

CULTURAL RELATIVISM AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY

1.0 Different cultures, different moral codes

- Funeral rites: Callatians vs. Greeks
- Eskimos: sexual practices, infanticide

2.0 Cultural relativism

- Cultural dependency: The thesis that morality depends on culture.
Folkways
- Cultural differences: customs differ from culture to culture.
- Ethical vs. Cultural Relativism
- Various theses

3.0 The Cultural Differences argument

Different cultures have different moral codes.
Therefore, there is no objective truth in morality.

Other considerations: cultural dependency, issues of provability and the possibility of solving moral disputes among cultures

4.0 Consequences of Ethical Relativism

- We can no longer claim that the customs of other cultures are morally inferior to our own
- We could decide whether actions are right or wrong just by consulting the standards of our own culture (moral infallibility)
- The idea of moral progress is called into doubt.
- No place for reform
- The subgroup problem
- Tolerance and contradiction

5.0 Universality of Values?

5.1 Kinds of disagreement

- Disagreement with respect to principles vs. disagreement with respect to the application of the principles (e.g. factual considerations)

5.2 Rules that every society must have in order to exist

- Protecting the young
- Truthfulness
- Murder

5.3 A culturally neutral standard of right and wrong?

Rachels' proposal (p. 29): *Does the practice promote or hinder the welfare of the people whose lives are affected by it?*

6.0 Why, Despite All This, Thoughtful People May Nevertheless Be Reluctant to Criticize Other Cultures.

- People are reluctant to judge because they are uncomfortable interfering in the practices of other cultures.
- People are reluctant to judge because they feel that tolerance is an overriding virtue. We should be tolerant of others, and of other cultures.
- People are reluctant to judge because they do not want to express contempt for others, or for other cultures.

2.8 What Can Be Learned From Cultural Relativism: the Dangers of Ethnocentrism

- Cultural Relativism warns us about the danger of assuming that all our preferences are based on some objective standard.
- Cultural Relativism warns us about the importance of keeping an open mind.