RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cultural relativism: Truths and falsehoods

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Abstract

This article presents a critical philosophical and sociological examination of cultural relativism. While acknowledging the empirical fact of cultural diversity, it argues that drawing normative or epistemic relativism from cultural differences constitutes a logical fallacy. The core principles of cultural relativism are analyzed to expose their internal contradictions and conceptual ambiguities. Specifically, the descriptive claim regarding cultural variation does not necessarily lead to the normative assertion that all moral systems are equally valid. In rejecting radical relativism, the article advocates for the coherence and necessity of certain universal ethical principles that transcend cultural contexts. It warns that an uncompromising relativist stance can undermine moral critique and justify ethically problematic practices, including violations of fundamental human rights. While promoting intercultural respect and tolerance, the article emphasizes the importance of subjecting both ethical and epistemological relativism to rigorous critical evaluation. Ultimately, it calls for a reflective equilibrium that respects cultural particularity without abandoning the pursuit of objective moral reasoning.

Background

In an era marked by increasing globalization, migration, and intercultural interaction, the debate surrounding cultural relativism has gained renewed significance in both academic and policy-making circles. The growing visibility of diverse moral frameworks and cultural practices across societies has led many to question the universality of ethical norms and the objectivity of moral reasoning. While cultural relativism seeks to promote tolerance and respect for difference, its uncritical acceptance poses substantial challenges to the defense of fundamental human rights and universal ethical standards. This article addresses a timely and pressing issue: the tension between cultural diversity and the need for coherent moral critique. By examining the theoretical inconsistencies of cultural relativism, the study highlights the importance of distinguishing between descriptive cultural differences and normative moral judgments. In doing so, it contributes to contemporary discourse on ethics, multiculturalism, and global justice, advocating for a balanced approach that neither imposes cultural uniformity nor endorses moral indifference.

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Introduction

As Terry Eagleton aptly observes, culture is an extraordinarily complex and polysemous term. In his influential work The Idea of Culture (2000), Eagleton identifies at least four dominant meanings: first, culture as the totality of artistic and intellectual works; second, as a process of spiritual and intellectual cultivation; third, as the constellation of values, beliefs, traditions, and symbolic practices that inform people's lived experiences; and fourth, as a comprehensive form of life or a way of being-in-the-world. While the first two definitions are commonly associated with the humanistic and aesthetic traditions of thought, the latter two have become central to the anthropological and sociological uses of the term. It is within these latter senses that the

doctrine of cultural relativism primarily situates itself.[1]

Cultural relativism, broadly defined, refers to the idea that moral values, epistemic norms, and social customs are not universal but rather contingent upon specific cultural frameworks.[2] Those who endorse this view often do so in an effort to promote tolerance, pluralism, and a deeper appreciation of cultural difference. Despite its relatively recent emergence as a formal doctrine—largely shaped by 20th-century anthropologists such as Franz Boas[3] and Ruth Benedict[4]—the recognition of cultural diversity as a significant philosophical problem dates back to antiquity.

For example, in The Histories, Herodotus recounts how King Darius of Persia encountered vastly different funeral customs among various peoples, illustrating a rudimentary form of cultural relativism. Darius famously orchestrates a thought experiment: he asks the Greeks what sum of money would compel them to eat the corpses of their deceased fathers, an act they find unthinkable. He then asks the Callatians, who customarily consume their dead, what compensation would induce them to burn their fathers' bodies—a notion they find equally abhorrent. Herodotus uses this anecdote to highlight the deeply ingrained, and often conflicting, moral intuitions that emerge from differing cultural matrices.[5]

A more systematic engagement with the implications of cultural difference is found in classical Greek philosophy, especially among the Sophists and later the Skeptics. The Sophist Protagoras famously declared that "man is the measure of all things," thereby introducing a relativist orientation in both epistemology and ethics.[6] The Skeptics, particularly Pyrrhonists like Sextus Empiricus, advanced this line of thought through their tropoi (modes), which expose the contradictions and irresolvable disputes between cultural norms, beliefs, and laws. Sextus, for instance, catalogs a variety of cultural practices—from Ethiopian tattooing to Egyptian sibling marriages—to argue that there is no rational basis upon which to adjudicate among them. The appropriate response, he maintains, is epochē (suspension of judgment), which frees the individual from dogmatism and the illusion of certainty.[7]

