

PHI 202 | Precept on lectures 15 and 16

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READINGS:

Gensler, H. (1998). Cultural Relativism. In his *Ethics: A contemporary introduction*. Routledge.
Mill, J. S. 'On Liberty' and other writings. Cambridge University Press.

CULTURAL RELATIVISM

(1) What is the difference between *descriptive* cultural relativism and *normative* cultural relativism?
(Whole group)

(2) To give substance to the thesis of normative cultural relativism, we need to say more about what the relevant standard for 'X is approved by the society/culture'. There are many fascinating questions here. In answering them, try to be maximally charitable even if you disagree with this view. That is, try to think what the best version of this view would be.

(i) *Kevin H & Logan*: We all seem to be members of multiple cultures: ethnic, religious, political, racial, gender-based, etc. Is any of these privileged or do all count?

(ii) *Sofia*: Does X have to be approved *universally* or only by *the majority*?

(iii) Is the relevant standard *what the society actually approves* or rather *what the 'informed' society would approve*? For example, what if the society disapproves of X only because they have a false empirical belief?

(Breakout rooms)

(3) "If cultural relativism is true, then we cannot coherently criticise the norms of our society, we cannot coherently criticise the norms of other societies, and we cannot make sense of the idea of moral progress". Do you agree?

(Whole group)

MILL ON FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND ACTION

(4) Mill makes a big deal of the idea that exercising our deliberative capacities and autonomy is an essential aspect of well-being. It features in his 'non-instrumental' arguments for freedom of expression, for freedom of action, and against paternalism.

(Explain)

(5) Can you give an example of a contemporary paternalistic practice which is conducive to exercising one's deliberative capacities and autonomy?

(Whole group)

(6) How would you explain the Harm Principle to someone who has not read Mill?

(Whole group)

(7) *Griffen*: How can we draw the line between genuine harm and mere offence?

(Breakout rooms)

(8) *Amanda*: Would Mill's arguments license *forcing* someone to perform a certain action or to voice certain ideas?

(Whole group)

(9) The Harm Principle is envisioned as something that we can apply proactively. But in many such cases we merely know that an action carries *a mere risk* of harming others. Is presence of a mere risk of harm a legitimate ground for preventing someone from acting in a certain way?

(Whole group)

(10) What about consensual harm? Is the harm that two boxers are about to inflict on one another in a boxing match a legitimate ground from preventing the fight?

(Whole group)