

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### BASIC ETHICAL THEORIES

**Ethics** is the study of morality, including an analysis of the concepts of good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice, duty, responsibility, character, and successful living. In this book, we will discuss whether morality is relative to culture, or to the individual, the relationship between religion and morality, theories about what makes particular actions right or wrong, and the concept of morality as the character traits which would be possessed by an ideal person. We will also consider the challenge of moral skepticism and whether moral truths are real or knowable.

Before we begin, a brief note about the terms "ethical" and "moral" is in order. These terms are nearly if not entirely synonymous in Philosophy, so I will freely move between the two terms as if there were no difference between them. As a matter of fact, a somewhat archaic name for Ethics is "Moral Philosophy." Lexographers and linguists may point out differences in the popular usage of these terms. For instance, the term *moralist* has acquired the negative connotation of a person who pontificates about the faults of others, perhaps while at the same time blind to his own, whereas *ethicist* describes someone who does academic or public policy work involving ethical theory, and has no such negative connotations. But if you think of the way you use these terms in everyday life, I think you'll see that these are at best subtle nuances.

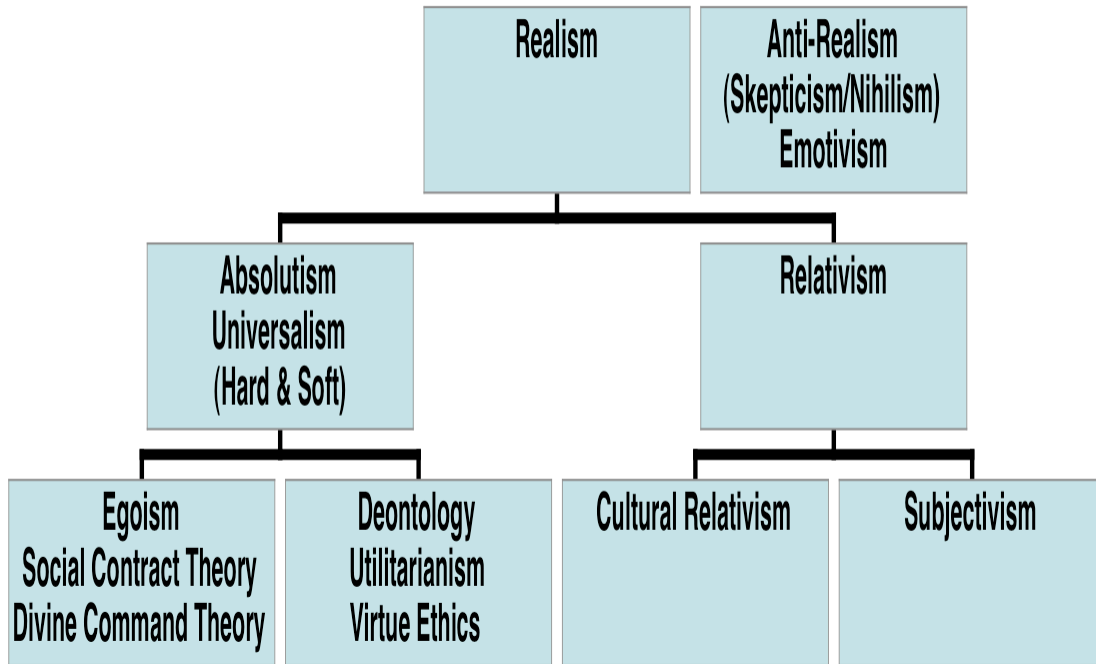
This chapter will give a brief survey of basic ethical theories and show how they are related to one another. Then, in subsequent chapters, we will look at each individually in some depth through important historical works in Philosophy and Literature. Basic ethical theories fall into categories and subcategories. Just as under the general category of *animal*, there insects, birds reptiles, mammals, and under *mammals* there are humans, monkeys, cats, dogs, etc., and among *dogs* there are poodles, bulldogs, greyhounds etc., so ethical theories fall into categories and subcategories.

Ethical theories are either **realist** or **anti-realist**. Realist theories are either **absolutist** or **relativist**, and relativists are either **cultural relativists** or individual relativists usually known as **subjectivists**. The bulk of our discussion will be about the **absolutist** or **universalist** theories of **divine command theory**, **egoism**, **social contract theory**, **utilitarianism**, **deontology** and **virtue ethics**. We will also briefly discuss a distinction between **hard and soft** forms of absolutism/universalism. The chart on the next page shows the relationship of these theories to one another.

The most basic question one can ask about morality is whether it exists at all or possesses any legitimacy. **Anti-realism**, also known as **skepticism** or **nihilism**, maintains that ethics is in some way false or illusory, being an interesting fact of human nature or social evolution, but something without binding force or claim on the individual's behavior. Some nihilists regard morality as nothing more than a conspiracy of the weak to control the powerful among us.

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# Basic Ethical Theories



Anti-realist theories don't have many additional subcategories since the theory essentially says that there is no such thing as ethics. Anti-realists only differ, then, in why people *believe* in morality or what moral statements *mean* if they don't refer to anything real. **Emotivism** or **non-cognitivism** is special version of anti-realism or nihilism that says that moral statements are merely expressions of subjective feelings, attitudes and preferences, with no factual content. Saying "The War in Iraq is immoral" isn't an *objective* statement about the war like "The war in Iraq began in 2003", but rather a *subjective* expression of *disapproval* on the part of the speaker. This disapproval amounts to nothing more than *negative emotional associations* in the speaker's mind, a report of subjective feelings, not objective fact.

In contrast to anti-realism, **realism** maintains that morality expresses objective truths about the world and is a valid and legitimate enterprise. It holds that certain things are right and wrong, good and evil, and that morality does lay claim on what we do and how we should live. **Absolutism** or universalism says that there are some objective, universal moral truths which apply regardless of culture or conscience. Recently the concept of **soft universalism** has been introduced in an attempt to create a more culturally inclusive absolutism. Since an in depth discussion of this here would muddy the distinction between absolutism and relativism, I am going to postpone our discussion of it until the next chapter.

While absolutism holds that there are some universal truths which apply to everyone, **relativism** holds morality is

relative to culture or conscience.