This skeptical orientation toward moral universalism resurfaced in early modernity in the writings of Michel de Montaigne[8] and David Hume[9], who both approached human customs and beliefs with a blend of irony, skepticism, and anthropological curiosity. However, running parallel to this relativist tradition is a powerful countercurrent in Western philosophy that insists upon the reality of objective truths and universal values. From Socrates and Plato[10] to al-Farabi[11], Descartes[12], and Kant[13], philosophers have sought to ground morality and knowledge in principles that transcend cultural or historical contingency. The Enlightenment, in particular, intensified the aspiration toward universality, culminating in the formulation of universal human rights and the categorical imperative as expressions of rational moral law.[14]

In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, relativist and anti-foundationalist approaches returned to prominence, notably through the influence of post-structuralist and postmodern thinkers such as Michel Foucault[15], Richard Rorty[16], and Jean-François Lyotard.[17] These currents

[1] Terry Eagleton. *The Idea of Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000, pp.1-15.
[2] David Wong, *Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 7.
[3] Franz Boas, *Race, Language and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940, pp.15-40.
[4] Benedict Ruth, *Patterns of Culture*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934, pp.12-35.
[5] Herodotus. *The Histories*. Translated by Robin Waterfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Book 3, Chapter 38, pp. 140–142.
[6] Hermann Diels, and Walther Kranz. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. Berlin: Weidmann, 1951, Fr. 80 B1.
[7] Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R. G. Bury. London: Heinemann, 1990,I.36-179.
[8] Montaigne, Michel de. The Essays. Translated by M. A. Screech. London: Penguin Classics, 1991, pp. 125-145.
[9] Hume, David. An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding. Edited by Eric Steinberg. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993, pp. 60-85.
[10] Julia Annas, "The Morality of Happiness." Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes 78 (2004): 1–18
[11] Muhsin Mahdi, "Alfarabi and the Philosophy of Culture." Philosophy East and West 17, no. 2 (1967): 115–134.
[12] Steven Nadler, "Descartes' Ethics," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2020, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/descartes-ethics/, bölümler 2–3.
[13] Allen W. Wood, "Kantian Ethics." Philosophy Compass 2, no. 3 (2007): 536–57.
[14] Lynn Hunt, "The Birth of Human Rights: Enlightenment, Revolution, and the Modern State." The American Historical Review 110, no. 4 (2005): 1001–1012.
[15] Hubert L. Dreyfus, and Paul Rabinow. Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983, pp.30-60.
[16] Richard Rorty, "Relativism: Ironist and Pragmatist." Philosophical Papers, vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp.45-70.
[17] Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. Translated by Geoff Bennington

challenged the universalist pretensions of Enlightenment rationalism, emphasizing instead the historical, linguistic, and cultural situatedness of all knowledge claims. Within this intellectual climate, cultural relativism has been increasingly embraced as both a descriptive claim about human diversity and a normative commitment to pluralism and tolerance.[18]

Today, the doctrine enjoys wide acceptance across the humanities and social sciences. In many academic and political circles, critiques of relativism are met with suspicion, often regarded as expressions of ethnocentrism, moral absolutism, or intolerance. As such, relativism has become not merely a philosophical position but a moral-political attitude—one deeply intertwined with contemporary debates over multiculturalism, identity, and global ethics.[19]

Nevertheless, important philosophical questions remain: What does cultural relativism actually entail? Do its descriptive claims logically support its normative conclusions? To what extent is it a coherent and defensible position? And why does it remain so intellectually and morally attractive despite its controversial implications? In this essay, we aim to examine the theoretical foundations, internal tensions, and practical consequences of cultural relativism. By doing so, we hope to offer a balanced appraisal—one that neither dismisses the insights of relativism nor overlooks its conceptual and ethical limitations.

Cultural Differences and Cultural Relativism

First and foremost, it should be noted that cultural relativism begins with the observation that different cultures possess different norms, practices, and conceptions of truth; it grounds its legitimacy in the sociological fact of cultural difference. According to this view, there is no such thing as an objective truth; rather, there exist multiple truths that vary according to language, culture, gender, beliefs, needs, and tastes, all of which are equally valid and compete with one another. Furthermore, cultural relativism holds that what is considered true within one group or culture may be utterly repugnant to members of another, and vice versa.[20]

