

Description. Moral relativism is one of the few ethical theories that people outside of philosophy can identify. Some people consider themselves moral relativists. Others think moral relativism is obviously wrong. The debate extends far beyond philosophy: conservative pundits, right-wing politicians and religious leaders often rail against moral relativism. In their telling, relativism is a scourge of the modern world. Other public intellectuals, many academics and social justice activists defend moral relativism as an antidote to ethnocentrism and racism and the only moral position that can ensure tolerance.

Outside of ethics, moral relativism also crops up at surprising places, from psychology, cognitive science, social or cultural anthropology (where it originates), to the philosophy of science and social and political theory.

This course looks at moral relativism from a variety of perspectives and uses it as a gateway to study related questions in different disciplines and areas of philosophy. We examine the problem of moral relativism in experimental philosophy, metaethics, practical reasoning, moral psychology, cultural anthropology, social ontology and political philosophy.

Readings and assignments. All required readings are available on Athena. Recommended readings are optional but may be useful for your final essay. You must do the readings in advance for each class and submit brief responses to *study questions* before each meeting. Your responses will be graded on a *pass/fail* basis and they will count towards your final grade.

Assessment. At the end of the course, you will write a 3,000-word essay on a topic that you choose (after consultation with me). Your essay topic should be related to the material discussed at one of the seminars. The essays should be submitted through Athena. The final grade will be determined according to the following weights:

- *final essay*: 50%
- *responses to study questions*: 10% each, with five taken into account.

There will be seven classes with new material (the last class is reserved for review, student presentations, and discussion of essay projects). This means that you can skip submitting responses to the study questions for at most two classes without penalty.

Appointments. If you would like to make an appointment, get in touch with me by email: greg.bognar@philosophy.su.se. Email is preferable to Athena's messaging function.

Topics and readings

1. Moral Relativism and Experimental Philosophy

HAGOP SARKISSIAN, JOHN PARK, DAVID TIEN, JENNIFER COLE WRIGHT, AND JOSHUA KNOBE. "Folk Moral Relativism." *Mind & Language* 26 (2011), 482–505.

GILBERT HARMAN. "Is There a Single True Morality?" Reprinted in *Explaining Value and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*. Clarendon Press, 2000, 77–99.

Recommended readings

JOSHUA KNOBE AND SHAUN NICHOLS. "An Experimental Philosophy Manifesto." In Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichols (eds.) *Experimental Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, 2008, 3–14.

HAGOP SARKISSIAN. "Aspects of Folk Morality: Objectivism and Relativism." In Justin Sytsma and Wesley Buckwalter (eds.) *A Companion to Experimental Philosophy*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2016, 212–224.

SHAUN NICHOLS. "After Objectivity: An Empirical Study of Moral Judgment." *Philosophical Psychology* 17 (2004), 3–26.

BERNARD WILLIAMS. "Internal and External Reasons." Reprinted in *Moral Luck*. Cambridge University Press, 1981, 101–113.

2. Moral Relativism and Metaethics

GILBERT HARMAN. *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*. Chapter 1, "Ethics and Observation." Oxford University Press, 1977, 3–10.

JAMES DREIER. "Moral Relativism and Moral Nihilism." In David Copp (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*. Oxford University Press, 2006, 240–264.

Recommended readings

JOHN L. MACKIE. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. Chapter 1, "The Subjectivity of Values." Penguin Books, 1977, 15–49.

GEOFFREY SAYRE-MCCORD. "Being a Realist about Relativism (In Ethics)." *Philosophical Studies* 61 (1991), 155–176.

DAVID B. WONG. "Commentary on Sayre-McCord's 'Being a Realist about Relativism.'" *Philosophical Studies* 61 (1991), 177–186.

TERRY HORGAN AND MARK TIMMONS. "Expressivism, Yes! Relativism, No!" In Russ Shafer-Landau (ed.) *Oxford Studies in Metaethics, Vol. 1*. Oxford University Press, 2006, 73–98.

GILBERT HARMAN. "Moral Relativism is Moral Realism." *Philosophical Studies* 172 (2015), 855–863.

3. Moral Relativism and Practical Reasoning

J. DAVID VELLEMAN. *Foundations for Moral Relativism*. Second, expanded edition. Chapter V, “Foundations for Moral Relativism.” Open Book Publishers, 2015, 75–99.