**Cultural relativism** maintains that moral truths are only right or wrong for particular cultures or societies and are defined by what a majority of a society believes or practices. **Subjectivism**, on the other hand, maintains that morality is relative to conscience or an individual's moral code, even if it conflicts with his or her society. It is important to remember that relativism, whether cultural relativism or subjectivism is *still a form of realism*. Although relativism denies that there are any universal or absolute moral truths, it still believes that there are legitimate moral rules, but only *for* particular societies or individuals. If the majority of my society believes that, say, binge drinking is wrong, then it's just as wrong for me under relativism as it would be if absolutism were true and there were a universal moral rule against binge drinking. If my individual moral code or conscience tells me that I should give more to charity, then I am just as obligated to give to charity as I would be if there were a universal moral rule requiring me to give more.

The remainder of the theories we will be studying are sub-categories of absolutism or universalism. **Divine command theory** asserts that the right act is that which is in accord with the will of God. **Egoism** believes that the right act is that which furthers an individual self-interest. **Social contract theory** maintains that there is an implied contract between the individual and the community or State which serves his enlightened self-interest. The right act is the legal act. **Utilitarianism** holds that right act is that which maximizes happiness (not just for oneself, but the total amount of happiness in the world).

Note that the **utility** in utilitarianism is a technical word which means *pleasure and the absence of pain*, not merely what's practical or useful. So utilitarianism says that morality is ultimately about producing the most *net pleasure* possible. **Deontology** maintains that the right act is that which respects absolute moral truths which have no exceptions. Deontologists disagree stringently about the moral importance of happiness and believe morality is about doing your duty and adhering to principle, whatever the consequences. If this creates any happiness it is mere icing on the cake, but has nothing whatsoever to do with morality itself.

**Virtue ethics** suggests that instead of basing morality on defining the conditions under which an act is right or wrong, we should base it on the good qualities of character (virtues) of an ideal individual which make him successful in life. These virtues can be taught to children through good upbringing but must eventually be learned through experience and unquantifiable moral judgment. **Nietzschean ethics**, based on the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, defines the right act as that which embodies the **Will to Power**, the life-force in all of us which seeks to grow and dominate its environment. The **Overman** embodies the will to power and exhibits this in virtues such as physical health and vitality, creativity, optimism, joy, intelligence and ambition. Friedrich Nietzsche's views on ethics are hard to categorize, but I believe are best interpreted as a form of virtue ethics. However, his views about traditional morality and its origins are very unlike traditional virtue theory found in ancient Greek philosophy and demand special analysis.

It is important to remember that each of these theories is *comprehensive* or all-encompassing in its scope. That is, each theory gives an analysis of what morality is and what makes an action right or wrong and cannot be combined with competing theories. This means that one theory cannot be true in one instance and another theory true in another instance. Acts themselves aren't utilitarian or egoist, but rather *if* utilitarianism is true, *then* certain acts will be right or wrong and *if* egoism is true then certain *other* acts will be right and wrong. Note, however, that many of these theories will agree about many things, differing only on *the reasons why* they are right or wrong. For example, an **egoist** and a **utilitarian** might agree that having children you cannot afford is wrong. For the egoist, it is wrong because *it is not in your interest* to do so—it has a negative effect on your individual welfare. For the utilitarian, it is wrong because of the negative effect on both you *and society*, as this is one of the main causes of poverty and lack of social mobility in developed nations, and fatherless households produce children more likely to commit crimes, join gangs, abuse drugs or have various kinds of other social and emotional problems. So, according to utilitarianism, it is the effect on *the general welfare or happiness of society* which makes it wrong to have children you cannot afford—including, but not limited to any reduction of happiness in your own life.

It is also sometimes unclear what things are right or wrong according to a particular theory. For example, suppose we agree that utilitarianism is true and that the right act is that which maximizing happiness. We may still disagree about how to go about it or

*which things* maximize happiness. For example, some people think that radically cutting the size and scope of government and increasing individual freedom and autonomy would be one of the most effective means to increasing human happiness. Others believe that this would lead to disastrous consequences, and that, quite to the contrary, we should increase the size and scope of government, as well as forcible redistribution of income in order to fund more social services for the poor and middle class. The fact that people can proceed from a common theoretical foundation and arrive at vastly different conclusions raises serious questions about the possibility of genuine moral knowledge and by extension, political knowledge. These issues will be addressed in depth the end of the book.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. You've been given a brief introduction to the various theories we'll be considering this term. What questions do you have about them or how they are related to one another or categorized on the chart?
2. Give an example of one of these theories being used to justify an act as right or to condemn it as wrong. Your example could be from history, literature, a movie or television program, current events, or completely made up by you.
3. At this early stage of the game, which theory looks the most promising to you as an account of morality? Why?
4. On the last page it is suggested that the egoist and the utilitarian will agree that having children you cannot afford is

wrong but for different reasons, either your individual well-being (egoism) or the general welfare or happiness of society (utilitarianism). On a more in-depth analysis, will the justification of the utilitarian work for the egoist, and vice versa?

5. Come up with an example or two of an ethical choice where two theories would tell you to do *the same thing*, but for *different reasons*. Explain how each theory justifies the choice.
6. Come up with some examples of ethical choices where two theories might recommend different courses of action. Explain why they differ in the advice they would give you.

## CHAPTER 2 MORAL RELATIVISM

### OF CANNIBALS

Miguel de Montaigne

Translated by Charles Cotton

I long had a man in my house that lived ten or twelve years in the New World, discovered in these latter days, and in that part of it where Villegaignon landed,—[At Brazil, in 1557.]—which he called Antarctic France. This discovery of so vast a country seems to be of very great consideration. I cannot be sure, that hereafter there may not be another, so many wiser men than we having been deceived in this. I am afraid our eyes are bigger than our bellies, and that we have more curiosity than capacity; for we grasp at all, but catch nothing but wind...

