

Ethical Relativism

US275 Scientific Ethics
John R. Hoffman
Arcadia University



Ethnocentrism

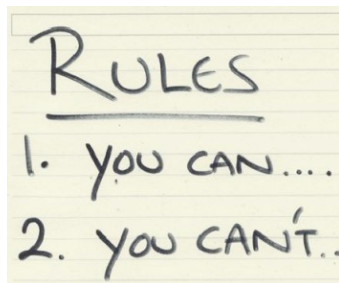
- view everything from the perspective of your own cultural beliefs and values
- prejudicial view
 - common during colonialism



Father Marquette and the Indians
William Lamprech, 1869

Moral Objectivism

- belief in some universal or objective moral principles
 - for all people
 - in all social environments
- to be covered in next lecture



Ethical Relativism

- moral principles are created by humans
 - principles are dependent upon the perspective of the creators
- Two branches
 - Subjective ethical relativism
 - Conventional ethical relativism



<http://www.21stcenturycollaborative.com/2010/12/how-do-it-yourself-diy-pd-works-what-are-you-working-on/>

Subjectivism (Subjective Ethical Relativism)

- moral rules established by the individual
 - not based on one's culture
 - not based on an objective value
- Problem:
 - Hitler would be as moral as Ghandi as long as both acted according to their principles.



Conventionalism (Conventional Ethical Relativism)

- Moral principles justified by their cultural acceptance.
 - social nature of principles
 - still no universal principles



The Mayflower Compact, 1620
Jean Leon Gerome Ferris

Conventionalism: Diversity Thesis

- Cultural Relativism
 - moral rules differ from society to society



<http://www.veteranstoday.com/2010/10/13/before-we-kill-each-other-over-religion-take-this-quiz/>

Conventionalism: Dependency Thesis

- individual acts are judged in the context of the culture in which they occur.



Ethical Relativism is dependent upon intercultural tolerance

- If morality is based on culture,
 - then you can only criticize the morality of your own culture
- If we cannot criticize other cultures,
 - then we must be tolerant to the morality of other cultures



http://blogs.msdn.com/blogfiles/willy-peter_schaub/windowslive/writer/sdlcsoftwaredevelopmentlifecyclewhatsthe_85d7/clipart_of_15195_sm_2.jpg

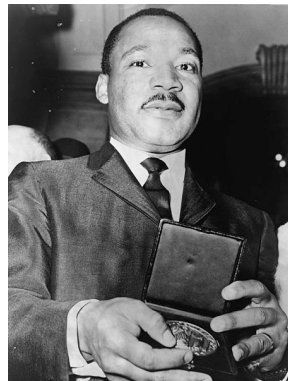
Ethical Relativism is dependent upon intercultural tolerance (Cont)

- If morality is based on culture
 - then we must be tolerant of the moralities of other cultures
- but what if the morality of the culture is one of intolerance...

HATE
is not a
FAMILY
VALUE

Civil Disobedience

- Moral reformers challenge the acceptance of current cultural standards
- according to conventional ethical relativism,
 - their actions are wrong...



Martin Luther King, Jr.
U.S. Library of Congress

Conventional Ethical Relativism leads to Subjectivism

- Most individuals in modern world are members in a number of societies and/or cultures.
- What is the definition of a culture or a society
 - subculture...



Is moral diversity exaggerated?

- Are there similarities among the moral codes of different cultures?



clay tablet with prologue of the "Code of Hammurabi" around 1772 B.C.

Assignment

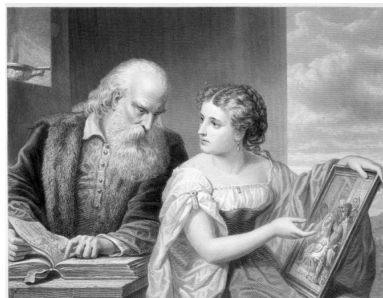
The activity for this topic will be assigned in the Moral Objectivism mini-lecture



Readings

Chapter 2: Ethical Relativism

Pojman & Fieser,
Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong



Engraving based on Daniel Huntington's 1868 painting
Philosophy and Christian Art.
W. Ridgway

Any Questions?

Email me at:
hoffmanj@arcadia.edu



<http://www.vippitbullkennels.com/images/animated-question-mark.gif>