This perspective is deeply influenced by postmodern and constructivist currents in philosophy and anthropology, which emphasize that knowledge itself is historically and socially constructed rather than discovered. [21]Under this lens, even the criteria by which we would judge a belief or a practice as "true," "valid," or "good" are themselves contingent upon cultural contexts. This leads to what Michel Foucault terms regimes of truth, meaning that truth is produced and authorized by cultural, institutional, and historical forces rather than existing independently.[22]

To open the discussion, drawing on Herodotus's example: should we consume the corpses of the dead or cremate them? Or, following Sextus Empiricus's illustration: should we marry our sisters as in ancient Egypt, or should we, like the Greeks, find such unions abhorrent? Advocates of cultural relativism argue that if we lived in the Greek society of the time, cremation would be right and marrying sisters wrong; if we were Indians, cremation would be wrong and corpse consumption right; if we were ancient Egyptians, marriage to sisters would be lawful, and so forth. Certainly, it is not difficult to multiply such examples.

These examples function as evidence of radical moral diversity. However, they also raise the deeper philosophical issue of whether difference implies equivalence—that is, whether the existence of different practices entails that all are equally valid. Relativists often conflate the fact of difference with the norm of equal legitimacy. But the latter requires an independent justification, not merely empirical observation.

For instance, it is evident that some elements of pre-Islamic Arab cultures differed markedly from ours. It is well known that Arab men generally had multiple wives and even concubines. Islamic culture sought to limit wives to four. The differences are not confined to marriage and sexual practices. Pre-

and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp. 20-50.

[18] Lawrence Grossberg, "Cultural Studies and the Politics of Postmodernism." Cultural Studies 1, no. 3 (1987): 271–287.

[19] Hacking, Ian. "The Social Construction of What?" Harvard University Press, 1999, pp.25-40; Warren D. Walsh, and Paul J. Kecskemeti, "Cultural Relativism and Political Theory." Ethics & International Affairs 2, no. 1 (1988): 43–58; Richard Rorty, "Relativism and the Social Sciences." Philosophy and Social Hope. London: Penguin Books, 1999, pp. 85–100.

[20] Maria Baghramian, "Introduction: The Many Faces of Relativism." In The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Relativism, edited by Maria Baghramian, London: Routledge, 2020, pp. 1–20; Jesse Prinz, "Culture and Cognitive Science." In The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Relativism, edited by Maria Baghramian, London: Routledge, 2020, pp.147-163.

[21] Peter L. Berger, and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Anchor Books, 1966, pp.1-18.

[22]Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977. Edited by Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980, pp. 131-133.

Islamic Arabs appear to have shown less respect for human life compared to our standards. For example, female infanticide was reportedly widespread among pre-Islamic Arabs, with the destruction of female infants left to the discretion of parents and allowed without social stigma. Similarly, in Eskimo culture, elderly individuals who became too weak to contribute to the family were said to be abandoned in snowy environments to die.

Our own lifestyle and values seem so natural and correct that we shudder at such life-denying practices of pre-Islamic Arabs and Eskimos. Upon encountering these, our natural reflex is to condemn them as "backward" or "primitive." Such peculiar differences in practice should not be thought confined to history; in many modern societies, practices such as female genital mutilation, child marriage, honor killings, blood feuds, stoning (as a punishment for adultery), and veiling remain prevalent. Proponents of cultural relativism regard these as normal, even legitimizing them.

Yet this raises a tension: if every practice is right within its own cultural framework, does that mean we must suspend judgment even in the face of cruelty or oppression? At this point, relativism appears to conflict with fundamental moral intuitions—such as the wrongness of unnecessary harm, violence, or coercion.

Philosophically, the central question is this: Can we legitimize such practices under the concept of cultural relativism? Or, more precisely, does the acknowledgment of cultural difference commit us to moral relativism?

According to postmodernist thinkers, different cultures have different moral norms, laws, customs, and regimes of truth, and this is a reality. This reality, they argue, demonstrates that the idea of universality in law, ethics, and even the notion of truth is a myth. Therefore, we cannot judge the truth regimes, ethical values, customs, and social practices of different societies as "right" or "wrong," because that would imply that we possess an independent and objective standard of right and wrong by which they could be judged. However, such an independent and objective standard does not exist; every standard is embedded in culture, culturally relative.[23]

However, this line of thought leads to a form of epistemic and moral skepticism that is hard to sustain. If all standards are internal to cultures, and there is no external standpoint from which to evaluate them, then no form of ethical critique—whether of others or of one's own culture—is possible. This position undermines both moral accountability and the possibility of moral progress.