This man that I had was a plain ignorant fellow, and therefore the more likely to tell truth: for your better-bred sort of men are much more curious in their observation, 'tis true, and discover a great deal more; but then they gloss upon it, and to give the greater weight to what they deliver, and allure your belief, they cannot forbear a little to alter the story; they never represent things to you simply as they are, but rather as they appeared to them, or as they would have them appear to you, and to gain the reputation of men of judgment, and the better to induce your faith, are willing to help out the business with something more than is really true, of their own invention. Now in this case, we should either have a man of irreproachable veracity, or so simple that he has not wherewithal to contrive, and to give a colour of truth to false relations, and who can have no ends in forging an

untruth. Such a one was mine; and besides, he has at divers times brought to me several seamen and merchants who at the same time went the same voyage. I shall therefore content myself with his information, without inquiring what the cosmographers say to the business...

I find that there is nothing barbarous and savage in this nation, by anything that I can gather, excepting, that every one gives the title of barbarism to everything that is not in use in his own country. As, indeed, we have no other level of truth and reason than the example and idea of the opinions and customs of the place wherein we live: there is always the perfect religion, there the perfect government, there the most exact and accomplished usage of all things. They are savages at the same rate that we say fruits are wild, which nature produces of herself and by her own ordinary progress; whereas, in truth, we ought rather to call those wild whose natures we have changed by our artifice and diverted from the common order. In those, the genuine, most useful, and natural virtues and properties are vigorous and sprightly, which we have helped to degenerate in these, by accommodating them to the pleasure of our own corrupted palate. And yet for all this, our taste confesses a flavour and delicacy excellent even to emulation of the best of ours, in several fruits wherein those countries abound without art or culture. Neither is it reasonable that art should gain the pre-eminence of our great and powerful mother nature. We have so surcharged her with the additional ornaments and graces we have added to the beauty and riches of her own works by our inventions, that we have almost smothered her; yet in other places, where she shines in her own

purity and proper lustre, she marvellously baffles and disgraces all our vain and frivolous attempts:

"Et veniunt hederæ sponte sua melius;  
Surgit et in solis formosior arbutus  
antris; Et volucres nulls dulcius arte  
canunt."

["The ivy grows best spontaneously, the arbutus best in shady caves; and the wild notes of birds are sweeter than art can teach. –"Propertius, i. 2, 10.]

Our utmost endeavours cannot arrive at so much as to imitate the nest of the least of birds, its contexture, beauty, and convenience: not so much as the web of a poor spider.

All things, says Plato,–[Laws, 10.]–are produced either by nature, by fortune, or by art; the greatest and most beautiful by the one or the other of the former, the least and the most imperfect by the last.

These nations then seem to me to be so far barbarous, as having received but very little form and fashion from art and human invention, and consequently to be not much remote from their original simplicity. The laws of nature, however, govern them still, not as yet much vitiated with any mixture of ours: but 'tis in such purity, that I am sometimes troubled we were not sooner acquainted with these people, and that they were not discovered in those better times, when there were men much more able to judge of them than we are. I am sorry that Lycurgus and Plato had no knowledge of them; for to my apprehension, what we now see in those nations, does not only surpass all the pictures with which the poets have adorned the golden age, and all their inventions in feigning a happy

state of man, but, moreover, the fancy and even the wish and desire of philosophy itself; so native and so pure a simplicity, as we by experience see to be in them, could never enter into their imagination, nor could they ever believe that human society could have been maintained with so little artifice and human patchwork. I should tell Plato that it is a nation wherein there is no manner of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no science of numbers, no name of magistrate or political superiority; no use of service, riches or poverty, no contracts, no successions, no dividends, no properties, no employments, but those of leisure, no respect of kindred, but common, no clothing, no agriculture, no metal, no use of corn or wine; the very words that signify lying, treachery, dissimulation, avarice, envy, detraction, pardon, never heard of...

As to the rest, they live in a country very pleasant and temperate, so that, as my witnesses inform me, 'tis rare to hear of a sick person, and they moreover assure me, that they never saw any of the natives, either paralytic, bleareyed, toothless, or crooked with age. The situation of their country is along the sea-shore, enclosed on the other side towards the land, with great and high mountains, having about a hundred leagues in breadth between. They have great store of fish and flesh, that have no resemblance to those of ours: which they eat without any other cookery, than plain boiling, roasting, and broiling. The first that rode a horse thither, though in several other voyages he had contracted an acquaintance and familiarity with them, put them into so terrible a fright, with his centaur appearance, that they killed him with their arrows before they could come to discover who he was.

Their buildings are very long, and of capacity to hold two or three hundred people, made of the barks of tall trees, reared with one end upon the ground, and leaning to and supporting one another at the top, like some of our barns, of which the covering hangs down to the very ground, and serves for the side walls. They have wood so hard, that they cut with it, and make their swords of it, and their grills of it to broil their meat. Their beds are of cotton, hung swinging from the roof, like our seamen's hammocks, every man his own, for the wives lie apart from their husbands. They rise with the sun, and so soon as they are up, eat for all day, for they have no more meals but that; they do not then drink, as Suidas reports of some other people of the East that never drank at their meals; but drink very often all day after, and sometimes to a rousing pitch. Their drink is made of a certain root, and is of the colour of our claret, and they never drink it but lukewarm. It will not keep above two or three days; it has a somewhat sharp, brisk taste, is nothing heady, but very comfortable to the stomach; laxative to strangers, but a very pleasant beverage to such as are accustomed to it. They make use, instead of bread, of a certain white compound, like coriander seeds; I have tasted of it; the taste is sweet and a little flat. The whole day is spent in dancing. Their young men go a-hunting after wild beasts with bows and arrows; one part of their women are employed in preparing their drink the while, which is their chief employment. One of their old men, in the morning before they fall to eating, preaches to the whole family, walking from the one end of the house to the other, and several times repeating the same sentence, till he has finished the round, for their houses are at least a

hundred yards long. Valour towards their enemies and love towards their wives, are the two heads of his discourse, never failing in the close, to put them in mind, that 'tis their wives who provide them their drink warm and well seasoned. The fashion of their beds, ropes, swords, and of the wooden bracelets they tie about their wrists, when they go to fight, and of the great canes, bored hollow at one end, by the sound of which they keep the cadence of their dances, are to be seen in several places, and amongst others, at my house. They shave all over, and much more neatly than we, without other razor than one of wood or stone. They believe in the immortality of the soul, and that those who have merited well of the gods are lodged in that part of heaven where the sun rises, and the accursed in the west.

