

Melville Herskovits

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Dahomey Kingdom (600-1900 (West Africa))

- Known for starting slave trade, including women in their army
- Wealth was measured by family size → people wanted slaves/to be slaves
 - * bride would bring their slaves + search for other wives to extend their family

↳ Moral Status of Polygamy

- * Evaluations include judgements of value → ~~but what makes any particular evaluation correct?~~
 - ↳ particular judgements 'stand or fall' w/ the acceptance of the premises from which they derive
 - the basic assumptions of a culture involve the values the culture adopts as a basis for evaluating judgements
- * ~~The problem:~~ the assumed values of one culture can conflict w/ assumed values of another culture
 - ↳ ~~Are there absolute moral standards or are they relative to culture?~~
- moral 'facts' are evaluations made relative to our experience → culturally patterned

* Moral Relativism

- moral facts/truths depend on cultural values → what is 'legal' depends on what laws are binding on you, what is 'rude' depends on your culture → no such thing as objective legalness/rudeness
- 'right' means 'right-for-culture-x' → moral truths are culturally dependent
- are mistakes possible?
 - a given individual → yes if they are contrary to an individual's own culture's values
 - a given culture → no, each culture cannot be correct/incorrect in basic values it holds

* Why we should accept moral culture relativism

- Both claims are putatively true: polygamy is morally correct for the Dahomey, polygamy is morally incorrect for Americans
 - ↳ Herskovits believes that these empirical claims are true → against ethnocentric;
 - * toleration: argues we should be tolerant of other cultures' values, and it's wrong to interfere w/ other cultures' practices

* Bernard Williams (Problems)

- Self-defeating argument: toleration itself is a moral claim. so is it true or false?

↳ either toleration is objectively true, and relativism is false, or there is circular justification (claiming toleration is correct because our culture accepts it as a value)

Book notes

Herskovits, "Culture relativism + Cultural values"

• Considering social norms from other points of view creates alternative answers based on different conceptions of desirability

- example Dahomey, West Africa: bigger family = higher status

→ **Cultural relativism**: an approach to the nature + roles of values in cultures

• judgements are based on experience; experience is interpreted by each individual in terms of their own enculturation → definitions of normal are relative to the cultural frame of reference

• **Ethnocentrism**: Pov that one's own way of life is preferred to all others

• humans live in accordance with the ways they have learned

- relativistic pov: validity in every set of norms + values they represent

• **Absolutes**: fixed, differ from culture to culture

• **Universals**: least common denominators to

• **Moral relativism**:

- methodological: one seeks to understand behavior in a culture + refrains from making interpretations that arise from a preconceived frame of reference

- philosophical: concerns nature of cultural values + implications of an epistemology that derives from recognition of enculturative conditioning in shaping thought + behavior

- practical: involve application/practice of the philosophical principles to cross culture scene

• **Cultural history** teaches to study parallelisms in human civilizations + the different ways man has devised to fulfil his needs

• in a culture where absolutes are stressed, the relativisms of a different culture will be hard to understand

Williams, "Interlude: Relativism"

• what is 'right' can only be understood as what is 'right for a given society'

→ if society is regarded as a cultural unit,

• When Cortez came to America and decided the natives were inferior → if a burglar walks in on the house owner murdering someone, is he morally obligated not to interfere b/c he is trespassing

→ it cannot be a consequence of the nature of morality that no society ought to ever interfere w/ another or ind. from one confronted w/ the practices of another will react w/ acceptance → relativism is inconsistent + circular reasoning