This line of thought, frankly, invites skepticism regarding values. In this respect, cultural relativism, with its skeptical stance, challenges our ordinary belief in the objectivity and universality of moral reality and even truth in general. Because according to this theory, which denies the existence of universal truth in the domains of values and knowledge, there are only various cultural norms, assumptions, practices, and regimes of truth—nothing else. Moreover, our own cultural norms, values, and the knowledge we prioritize do not possess any special objective status; they are merely one among many. There is no viewpoint that stands independently of all conditions, that looks at things from nowhere, a neutral perspective.

This claim—that there is no "view from nowhere"—is forcefully articulated by philosophers such as Thomas Nagel, yet even Nagel allows for a kind of gradual objectivity, in which we refine our moral and epistemic judgments through intersubjective deliberation and reason.[24]

Analytically, these judgments imply that cultural relativism is a combination of several different ideas. Therefore, to see the true and false elements in cultural relativism, it is important to separate its various components. Such an analysis can enable us to adopt a more critical stance regarding rightness and wrongness.

As a starting point, based on the thoughts of James Rachels, we can distinguish the following claims concerning moral values—all of which are advanced by cultural relativists:

"a) Different societies have different moral codes.
b) There is no objective standard that can be used to judge one societal code better than another.
c) The moral code of our own society has no special status; it is merely one among many.
d) There is no "universal truth" in ethics; that is, there are no moral truths that hold for all peoples at all times.
e) The moral code of a society determines what is right within that society; that is, if the moral code of a society says that a certain action is right, then that action is right, at least within that society.

[23] Bernard Williams, "The Truth in Relativism." Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 76 (1975): 215–228; Martha C. Nussbaum, "The New Religious Intolerance." The New Republic 221, no. 15 (1999): 34–41.

[24] Thomas Nagel, The View from Nowhere. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, 14-33; 139-162.

f) It is mere arrogance for us to try to judge the conduct of other peoples. We should adopt an attitude of tolerance toward the practices of other cultures."[25]

These six propositions, which we have distinguished, naturally support each other according to cultural relativists, as James Rachels expresses. But is that really the case?

A closer look reveals that there is no necessary logical connection that requires these six propositions to follow from one another. To see this more clearly, we need to take our analysis a step further and make it somewhat more concrete.

It is important to note that cultural relativism, as expressed in these six propositions, is primarily put forward as a theory about the nature of morality. At first glance, the theory seems quite reasonable. However, when we start analyzing it, it becomes clear that it is not as reasonable as it appears at first.

The first thing we need to notice is that cultural relativism is based on a certain form of argumentation. This form of argument demands that we derive a conclusion about the nature and status of morality from the observation of differences in norms and practices between cultures. Is this logically correct? To see this, we need to look more closely at the following reasoning:

(a) The Greeks believed that eating the dead was wrong, while the Callatians believed that eating the dead was right.
(b) Therefore, eating the dead is neither objectively right nor wrong; it is merely a matter of opinion and practice that varies from culture to culture.

Alternatively, we can consider this argument:
(a) Pre-Islamic Arabs saw nothing wrong with burying baby girls alive, while the Turks believe that killing baby girls is immoral.
(b) Therefore, burying baby girls alive is neither objectively right nor wrong; it is merely an opinion or practice that varies from culture to culture.

Both of these arguments are essentially two variations of a single argument. Therefore, both can be seen as particular cases of a more general argument, which can be stated as follows:

(a) Different cultures have different moral norms and practices.
(b) Therefore, there is no objective truth in the moral domain; right and wrong are merely matters of opinion or belief, and opinions/beliefs vary from culture to culture.

This argument put forward by cultural relativists is called the "argument from cultural differences."[26] This argument is very popular and persuasive to many people. However, is it logically valid? It cannot be said that the argument is logically valid because the conclusion does not logically follow from the premise; even if the premise is true, the conclusion can still be false. The premise concerns what people in a particular culture believe. In some cultures, people believe one thing, while people in other cultures may believe differently about the same issue. This is true and a sociological fact; however, the argument jumps from this social fact to the conclusion that there is no right or wrong. Such a conclusion cannot logically follow from such a premise.

Referring back to the example given by Herodotus: The Greeks believed that eating the dead was wrong, while the Callatians believed it was right. Can we conclude from the fact that Greeks and Callatians disagree on this that there is no objective truth about the matter? No, we cannot; because it is possible that the practice is objectively right or wrong, or that one of the two beliefs is right or wrong.

