**Args for and against MR, in outline form**

*Arguments from “Moral Relativism,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

PHIL 230A, Hendricks, Fall 2014

**Arguments for MR**

A. Untenability of moral objectivism (IEP, sect. 3b)

1. moral judgments are value judgments

2. value judgments are not susceptible to rational proof in a universal sense

Therefore, moral judgments cannot be proven to be true or false in any universal sense

*Question premise 2?*

B. Argument from Timmons, *Moral Theory* (cited above), pp. 52-53)

1. Different cultures have different moral codes; the moral codes of some cultures include moral norms that conflict with the moral norms of other cultures

2. Such conflicts cannot be resolved by rational means

3. So, there are rationally irresolvable intercultural conflicts over basic moral norms

4. The best explanation for such irresolvable conflicts is that there are no universally valid moral norms applying to all cultures

5. If there are no universally valid moral norms applying to all cultures, then what is right and what is wrong for the members of a culture depends on the moral norms of their culture

Therefore, it makes sense to say that the validity of moral judgments depends on the moral norms of the culture in which the judgments are made.

*Question premise 4?*

C. MR promotes tolerance (IEP, “moral relativism,” sect. 3d)

1. moral relativism (MR) is the view that “moral judgments are true or false only relative to some particular standpoint (for instance, that of a culture or a historical period) and that no standpoint is uniquely privileged over all others.” (IEP, “moral relativism, intro)

2. If individuals believe MR is true, they are more likely to become “aware of the merely relative validity of [their] own moral norms,” and thus “less likely to fall into arrogant ethnocentrism and less inclined to pass moral judgment on the beliefs and practices found in other cultures” (IEP, “moral relativism,” 3d).

-- In other words, they are likely to be more tolerant of moral views differing from their own.

3. It is good for individuals to become more tolerant of moral views differing from their own.

Therefore, it is good to promote belief in moral relativism.

*Note: this argument doesn’t say MR is true.*

*D. A possible criticism of promoting MR on the basis of promoting tolerance:*

1. moral relativism (MR) is the view that “moral judgments are true or false only relative to some particular standpoint (for instance, that of a culture or a historical period) and that no standpoint is uniquely privileged over all others.” (IEP, “moral relativism, intro)

2. to claim that all individuals should be tolerant of moral views different from their own is to make a claim with universally valid force

3. to make a claim with universally valid force contradicts MR

Therefore, if proponents of MR say that all individuals should be tolerant of moral views different from their own, they are contradicting what MR requires.

**Problems with MR**

A. Problems with determining which group’s standpoint to use to make moral judgments

1. *Internal inconsistency within groups*: many groups whose standpoint you might want to use as a moral relativist do not all agree on moral principles, rules, values.
2. *People belong to multiple groups*: should they just choose which group’s standpoint/moral beliefs they are going to use to make moral judgments?
   1. And if so, does this mean that ultimately, the standpoint being used is that of the individual rather than the group (subjectivism)?
   2. Some problems with subjectivism: morality can’t serve some of the functions it might otherwise
      1. help resolve interpersonal conflict by providing a set of rules independent of individuals’ views; help promote social interaction and cooperation
      2. help promote human flourishing and reduction of suffering (unless most people have this as part of their subjective moral standpoint)

B. Hard to criticize moral standpoints different than that of your group

1. *Can say they are wrong according to your standpoint;* this is not enough for some, who want to judge what they see as moral atrocities as, in some way, more strongly wrong.

*A very simple argument that captures this*

1. Any viable meta-ethical view must allow for criticism of moral beliefs, values and practices that differ from one’s own, beyond saying that they are wrong according to one’s own moral beliefs or values.
2. Moral relativism does not allow for this.

Therefore, moral relativism is not a viable meta-ethical view.

1. *Can say their practices are inconsistent with their own moral principles or values*; but that’s not always the case.

C. Hard to criticize your own group as well

*Hard to say that your group’s moral rules, values, practices are not adequate and should be changed*

-- can make such an argument on practical grounds, but not moral ones

*a simple argument*

1. Any acceptable meta-ethical theory should allow us to evaluate the moral norms a group already accepts as being morally flawed or morally acceptable

-- we should be able to say of what people already *do* accept as morally r/w (descriptive), that they *should* accept that or something else (normative judgment)

2. According to moral relativism, one cannot make moral judgments about the moral norms of one’s group because those moral norms themselves determine what is morally r/w

-- one could judge the moral norms of one’s own group pragmatically, but not morally

Therefore, MR is not an acceptable moral theory

D. The choice of moral rules, values, practices by a group is morally arbitrary

*What reasons might a group have for their current moral norms?*

* 1. History/tradition?
  2. Enforced by some authority?
  3. Pragmatic reasons (better for other goals the society has)?

-- What one can’t say in MR is that the group has chosen those moral norms because they are morally better in some way.