They have I know not what kind of priests and prophets, who very rarely present themselves to the people, having their abode in the mountains. At their arrival, there is a great feast, and solemn assembly of many villages: each house, as I have described, makes a village, and they are about a French league distant from one another. This prophet declaims to them in public, exhorting them to virtue and their duty: but all their ethics are comprised in these two articles, resolution in war, and affection to their wives. He also prophesies to them events to come, and the issues they are to expect from their enterprises, and prompts them to or diverts them from war: but let him look to't; for if he fail in his divination, and anything happen otherwise than he has foretold, he is cut into a thousand pieces, if he be caught, and condemned for a false prophet: for that reason, if any of them has been mistaken, he is no more heard of.



Divination is a gift of God, and therefore to abuse it, ought to be a punishable imposture. Amongst the Scythians, where their diviners failed in the promised effect, they were laid, bound hand and foot, upon carts loaded with firs and bavins, and drawn by oxen, on which they were burned to death.— [Herodotus, iv. 69.]—Such as only meddle with things subject to the conduct of human capacity, are excusable in doing the best they can: but those other fellows that come to delude us with assurances of an extraordinary faculty, beyond our understanding, ought they not to be punished, when they do not make good the effect of their promise, and for the temerity of their imposture?

They have continual war with the nations that live further within the mainland, beyond their mountains, to which they go naked, and without other arms than their bows and wooden swords, fashioned at one end like the head of our javelins. The obstinacy of their battles is wonderful, and they never end without great effusion of blood: for as to running away, they know not what it is. Every one for a trophy brings home the head of an enemy he has killed, which he fixes over the door of his house. After having a long time treated their prisoners very well, and given them all the regales they can think of, he to whom the prisoner belongs, invites a great assembly of his friends. They being come, he ties a rope to one of the arms of the prisoner, of which, at a distance, out of his reach, he holds the one end himself, and gives to the friend he loves best the other arm to hold after the same manner; which being done, they two, in the presence of all the

assembly, despatch him with their swords. After that, they roast him, eat him amongst them, and send some chops to their absent friends. They do not do this, as some think, for nourishment, as the Scythians anciently did, but as a representation of an extreme revenge; as will appear by this: that having observed the Portuguese, who were in league with their enemies, to inflict another sort of death upon any of them they took prisoners, which was to set them up to the girdle in the earth, to shoot at the remaining part till it was stuck full of arrows, and then to hang them, they thought those people of the other world (as being men who had sown the knowledge of a great many vices amongst their neighbours, and who were much greater masters in all sorts of mischief than they) did not exercise this sort of revenge without a meaning, and that it must needs be more painful than theirs, they began to leave their old way, and to follow this. I am not sorry that we should here take notice of the barbarous horror of so cruel an action, but that, seeing so clearly into their faults, we should be so blind to our own. I conceive there is more barbarity in eating a man alive, than when he is dead; in tearing a body limb from limb by racks and torments, that is yet in perfect sense; in roasting it by degrees; in causing it to be bitten and worried by dogs and swine (as we have not only read, but lately seen, not amongst inveterate and mortal enemies, but among neighbours and fellow-citizens, and, which is worse, under colour of piety and religion), than to roast and eat him after he is dead.

Chrysippus and Zeno, the two heads of the Stoic sect, were of opinion that there was no hurt in making use of our dead

carcasses, in what way soever for our necessity, and in feeding upon them too;—[Diogenes Laertius, vii. 188.]—as our own ancestors, who being besieged by Caesar in the city Alexia, resolved to sustain the famine of the siege with the bodies of their old men, women, and other persons who were incapable of bearing arms.

"Vascones, ut fama est, alimentis talibus usi Produxere animas."

["'Tis said the Gascons with such meats appeased their hunger." —Juvenal, Sat., xv. 93.]

And the physicians make no bones of employing it to all sorts of use, either to apply it outwardly; or to give it inwardly for the health of the patient. But there never was any opinion so irregular, as to excuse treachery, disloyalty, tyranny, and cruelty, which are our familiar vices. We may then call these people barbarous, in respect to the rules of reason: but not in respect to ourselves, who in all sorts of barbarity exceed them. Their wars are throughout noble and generous, and carry as much excuse and fair pretence, as that human malady is capable of; having with them no other foundation than the sole jealousy of valour. Their disputes are not for the conquest of new lands, for these they already possess are so fruitful by nature, as to supply them without labour or concern, with all things necessary, in such abundance that they have no need to enlarge their borders. And they are, moreover, happy in this, that they only covet so much as their natural necessities require: all beyond that is superfluous to them: men of the same age call one another generally brothers, those who are younger, children; and the old men

are fathers to all. These leave to their heirs in common the full possession of goods, without any manner of division, or other title than what nature bestows upon her creatures, in bringing them into the world. If their neighbours pass over the mountains to assault them, and obtain a victory, all the victors gain by it is glory only, and the advantage of having proved themselves the better in valour and virtue: for they never meddle with the goods of the conquered, but presently return into their own country, where they have no want of anything necessary, nor of this greatest of all goods, to know happily how to enjoy their condition and to be content. And those in turn do the same; they demand of their prisoners no other ransom, than acknowledgment that they are overcome: but there is not one found in an age, who will not rather choose to die than make such a confession, or either by word or look recede from the entire grandeur of an invincible courage. There is not a man amongst them who had not rather be killed and eaten, than so much as to open his mouth to entreat he may not. They use them with all liberality and freedom, to the end their lives may be so much the dearer to them; but frequently entertain them with menaces of their approaching death, of the torments they are to suffer, of the preparations making in order to it, of the mangling their limbs, and of the feast that is to be made, where their carcass is to be the only dish. All which they do, to no other end, but only to extort some gentle or submissive word from them, or to frighten them so as to make them run away, to obtain this advantage that they were terrified, and that their constancy was shaken; and indeed, if rightly taken, it is in this point only that a true victory consists:

"Victoria nulla est,  
Quam quae confessor animo quoque  
subjugat hostes."