Recommended readings

J. DAVID VELLEMAN. *Foundations for Moral Relativism*. Second, expanded edition. Chapter III, “Morality Here and There.” Open Book Publishers, 2015, 23–51.

RICHARD A. SHWEDER. “Ethical Relativism: Is There a Defensible Version?” *Ethos* 18 (1990), 205–218.

TORBJÖRN TÄNNSJÖ. “Moral Relativism.” *Philosophical Studies* 135 (2007), 123–143.

4. Moral Relativism and Moral Psychology

MARC D. HAUSER, LIANE YOUNG, AND FIERY CUSHMAN. “Reviving Rawls’s Linguistic Analogy: Operative Principles and the Causal Structure of Moral Actions.” In Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (ed.) *Moral Psychology. Volume 2: The Cognitive Science of Morality: Intuition and Diversity*. The MIT Press, 2008, 107–143.

JESSE J. PRINZ. “Against Moral Nativism.” In Dominic Murphy and Michael Bishop (eds.) *Stich: And His Critics*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 167–189.

Recommended readings

ELLIOT TURIEL. *The Culture of Morality: Social Development, Context, and Conflict*. Chapter 5, “The Development of Moral and Social Judgments.” Cambridge University Press, 2002, 94–118.

SUSAN DWYER. “How Good is the Linguistic Analogy?” In Peter Carruthers, Stephen Laurence, and Stephen Stich (eds.) *The Innate Mind. Volume 2: Culture and Cognition*. Oxford University Press, 2006, 237–256.

JESSE J. PRINZ. “Is Morality Innate?” In Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (ed.) *Moral Psychology. Volume 1: The Evolution of Morality: Adaptations and Innateness*. The MIT Press, 2008, 367–406.

5. Moral Relativism and Cultural Anthropology

HORACE MINER. “Body Ritual among the Nacirema.” *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956), 503–507.

JOHN W. COOK. *Morality and Cultural Differences*. Part II, “Anthropology and Moral Relativism.” Oxford University Press, 1999, 49–108.

Recommended readings

RUTH BENEDICT. “Anthropology and the Abnormal.” Excerpts reprinted in Paul K. Moser and Thomas L. Carson (eds.) *Moral Relativism: A Reader*. Oxford University Press, 2001, 80–89.

ELVIN HATCH. *Culture and Morality: The Relativity of Values in Anthropology*. Columbia University Press, 1983.

MICHELLE M. MOODY-ADAMS. *Fieldwork in Familiar Places: Morality, Culture, and Philosophy*. Chapter 1, "Taking Disagreement Seriously." Harvard University Press, 1997, 13–60.

JAMES RACHELS AND STUART RACHELS. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. Ninth edition. Chapter 2, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism." McGraw-Hill, 2019, 14–32.

6. Moral Relativism and Social Ontology

JOHN R. SEARLE. *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization*. Chapter 1, "The Purpose of This Book" and Chapter 8, "Human Rights." Oxford University Press, 2010, 3–18 and 174–199.

Recommended readings

AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION. "Statement on Human Rights." *American Anthropologist* 49 (1947), 539–543.

BERNARD WILLIAMS. "Human Rights and Relativism." In Geoffrey Hawthorn (ed.) *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*. Princeton University Press, 2009, 62–74.

ALLEN BUCHANAN. *The Heart of Human Rights*. Chapter 7, "The Challenge of Ethical Pluralism." Oxford University Press, 2013, 249–273.

7. Moral Relativism and Political Philosophy

GRAHAM M. LONG. "Relativism in Contemporary Liberal Political Philosophy." In Steven D. Hales (ed.) *A Companion to Relativism*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, 309–325.

Recommended readings

RONALD DWORKIN. "Liberalism." Reprinted in Michael J. Sandel (ed.), *Liberalism and Its Critics*. New York University Press, 1984, 60–79.

GRAHAM LONG. *Relativism and the Foundations of Liberalism*. Chapter 6, "Liberal Neutrality." Imprint Academic, 2004, 195–217.

JOHN STUART MILL. *On Liberty*. 1859.

MATTHEW J. MOORE. "Relativism and Liberalism." In Martin Kusch (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Relativism*. Routledge, 2020, 211–218.

T. M. SCANLON. "Fear of Relativism." Reprinted in Paul K. Moser and Thomas L. Carson (eds.) *Moral Relativism: A Reader*. Oxford University Press, 2001, 142–162.

8. Review and Essay Plans Discussion