Wolf, “Two Levels of Pluralism”

**Terms:** Pluralism in ethics (785); Relativism (786); Subjectivism (786)

*What is she trying to argue in this essay, overall? What are one or two of her main points?*

**First level pluralism**

Pluralism at “the level of individual moral jugments” about particular actions or policies (791)

Denies that there must only be one, uniquely correct moral judgment in any particular dilemma (788, 791)

*Is there just one objectively right answer to any moral question or dilemma?*

-- absolutism/objectivism with uniqueness: always

-- relativism: never

-- pluralism: sometimes (788-789)

*How is first level pluralism different from relativism?*

It can “appear to accommodate a form of relativism but really does not” (797).

*How can it still allow for objectivity in ethics?* (788-791)

(I needed to keep the font size the same as the original on the chart below, or else the chart gets all messed up!)

**First level pluralism:**

Objectively valid reasons, principles or values (788)

Both values are equally justified, objectively

Value 2

e.g., nonoppresion

Value 1

e.g., freedom

Consideration of empirical facts of a particular issue (791)

Judgment 2

e.g., pornography

not morally

acceptable

Judgment 1

e.g., pornography

is morally

acceptable

Both judgments are equally justified, objectively

*Wolf claims that pluralism (both first and second) could provide a “more tolerant” response to moral disagreement than objectivism (787). Do you think first level pluralism could do so?*

**Second level pluralism**

Pluralism at “the level of moral codes, moral outlooks, systems of moral principle which a society might adopt and internalize as a whole” (791).

*Acc to Wolf, this accommodates a kind of relativism—how/why?*

There may be “several moral systems that are all incommensurably good,” such that each is “unequivocally good,” even though they might conflict with one another (797)

Imagine two groups with two moral codes, where “d” means violence is always wrong: (next pg)

Objectively valid reasons, principles, values, along with empirical facts about groups (795-796), giving criteria for acceptable moral codes

Both codes are equally justified, objectively

Person A’s moral judgment: violence is always wrong (d)

Person B’s moral judgment: violence is sometimes acceptable (not d)

Objectively,

- Person A’s judgment is true for him

- Person B’s judgment is true for her (795)

Relativism here, in second level pluralism

-- violence is morally wrong for person A but not for person B b/c person A’s group accepts moral code 1 and person B’s accepts moral code 2

-- the basis for judgments of moral right/wrong is the moral code accepted by the group to which the individual belongs

-- you can’t say, in second level pluralism, that everyone ought to hold to the moral judgment you make, no matter the moral code of their group (794)

So, in 2nd-level pluralism, the validity of moral judgments depends on:

(i). their being derivable from a moral code accepted by a group, where

(ii). this code is one of several *objectively* acceptable codes—“it constitutes one good, or good enough, set of standards among others” (796)

*How is second level pluralism different from first level?*

1. According to first level pluralism, if nonviolence is an indeterminate moral issue, then

If person A thinks it would be wrong for her to use violence, that judgment is false

-- Because both person A’s judgment and person B’s judgment are equally justifiable objectively, so using violence or not would be equally justifiable (793)

-- But for second level pluralism, person A is right in thinking it would be wrong for her to use violence, and the same for person B thinking it would be acceptable in some situations.

1. (not exactly a difference, just a way of thinking of the two together): First level pluralism is compatible with either moral objectivism, or the kind of moral relativism involved in second level pluralism

Within second level pluralism, first-level could hold *within the moral codes of each group*, so it could be that on some moral questions, there are multiple, equally justifiable but competing moral judgments that could be drawn from the principles and values in the group’s moral code.

*How is the relativism of second level pluralism different from the moral relativism we talked about previous to reading Wolf’s article?*