["No victory is complete, which the  
conquered do not admit to be so.—"  
Claudius, De Sexto Consulatu Honorii ,  
v. 248.]...

...these prisoners are so far from  
discovering the least weakness, for all  
the terrors that can be represented to  
them, that, on the contrary, during the  
two or three months they are kept, they  
always appear with a cheerful  
countenance; importune their masters to  
make haste to bring them to the test,  
defy, rail at them, and reproach them  
with cowardice, and the number of  
battles they have lost against those of  
their country. I have a song made by  
one of these prisoners, wherein he bids  
them "come all, and dine upon him, and  
welcome, for they shall withal eat their  
own fathers and grandfathers, whose  
flesh has served to feed and nourish him.  
These muscles," says he, "this flesh and  
these veins, are your own: poor silly  
souls as you are, you little think that the  
substance of your ancestors' limbs is  
here yet; notice what you eat, and you  
will find in it the taste of your own  
flesh:" in which song there is to be  
observed an invention that nothing  
relishes of the barbarian. Those that  
paint these people dying after this  
manner, represent the prisoner spitting in  
the faces of his executioners and making  
wry mouths at them. And 'tis most  
certain, that to the very last gasp, they  
never cease to brave and defy them both  
in word and gesture. In plain truth, these  
men are very savage in comparison of  
us; of necessity, they must either be  
absolutely so or else we are savages; for

there is a vast difference betwixt their  
manners and ours.

The men there have several wives, and  
so much the greater number, by how  
much they have the greater reputation  
for valour. And it is one very  
remarkable feature in their marriages,  
that the same jealousy our wives have to  
hinder and divert us from the friendship  
and familiarity of other women, those  
employ to promote their husbands'  
desires, and to procure them many  
spouses; for being above all things  
solicitous of their husbands' honour, 'tis  
their chiefest care to seek out, and to  
bring in the most companions they can,  
forasmuch as it is a testimony of the  
husband's virtue. Most of our ladies will  
cry out, that 'tis monstrous; whereas in  
truth it is not so, but a truly matrimonial  
virtue, and of the highest form. In the  
Bible, Sarah, with Leah and Rachel, the  
two wives of Jacob, gave the most  
beautiful of their handmaids to their  
husbands; Livia preferred the passions of  
Augustus to her own interest; —  
[Suetonius, Life of Augustus , c. 71.]—  
and the wife of King Deiotarus,  
Stratonice, did not only give up a fair  
young maid that served her to her  
husband's embraces, but moreover  
carefully brought up the children he had  
by her, and assisted them in the  
succession to their father's crown.

Three of these people, not foreseeing  
how dear their knowledge of the  
corruptions of this part of the world will  
one day cost their happiness and repose,  
and that the effect of this commerce will  
be their ruin, as I presuppose it is in a  
very fair way (miserable men to suffer  
themselves to be deluded with desire of  
novelty and to have left the serenity of  
their own heaven to come so far to gaze

at ours!), were at Rouen at the time that the late King Charles IX. was there. The king himself talked to them a good while, and they were made to see our fashions, our pomp, and the form of a great city. After which, some one asked their opinion, and would know of them, what of all the things they had seen, they found most to be admired? To which they made answer, three things, of which I have forgotten the third, and am troubled at it, but two I yet remember. They said, that in the first place they thought it very strange that so many tall men, wearing beards, strong, and well armed, who were about the king ('tis like they meant the Swiss of the guard), should submit to obey a child, and that they did not rather choose out one amongst themselves to command. Secondly (they have a way of speaking in their language to call men the half of one another), that they had observed that there were amongst us men full and crammed with all manner of commodities, whilst, in the meantime, their halves were begging at their doors, lean and half-starved with hunger and poverty; and they thought it strange that these necessitous halves were able to suffer so great an inequality and injustice, and that they did not take the others by the throats, or set fire to their houses.

I talked to one of them a great while together, but I had so ill an interpreter, and one who was so perplexed by his own ignorance to apprehend my meaning, that I could get nothing out of him of any moment: Asking him what advantage he reaped from the superiority he had amongst his own people (for he was a captain, and our mariners called him king), he told me, to march at the head of them to war. Demanding of him

further how many men he had to follow him, he showed me a space of ground, to signify as many as could march in such a compass, which might be four or five thousand men; and putting the question to him whether or no his authority expired with the war, he told me this remained: that when he went to visit the villages of his dependence, they plained him paths through the thick of their woods, by which he might pass at his ease. All this is not too bad – but what's the purpose? They don't wear breeches."

[I've slightly modified the translation of this last line, which is somewhat obscure in Cotton's original translation. Montaigne's point is that having the brush cleared where you walk doesn't seem like such a big deal until you consider that the cannibals don't wear pants and otherwise have their legs scratched by the jungle growth. –J.B.]

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Make a list of the cultural differences between Europeans and the cannibal culture he discusses. What did the cannibals think of the Europeans during their visit? What would you imagine most Europeans thought of the cannibals? What does Montaigne think of them?
2. Montaigne is often interpreted as a cultural relativist. Is this interpretation accurate? Why or why not? Under what other theory might he be classified?
3. What are some cultural practices in our own culture which may seem abhorrent to members of other cultures?
4. Given that everyone is habituated to their own culture and likely to accept

most of the practices or taboos they grew up with, how does one obtain objective knowledge about right and wrong, good and evil? Or would you have to conclude that morality is relative to culture or perhaps objective, but unknowable?

5. Is cannibalism objectively wrong, wrong only if you are not a member of culture which practices it, or is it merely a widely held cultural taboo, corresponding to no underlying moral reality?

LETTER FROM  
A BIRMINGHAM JAIL  
Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.  
April 16, 1963

MY DEAR FELLOW CLERGYMEN:

While confined here in the Birmingham City Jail, I came across your recent statement calling our present activities "unwise and untimely." Seldom, if ever, do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would be engaged in little else in the course of the day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine goodwill and your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I would like to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms...

