**Moral Relativism, Sept. 9, 2014**

PHIL 230A, Hendricks, Fall 2014

**Definitions**

**Descriptive moral relativism**

“Descriptive relativism is a thesis about cultural diversity.  It holds that, as a matter of fact, moral beliefs and practices vary between cultures (and sometimes between groups within a single society).” (Internet Encycl. Phil., “moral relativism,” sec. 2a)

“Descriptive Moral Relativism(DMR).As a matter of empirical fact, there are deep and widespread moral disagreements across different societies, and these disagreements are much more significant than whatever agreements there may be.” (Stanford Encycl. Phil., “moral relativism” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-relativism/#ForAr>)

*Descriptive moral relativism could be true even if meta-ethical moral relativism is not.*

**Meta-ethical moral relativism**

“Moral relativism 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.” (Internet Encycl. Phil., “moral relativism,” introduction)

“Metaethical Moral Relativism *(*MMR*).* The truth or falsity of moral judgments, or their justification, is not absolute or universal, but is relative to the traditions, convictions, or practices of a group of persons.” (Stanford Encycl. Phil., “moral relativism” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-relativism/#ForArg>

Another definition: No “single moral code has universal validity”; “moral truth and justifiability…are in some way relative to factors that are culturally and historically contingent” (Wong, David. “Relativism.” *A Companion to Ethics.* Ed. Peter Singer. Blackwell, 1991. P. 442).

**Subjectivism**

Similar to meta-ethical moral relativism, except the standpoint from which moral judgments are true or justified is an individual rather than a group.

**Moral objectivism (also sometimes called moral universalism)**

Moral norms can be justified “on grounds that are independent of culture, or on grounds that will be common to all cultures” (Wolf, Susan. “Two Levels of Pluralism” (reading for next time), 795).

“… moral objectivism maintains that moral judgments are ordinarily true or false in an absolute or universal sense, that some of them are true, and that people sometimes are justified in accepting true moral judgments (and rejecting false ones) on the basis of evidence available to any reasonable and well-informed person.” (Stanford Encycl. Phil., “moral relativism” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-relativism/#ForArg>)

“There are moral norms whose correctness or validity is independent of the moral norms a culture does or might accept, and thus they express universally valid moral standards that apply to all cultures” (Timmons, Mark. *Moral Theory: An Introduction*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2002, p. 41).

**Arguments for & against MR**

Individually: Recall from the reading, or come up with on your own, one argument for and one argument against moral relativism.

Groups: Discuss which arguments individuals picked, and choose one for and one against that you think are the strongest of the bunch.

Then, write these down on the wiki page: go to the course website (<http://blogs.ubc.ca/phil230>), then click on “wiki” on the top menu, then “class discussions” to get to the page.