



**Centurion**  
**UNIVERSITY**

*Shaping Lives...  
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# Ethical Relativism

# Focus of Discussion

- **Meaning of Ethical Relativism**
- **Versions**
- **Reasons/Arguments for Ethical Relativism**
- **Implications**

# Ethical Relativism

- Ethical relativism is the view that moral (or normative) statements are not objectively true but “true” relative to a particular individual or society that happens to hold the belief
- Whenever two people or two societies disagree about the morality of an act (i.e. hold different and opposing views), both sides may be equally correct
- For example: anthropologists point to a range of practices considered morally acceptable in some societies but condemned in others, including infanticide, abortion, polygamy, racism, sexism, etc

# Versions of Ethical Relativism

- Individual or Personal Ethical Relativism
  - Ethical statements are relative to individual
    - I have my ethical views and you have yours, neither my views nor your views are better or more correct. For example, the existence of God or life after death
- Social or Cultural Ethical Relativism
  - Ethical statements are relative to a given society
    - What is right or wrong, one must simply look to the norms of the society in which they live. For example, abortion/contraception in Catholic tradition

# Reasons for ethical relativism

- I may not know something for certain, what is right in a given situation (traditional medicine)
- We may all hold different beliefs (belief in many Gods and one God)
- Our belief may be related to the situation (stealing, lying, etc)
- Tolerance in consistence with ethical relativism (degree of force in self-defense).

# Implications

- Ethical relativism reminds us that different societies have different moral beliefs and that our beliefs are deeply influenced by culture.
- It also encourages us to explore the reasons underlying beliefs that differ from our own, while challenging us to examine our reasons for the beliefs and values we hold.

# Thank You