We have waited for more than three hundred and forty years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jet-like speed toward the goal of political independence, and we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward the gaining of a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate filled policemen curse, kick, brutalize and even kill your black brothers and sisters with impunity; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek

to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little mental sky, and see her begin to distort her little personality by unconsciously developing a bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son asking in agonizing pathos: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger," your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tip-toe stance never quite knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"; then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.

You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws. This is certainly a legitimate concern. Since we so diligently urge people to obey the

Supreme Court's decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools, it is rather strange and paradoxical to find us consciously breaking laws. One may well ask: "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer is found in the fact that there are two types of laws: There are *just* and there are *unjust* laws. I would agree with Saint Augustine that "An unjust law is no law at all."

Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine when a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of Saint Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority, and the segregated a false sense of inferiority. To use the words of Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher, segregation substitutes an "I-it" relationship for an "I-thou" relationship, and ends up relegating persons to the status of things. So segregation is not only politically, economically and sociologically unsound, but it is morally wrong and sinful. Paul Tillich has said that sin is separation. Isn't segregation an existential expression of man's tragic separation, an expression of his awful estrangement, his terrible sinfulness? So I can urge men to disobey segregation ordinances because they are morally wrong.

Let us turn to a more concrete example of just and unjust laws. An unjust law is a code that a majority inflicts on a minority that is not binding on itself. This is difference made legal. On the other hand a just law is a code that a majority compels a minority to follow that it is willing to follow itself. This is sameness made legal.

Let me give another explanation. An unjust law is a code inflicted upon a minority which that minority had no part in enacting or creating because they did not have the unhampered right to vote. Who can say that the legislature of Alabama which set up the segregation laws was democratically elected? Throughout the state of Alabama all types of conniving methods are used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters and there are some counties without a single Negro registered to vote despite the fact that the Negro constitutes a majority of the population. Can any law set up in such a state be considered democratically structured?

These are just a few examples of unjust and just laws. There are some instances when a law is just on its face and unjust in its application. For instance, I was arrested Friday on a charge of parading without a permit. Now there is nothing wrong with an ordinance which requires a permit for a parade, but when the ordinance is used to preserve segregation and to deny citizens the First-Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and peaceful protest, then it becomes unjust.

I hope you can see the distinction I am trying to point out. In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law as

the rabid segregationist would do. This would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do it *openly, lovingly*, (not hatefully as the white mothers did in New Orleans when they were seen on television screaming "nigger, nigger, nigger") and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and willingly accepts the penalty by staying in jail to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the very highest respect for law.

Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was seen sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar because a higher moral law was involved. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks, before submitting to certain unjust laws of the Roman empire. To a degree academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience.

We can never forget that everything Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was "illegal." It was "illegal" to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany. But I am sure that if I had lived in Germany during that time I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers even though it was illegal. If I lived in a Communist country today where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I believe I would openly advocate disobeying these anti-religious laws. I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers.

First, I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direct action;" who paternalistically feels he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by the myth of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of goodwill is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice, and that when they fail to do this they become dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is merely a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, where the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substance-filled positive peace, where all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive.



We bring it out in the open where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured as long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its pus-flowing ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must likewise be exposed, with all of the tension its exposing creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is Martin Luther King's argument against cultural relativism? What does he propose in its place? Do you agree with his reasoning?
2. According to cultural relativism, if racism is accepted by the majority of a society, would that make it right for that society? Assuming that Martin Luther King represented a minority of Americans in his views or actions, what would relativism say about them at the time he was fighting for civil rights? What would relativism say about the rightness of his views or actions now?

## MORAL RELATIVISM

**Moral Relativism** is a form of Moral Realism which says that morality is a legitimate enterprise, and that there are moral dimensions to the world (i.e. morality isn't just a "useful fiction"), but that they are not universal. Nothing is right or wrong in itself; we always have to ask, "Right or wrong for whom?" Relativists differ on what the standard of measure for moral rules should be. **Cultural Relativists** say it should be what the majority of a society believe or practice. **Subjectivists** (Individual Relativists) say that the standard should be each individual's moral code, regardless of what his society thinks of it. It's important to remember, however, that each of these views are realist views, in that they believe there are moral truths which are binding on us, they only deny that such truths are universal or absolute. They are objective, but differ either from culture to culture, in the case of Cultural Relativism, or from person to person, as in the case of Subjectivism.

## CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Cultural Relativism has the advantage of preserving some of our common sense beliefs about morality and social norms, the idea that the individual is responsible to his or her community, that there are some rules for operating in polite society which are binding on everyone within that society. At the same time, it recognizes that human beings living in different areas have developed different ways of doing things, and that none are necessarily better than the others. When one travels abroad or studies different cultures, one notices that what is considered justified or taboo differs from

culture to culture and that different groups of people value different things. For example, Western Europe and Scandinavia have a more socialist system of government, providing a lot of free or low-cost services but having a high rate of taxation. The United States offers fewer government services but has lower rates of taxation and allow individuals more economic freedom. In Europe, people work less and have longer vacations; here people work longer and have shorter or no vacations but have larger houses, more air conditioning, automobiles and other luxuries. In Mexico and South America, people are not as wealthy as either North America or Europe, but have a much more relaxed pace of life, with less stress and fewer heart attacks.

To make another comparison, in Asian countries, one's family and community come first. The individual must often subordinate his or her wishes to the group. People often work at the same job from birth to death, and have a binding relationship and loyalty with their employer and lasting relationships with those in the town in which they live. They often live and work in the same place for most of their life. In the United States, the individual and his rights (and sometimes responsibilities) are primary. People tend to move around a lot to go to a good school or find a better job. It is considered a good thing to give to one's community or maintain a good relationship with one's family, but these are often subordinated to concerns about career or one's own "nuclear" family. After high school, many children leave home for college, find a job and never return. When their parents become unable to care for themselves, it is common for them to be put into a facility

staffed by professional care-givers, sometimes with financial assistance from the children, but often paid through the parents' own private insurance or savings, or the support of the government.