To make the point clearer, we can give another example outside the domain of values. In some past cultures, people believed that the Earth was flat, whereas in modern societies (excluding flat-Earthers), people believe that the Earth is spherical. Does the mere fact that people disagree mean that there is no "objective truth" in astronomy or geography? Of course not; we can never arrive at such a conclusion because it is likely that some members of some societies are mistaken in their beliefs about the world. Even if the Earth is truly spherical, there is no reason to think everyone should know it. Similarly, if there is a moral truth, there is no reason to think everyone should know it.

The fundamental mistake in the argument from cultural differences is trying to derive a conclusion about truth on the basis of the mere fact that people disagree on a subject. This is clearly a simple logical fallacy.

[25] Rachels, James. The Challenge of Cultural Relativism. In The Elements of Moral Philosophy, 5th ed., New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007, pp. 19-30.

[26] James Rachels, The Challenge of Cultural Relativism. pp.17-18.

Even if the argument from cultural differences is invalid, the cultural relativism theory may still be true. To recall, according to cultural relativism, the concept of "right" is inherent and relative to culture. Right has no independent foundation outside of culture, and whatever exists in a culture is right.

Cultural Relativism: Some Absurd Consequences

Now, in this context, if we take this approach seriously, what kind of absurd conclusions do we reach? This question needs to be answered. In philosophy, this is called the reductio ad absurdum argument — a form of critique that reveals internal contradictions by taking a claim to its logical extreme.

First, it must be noted that we can no longer say that the traditions or customs of other societies are morally inferior to ours. This is, of course, one of the main points emphasized by the theory of cultural relativism. We must stop condemning other societies simply because they are different. As long as we focus on particular examples, such as the funeral practices of the Greeks and the Callatians cited by Herodotus, the problem seems manageable or even thought-provoking. However, when we extend this reasoning to more extreme cases, we immediately encounter deeply unsettling implications.

Consider practices that have cost countless women their health, freedom, or lives: the pre-Islamic Arabs' custom of burying infant girls alive, the practice of female genital mutilation, or politicians like Hitler who, backed by mass consent, engineered the genocide of an entire people. According to cultural relativism, we cannot claim that any of these are morally wrong, since cultural relativism denies the existence of a cross-cultural standard of judgment. If we take cultural relativism seriously, then such life-destructive practices are to be regarded as culturally bounded and thus immune to ethical criticism — which is not only counterintuitive but morally outrageous.[27]

Second, cultural relativism seems to offer a deceptively simple test for determining what is right and wrong: one need only ask whether the action conforms to the rules of the person's society. Suppose someone wonders whether burying baby girls alive or practicing racial segregation is morally right. According to this view, the only relevant question is whether such actions conform to the norms of the society in which they occur. But can we accept that the execution of political dissidents, institutionalized racism, or systemic gender inequality are morally right merely because they are sanctioned by a cultural consensus? Such implications reveal the deeply unsettling consequences of cultural relativism, especially considering that few would claim their own society's norms are flawless.

Third, cultural relativism does not only paralyze our capacity to criticize the practices of other societies — it also disables our ability to critically assess our own. If moral rightness is determined solely by cultural context, then any critique of prevailing norms becomes incoherent. Yet many of us can identify injustices and contradictions within our own culture, whether related to systemic inequality, discrimination, or abuse of power. To say that "right" is whatever society deems it to be is to equate morality with conformity — a dangerous collapse of the critical ethical standpoint.[28]

Fourth, cultural relativism casts serious doubt on the very concept of moral progress. In everyday discourse, we assume that some social changes represent improvement — that we move toward more just, inclusive, and humane conditions. Consider the historical evolution of women's rights. In many traditional societies, women were excluded from property ownership, political participation, education, or even the public sphere itself. In Ancient Greece or the Ottoman Empire, women's movements were severely restricted, often confined to domestic roles under male guardianship. But with the influence of Enlightenment thought and feminist movements, these restrictions began to be challenged, and reforms — such as the right to vote, access to education, and legal equality — were achieved.

