multiple truths?

How can we find an intersection  
of reasonable perspectives?

## SAYINGS

### ASSOCIATED WITH THIS PERSPECTIVE:

“Multiple Truths”

“Firm, but flexible”

“Bend, don’t break”

“Balancing the truths of different views”

# PROS +

**MIDDLE WAY.** Pluralism allows us to have the conviction that there are some real truths about right and wrong. It also encourages us to be humble and seek out different viewpoints that we may not have considered. It helps us pursue a middle ground between being too open to any random viewpoint (e.g., thinking “there’s no wrong way”) and too closed to different, but reasonable ways of focusing on what is right (e.g., thinking “there’s only one right way”).

*You strongly support free speech rights, but when you see the damaging impact of bullying on a child you decide that you need to balance free speech rights with an understanding of the impact of people’s words.*

**CHECKS AND BALANCES.** Multiple perspectives seem necessary because no singular focus has been shown to be flawless. There is no one principle about what is right that all reasonable people agree on.

*You are selected for jury duty and must vote on a person’s innocence or guilt. The evidence clearly shows their guilt. You live by a focus respected by many people around the world: “treat others as I’d like to be treated.” If you were the one on trial, you would want the jury to let you go even though you were guilty. So, your singular focus on treating others as you’d like to be treated can lead to a lack of fairness/justice. It would help to consider other focus areas for balance.*

# CONS -

**WHICH FOCUS AREAS?** No guidance provided for which focus areas to consider, beyond “multiple”. How many different focus areas have a piece of the truth?

How do I decide which focus areas are best? Should I consider 2, 3, 5, 10 different focus areas?

**WHAT ACTION?** No guidance provided for what to do when focus areas conflict. Sometimes they point to the same answer, but how do we “balance” focus areas when they point to different answers?

*Your family member is near death. There is a new drug that could help save their life. One person owns the drug and is selling it for much more than it should cost in order to develop other drugs. You try extremely hard to raise the money, but can’t get enough. Time is running out. You clearly explain the situation to the drug owner and beg them, but they tell you that they have a right to the full price. Should you steal the drug to save a life? Reasonable focus areas point to different answers and Pluralism does not provide clear or easy answers for what to do.*

## CONCLUSION

Pluralism highlights a valuable lesson: There seem to be some truths about right and wrong and multiple focus areas may each illuminate a piece of those truths. Pluralism can help us find a middle ground between being too rigid and too permissive. WeTake5.com believes that the evidence favors a pluralistic approach to ethics. When deciding what is right, WeTake5.com suggests considering five well-respected focus areas which come from over 2,000 years of moral philosophy (see the 5Cs: **Character**, **Code**, **Consequences**, **Care** and **Consult**). We can look to these individual focus areas to address the Cons of Pluralism.