In contrast, in Asia extended families live together, and children more often care for their aged parents, instead of "strangers." One would be far less likely to date or marry a person with whom one's parents disapproved. Delinquent or deviant behavior is often taken care of informally by the community instead of by a professional police force or social workers. On the other hand, the strong social ties constrain individual freedom in a way that would seem oppressive to most Westerners. In some areas in China and India, marriages are still arranged by parents. Those who break social taboos are shunned by their community and one lacks the anonymity, privacy and independence one enjoys even in a small city in America. Freedom of religion and freedom of speech are virtually non-existent or strongly curtailed in many Asian countries. The State controls the news media and pornography operates underground and is heavily prosecuted. Along with a greater sense of community comes a greater obligation for conformity. "The nail that sticks up gets pounded down" as the old Chinese proverb goes.

A Cultural Relativist would argue that Asia and the West have developed different ways of doing things, neither of which are better or worse than the other. And while the idea of a marriage arranged by one's parents might seem absurd to someone raised in the West, the idea putting one's parents in an "old folks home" might seem equally absurd

to someone raised in the East. Each culture is a law unto itself, Cultural Relativism would say, and no culture should judge or try to change any other. They point out the inappropriateness and negative consequences of British, French and Spanish colonialism, and the attempt to force Western European values and religion on the indigenous peoples of their conquered territories. Cultural Relativists claim that because no culture is "right" or "wrong" in an absolute sense, we ought to have tolerance for cultures other than our own.

#### OBJECTIONS TO CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Cultural Relativism might seem that it works well in some cases, but when examining other cases of beliefs or practices accepted by the majority of a society, serious questions begin to emerge. Is whatever a large enough group of people believe or do always right? Should the majority always rule? And the majority of *whom*—how do you draw cultural boundaries in a world that is not neatly partitioned into homogenous groups of like-minded individuals? Consider the following objections:

(1) Corrupt cultures or heinous cultural practices.

Suppose the majority of people in the pre-Civil War United States believed in slavery. If a cultural relativist is going to be consistent, what should she say about the practice? She would have to say that since a majority of people believed in it, it was right for them to practice it. Assume that the majority of people in Germany during the 30s and 40s supported Hitler and his policies. If a cultural relativist is going to remain

consistent, what should she say about Germans who hid Jews from Nazi soldiers during the Holocaust? Again, it seems that she would have to say that those that hid Jews were immoral. This conflicts with our intuitions about what morality is all about. Morality isn't just a set of rules, but it has to do with things like justice, human rights, compassion and kindness, promoting happiness or reducing suffering, and so on. The idea that the moral standard of the Nazi regime, with its values of militarism, racism and genocide is no better or worse on the whole than any other culture is absurd. The idea that treating people as property and putting them to forced labor, with no concern for their value or autonomy or suffering was right merely because it was believed to be so by the majority is similarly absurd. Other examples of corrupt cultures or heinous cultural practices abound, from the Barbarian hords which engaged in invasion, looting, murdering, raping and pillaging, such as the Mongol hords or Vikings raiders, to the Aztecs who eviscerated alive tens of thousands of people on their stone altars to feed their blood-thirsty gods. Heinous cultural practices in cultures which as a whole may not be considered corrupt include such practices as female genital mutilation, where the clitoris of a pre-adolescent girl is cut off to reduce her sexual desire (predicated on the misogynistic view that women are "sluts and whores," when in reality, it is men who are naturally more promiscuous). Another such practice, still occasionally practiced in parts of rural India is that of suttee, the obligation of a widow to be cremated alive on her husband's funeral pyre. Before the British colonial period, the practice was widespread. Women who did not do this were shunned and

reduced to becoming homeless beggars or prostitutes. Again, this would seem to be predicated on a misogynistic view of women as having no intrinsic worth.

Of course various examples of genocide would also seem to qualify, such as Hitler's "final solution," which killed six million Jews, at first by firing squad and hastily dug trenches, and later in methodically constructed gas chambers and incinerators in the death camps such as Auschwitz, Dachau, Treblinka and elsewhere. We can add others such as the lesser known murder of one million Armenians by the Turks in World War I, the Jews' own ancient genocidal war of conquest against the Canaanites, attempts to wipe Native American populations by American settlers, North Vietnam's Pol Pot's massacre of millions after the America withdrew from Southeast Asia, and Saddam Husein's attempt to wipe out Kurdish populations in Northern Iraq, including the use of chemical warfare agents. Even today light-skinned Northern Sudanese Muslims are still waging a genocidal campaign against the darker-complected Animist and Christian Sudanese to the South, wiping out entire villages and selling women and children into slavery.

So aren't militarism, racism, sexism, religious discrimination and slavery bad or wrong, even if the majority of a particular culture supports them? If so, then relativism is false.

(2) Moral progress is impossible under Cultural Relativism.

The idea of moral progress, that things have gotten better and that we should work towards producing a more just society is an incoherent notion under

Cultural Relativism. Under Cultural Relativism, you can't have a "better" or "worse" set of social rules, only different social rules. The only sense in which the society itself would become better is in 100% agreement or compliance on some set of rules, whatever it happens to be. But most people think we have improved society in, say, the last 300 years in the Western Hemisphere. We've gone from slavery, racism and various kinds of monarchies and dictatorships to democracy, equal rights for women, outlawing discrimination on the basis of race and a general ostracization of racists, outlawing child labor, free public education and public libraries, and so on. This doesn't mean we can't improve, but if you look at how far we've come in reaching towards the ideals of equality, we have made significant progress. But the idea of progress only makes sense in the context of some universal standard or ideal which we are attempting to reach or embody. Without a transcendent universal standard outside our culture by which it may be judged, the notion of moral progress is nonsensical. Moral progress isn't impossible in the sense that we can't improve society if everyone is a cultural relativist, it is that the whole concept of improving society is rendered meaningless, unless by improvement you simply mean increasing conformity to the standards of your culture, whatever they happen to be.

(3) The minority is always wrong under cultural relativism.