Can we really say that abolishing the practice of female infanticide or ending slavery is not moral progress? If cultural relativism is true, such a claim would require judging past practices by present standards, which it prohibits. Yet the very idea of progress entails such comparisons: it assumes that we can distinguish "better" from "worse" practices through some rational or moral criterion. Without trans-cultural standards, concepts like reform, revolution, or justice lose their coherence. If we accept cultural relativism wholesale, then even the legacies of reformers such as Martin Luther, Mahmud II, or Mustafa Kemal Atatürk become problematic, since they presuppose the possibility of moving from a worse social order to a better one.

[27] James Rachels, The Challenge of Cultural Relativism. pp.23-25.

[28] Kwame Anthony Appiah, The Ethics of Identity. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, pp.49-52.

Fifth, certain practices are not only morally troubling but also scientifically demonstrable as harmful. For example, medical science can document the physical and psychological harms caused by practices such as cannibalism or female genital mutilation. Yet cultural relativism refuses to accept science as an objective authority, arguing that science itself is a cultural product and varies across societies. This view undermines not only the authority of science but also the very possibility of shared knowledge. Moreover, because scientific theories change over time, relativists argue that no scientific claim can be universal — a point that leads to what some scholars have called "the relativism of science" or "the plurality of sciences".[29] But taken to its extreme, this position risks collapsing into epistemic nihilism, where no claim can be more justified than another.

Conclusion and Evaluation

The five core consequences posited by cultural relativism have led many Enlightenment thinkers and intellectuals to reject the theory outright due to its logical and ethical inconsistencies. These thinkers argue that practices such as slavery, female genital mutilation, burying girls alive, marginalizing women, stoning, cannibalism, fascism, racism, genocide, and terrorism must be universally condemned regardless of the culture in which they occur. Furthermore, it is imperative to acknowledge that our own society still harbors structural flaws necessitating moral reform, thereby legitimizing the pursuit of moral progress. Cultural relativism, by asserting that such value judgments are meaningless, risks legitimizing these inappropriate practices, fostering societal stagnation, and engendering ethical confusion in intercultural interactions. Moreover, it impedes the critique of cultural practices and obstructs the search for universal ethical commonalities, rendering it impossible to claim that one value or practice is more reasonable, justified, or dignified than another.

Nevertheless, the appeal of cultural relativism stems from a justified recognition of the marked differences in moral understandings across cultures. However, the existence of a comprehensive and insurmountable moral divide between societies remains highly debatable. Sociological and anthropological research demonstrates diversity in cultural practices but also reveals widespread commonalities in fundamental moral norms—such as prohibitions against lying, stealing, and killing. Advocates of cultural relativism tend to emphasize differences while neglecting or exaggerating these commonalities. While highlighting and prioritizing differences can be instrumental in fostering intercultural understanding, open-mindedness, tolerance, and democratic inclusivity, interpreting this insight as legitimizing all cultural practices leads to significant ethical and societal problems.

Cultural diversity undeniably enriches human experience and highlights the plurality of moral understandings across societies. Recognizing that moral norms are historically and culturally situated fosters intellectual humility and promotes openness toward the perspectives of others. This awareness is crucial for overcoming ethnocentrism and cultivating intercultural respect. However, embracing cultural difference does not necessitate unconditional acceptance of all cultural practices. Cultural relativism, in its strongest forms, risks obscuring fundamental ethical concerns by denying the possibility of universal moral standards or legitimate cross-cultural criticism. Such an approach may inadvertently legitimize practices that violate human dignity, basic rights, and freedoms, and hinder social progress by rendering all cultural norms equally unquestionable.

A balanced perspective acknowledges that while moral beliefs and customs vary, there exist shared values—such as respect for human life, fairness, and freedom—that provide a common ground for ethical reflection and critique. Critical engagement with cultural practices must be maintained, especially where they cause harm or undermine human dignity, without dismissing the importance of cultural context. Therefore, cultural difference should be understood as a dynamic field of dialogue rather than a barrier to ethical evaluation. This approach allows us to appreciate the richness of cultural pluralism while upholding the necessity of universal principles that guide moral progress and human rights. By navigating between cultural sensitivity and ethical responsibility, humanity can advance toward a more just and inclusive global community.

[29] Sophie Juliane Veigl, "Notes on a Complicated Relationship: Scientific Pluralism, Epistemic Relativism, and Stances." Synthese 199, no. 1-2 (2021): 3485–3503; Resseguie, David. "Between Relativism and Pluralism: Philosophical and Political Relativism in Feyerabend's Late Work." History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences 38, no. 2 (2016): 1–22;

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