One benefit of cultural relativism is that, if true, it would take a lot of the guesswork out of moral decision-making; if one were unsure of whether a particular act was right and wrong, one could settle the matter by consulting the

appropriate poll. But this also means that great social reformers or courageous individuals who attempted to change society for the better are immoral. People such as Women's Rights advocate Susan B. Anthony, Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, or Rosa Parks were all bad people, that is, until they were able to help sway the majority to their side, at which time they became good people, and their views went from being wrong to right. This is paradoxical, to say the least. Aren't some of the greatest people those who challenged prevailing wisdom, tradition, and the *status quo*, and who *ignored* public opinion? Don't we disdain leaders who always have their finger in the air to see which way the wind is blowing and are driven by polls rather than core values?

(4) There is no non-arbitrary way to define "culture".

Defining what counts as a 'culture' in cultural relativism, and deciding who belongs in which cultural group is not just a difficult task, but an impossible one. We are all members of various institutional and non-institutionalized social groups: political, religious, economic, along with various sub-cultures, such as academia or being a musician or an artist. Allen Ginsberg was an atheist, Jewish, homosexual poet living in San Francisco, making his most acclaimed contributions in the 1960s. Which culture does he answer to? American culture? But American culture is extremely diverse. The values of San Francisco are not the values of rural Georgia or a backwater town in Mississippi. Should he have commissioned a national opinion poll to find out to what degree his liberal

enclave may have diverged from the majority of Americans? By virtue of his Jewish cultural heritage, should he have started believing in God or stopped being a practicing homosexual? Or by virtue of his deep roots in the artistic community, should he have focused on the values of his fellow artists? It's likely that Mr. Ginsberg would have far more in common with poets or artists in any European country or even with those in large coastal cities in Europe, than with "Average Americans" in Kansas or Utah. So why the focus on large land masses or vast political boundaries which group people together who will never meet and link people to places they may never go?

And what about immigration? Must you abandon your culture when you move to a new place or can you retain it? If you a recent Chinese immigrant and live in Chinatown, can you continue to live according to Chinese values or must you instantly adopt American values? Maybe you are spending too much time on your homework and making your American counterparts look bad! You might be too respectful of authority or your parents to fit the American mold. It might be a good idea to cut class or start smoking marijuana just to make sure you fit in.

And when you look at religious or class subcultures, you see that a Mormon in Utah may have more values common with Mormons from other parts of the world than with an atheist living in Utah. A devout Pentecostal construction worker in America may have more values in common with one living in Mexico than his neighbor the lapsed Catholic University professor. Someone who is a raver, a Deadhead, an athlete, and so on, may have more in common with those of other countries than the

average person in their own country. One might say that most artists and musicians tend to be subversives of one sort or another; are they obligated to change their values to be in accord with mainstream society? And again, aren't the great artists the ones who break with tradition, who set the trend rather than conform to the status quo?

Culture and society are diverse and complex, there is no easy, non-arbitrary way to divide people up. But if you can't do this, you don't have any objective standard of measure by which an individual's behavior can be judged and cultural relativism collapses.

(5) Is tolerance always a good thing? Does cultural relativism lead to tolerance? Does it propose tolerance as an absolute and universal value?

Many suggest that we should embrace cultural relativism because it will lead to greater tolerance. But tolerance is not always good. Should we have been tolerant of the Nazis because, after all, if they wanted to exterminate their minority subversive populations—Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, Jehovah's witnesses, those who didn't go along with the Reich—that's none of our business. Amnesty International is just morally confused, according to cultural relativism. If a country wants to torture political prisoners or persecute religious minorities, that's their business. If women are treated as property or second class citizens in various countries in the Middle East, we should look the other way. But most of us think that there is such a thing as "human rights", which are what groups like Amnesty International and other international organizations are working towards. But

if cultural relativism is true, then there can be no such thing as "human rights", only "American rights" "European rights", "Muslim rights", and so on.

And relativism doesn't necessarily lead to tolerance. There are some very intolerant cultures and relativism would say that their intolerant practices aimed at minority populations are justified, so long as they are supported by the majority.

The historic focus on the value of tolerance by cultural relativists would appear to be contradictory. On the one hand they assert that all values are relative to culture, but the same time, they assert that it is (absolutely, universally) morally wrong for one culture to impose its values on another. Shouldn't this obsession with tolerance, "diversity" and non-judgmentalism really be considered to be an American or European value, or perhaps a value of the American-European cultural elite? Certainly it is not a part of the culture of Saudi Arabia or North Korea.

The views espoused by those who claim to be Cultural Relativists seem to be more consistent with those of **Soft Universalism**, which asserts that *there are universal values which apply to everyone, regardless of culture or conscience, but the way in which these values are embodied or applied may differ from culture to culture.* **Hard Universalism** maintains that ethical truths are very *particular* and *specific* in nature. For example, the concept that sex is only right in a monogamous, heterosexual relationship must be either true or false. Soft universalism holds that moral truths are general and could be represented in a variety of cultural

forms. For example, it might be a moral truth that sexual relationships should be in the context of a consensual, loving relationship, but may be polygamous (one person with one or more spouses, as practiced in Islamic countries in the Middle East, Tibet, Nepal, and Sri Lanka), monogamous (the rule in Western Europe and North America) or same sex couplings (increasingly accepted in the Europe and the U.S., accepted as normal in Ancient Greece).

However, critics suggest that soft universalism may just be a slippery slope to relativism. What do you say about cultures in which women are treated as second class citizens and the society disapproves of them in any but traditional roles as wives and mothers? Is this simply that society's way of valuing the contribution of women or cherishing their value, or does it violate a universal moral rule of gender equality?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are there any moral principles which are either shared by all cultures or which apply to every human being, regardless of their culture? If so, give an example. If not, describe the consequences for the possibility of harmony in multi-cultural societies such as the United States or of lasting global peace.
2. Isn't it obvious that Nazi Germany was a corrupt culture or that various cultural practices, such as racism, genocide, or slavery are immoral? If so, what does that say about cultural relativism?
3. Many people are under the impression that cultural relativism should be

embraced because it is a more tolerant view than absolutism or universalism. Is tolerance always desirable? Does cultural relativism naturally lead to greater tolerance?

4. Subjectivism is relativism on an individual level and says that right and wrong are determined by each individual's moral code. Which of cultural relativism's problems does this view avoid? Which does it share? What problems of its own might it have? Argue for or against this view.