

## **CONTEMPORARY RELATIVISM: A QUESTION TO HUMAN DIGNITY**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper is a review of contemporary relativism as a human dignity problem. It began with a conceptual review and a wholesome analysis of the variables as contained. Relativism stipulates from the analysis made that moral principles are not universal, but contextual; thus, "members of one community do not fairly judge or reject certain conventional social practices. Relativism, in its most severe form, rejects the existence of valid cross-cultural criteria for assessing human rights policies and exempts from public scrutiny, certain differences in social norms and institutions. Relativism is a dynamic term whose philosophical origins lie in debates about relativism in science theory and language theory. Usually, relativism is presented in contrast to realism, which is the belief that what is real and true happens independently of the mind. Where epistemological, social, economic, and cognitive relativism of several different forms are present. It is widely reported that one aspect (e.g. moral principles, information, and meaning) relates to a particular context (e.g. the person subject, a society, or a language). Although cultural relativism provides sociology with a reflexive and critical method, political and moral conservatives continue to despair about the effect of cultural relativism on analytical discourse and the change away from the objective, measurable principles as the measure of all claims to reality. Nevertheless, some scholars have suggested that cultural relativism can be embraced without compromising a commitment to the concept of moral values, or human rights.*

**KEYWORDS:** contemporary, relativism, human, dignity, human dignity

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Relativism, roughly put, is the view that truth and falsity, right and wrong, standards of reasoning, and procedures of justification are products of differing conventions and frameworks of assessment and that their authority is confined to the context giving rise to them. More specifically, "relativism" includes views that maintain that at a high level of abstraction at least some class of objects have the properties they possess (e.g., perfect, morally decent, epistemically justified) not simpliciter, but only relative to a given appraisal context (e.g., local cultural norms, individual standards), and correspondingly, that the truth of claims attributing these properties holds only once the relevant framework of assessment is specified or supplied. Furthermore, relativists argue characteristically that if anything is only objectively so, then there can be no framework-independent perspective from which to determine if the matter is so (Velleman, 2013).

Relativism considers concepts and beliefs to be influenced by time and place, so that the actions of individuals decide their moral principles, regardless of the rights of others as well as the unwritten law of human nature, the universal moral law. Thus, the truth was "warranted assertive

capacity" for John Dewey and his pragmatism that has shaped Australian education so much (VonFintel, & Gillies, 2011).

Relativism was one of the most common and reviled philosophical theories of our time in its various forms. Defenders see it as a harbinger of acceptance and as the only open-minded and inclusive legal and epistemic approach worthy of. Detractors condemn it for its supposed incoherence and uncritical permissiveness to the intellect. Debates on relativism permeate the entire spectrum of sub-disciplines of philosophy. From ethics to epistemology, from science to religion, from political theory to ontology, from theories of meaning to even logic, philosophy has felt the need to respond to this heady and seemingly subversive concept (Charles 2011).

Relativism debates often frequently invoke questions relating to the very essence and methods of philosophy, and the split of philosophy between the so-called "analytic and continental" camps. However, given a long history of discussion that goes back to Plato and an increasingly large body of literature, it is still difficult to arrive at an accepted description of what relativism is at its heart, and what philosophical meaning it has. This entry seeks to provide a full account of the various ways of describing, explaining, defending and condemning "relativism" (Stich, 2012).

Human dignity was defined as a term referring, in the manner described, to man's dominance over animals. 'Dignitas' is not just 'worth' Across history; modesty has been used to suggest several human attributions. It was during the Ancient Greece era that the nobility definition (which would now be known as dignity) was defined as something honourable, or of noble rank, attributed to the aristocracy (Ober, 2014).

Despite the best efforts of the framers of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to create a human rights base that is not related to any specific cultural tradition, the controversy has never subsided as to whether there can be items like universal human dignity, or whether human rights and dignity are subjective. Western capitalist, communist, and emerging nations have conflicting human rights concepts. Developing countries are rejecting values rooted in liberal, European democratic traditions that prioritize civil and political rights over social welfare. This leads to the more general question of whether we can give priority to rights at all (Charles R. Beitz 2011).

In general, relativism stipulates that normative values are not universal, but contextual; therefore, "members of one society may not legitimately judge or condemn the social practices of other traditions." In its most extreme form, "relativism denies the existence of legitimate cross-cultural standards for evaluating human rights practices and exempts certain variations in social practices and institutions from external criticism." If there is no objective criterion for assessing the acceptability of human dignity, and there is no valid basis for criticizing other states' social practices, then recognition of human dignity depends on particular cultural or political practices. The consequence may be a far cry from a shared spirit of fraternity. Some cultures or customs may find values unacceptable such as compulsory political participation or equal treatment of individuals.

Even if abstract rights are recognized, such as fairness, democracy and equality, they still mean different things in different cultures. Finally, relativism endorses this outcome by exempting

individual cultures from any external scrutiny by arguing that "every state should embrace its interpretation of what human right means as a social entity based on its cultural values and political ideology" (Rovane, 2012).

In reality, this locates fundamental human integrity in the interests of the most influential leaders of international society, not in unchanging realities. Nevertheless, to refute the more extreme views of cultural relativism, one can use both plain facts and philosophical reasoning. Empirically speaking, one can argue for the existence of at least a minimal universal moral order from an international law perspective. For example, all States find the peremptory jus cogens norms of international law to be universal. We uphold universal rights such as the right to life and prevent genocide, torture, slavery, "long-term arbitrary detention and institutional discrimination against race" (Rovane, 2012).

They are non-derogable, standing on a higher plane than positive law and can be changed only by the advent of a subsequent rule of equal character. As stated previously, the very presence of the Charter of the United Nations suggests at least that the principle of human dignity is essential to everyone. This "requires a degree of common standards and therefore includes an exception to the basic rule of absolute state sovereignty"<sup>6</sup>.

In short, international law represents a certain centre of universal principles. Philosophically, relativism is untenable and appears destined to crumble under the weight of its philosophical inconsistency: it at the same time affirms that; there are no universal moral principles; one can behave according to one's own group's principles, and there is a universal moral principle. Unless it is true that no moral values exist, then by claiming the universality of the relativistic principle, the relativist engages in self-contradiction (Sankey, 2010).

Due to the above review, the need for this study that sought to review contemporary relativism as a question to human dignity.

## **REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Concept of Relativism**

A broad variety of ideas and views have been attached to the word "relativism," which may explain the lack of agreement about how the concept should be interpreted. In contemporary philosophy, the profusion of the use of the word "relativism" means there is no ready consensus on any one concept. Two forms of relativism are commonly considered to exist: cognitive and ethical. Cognitive relativism is a term given to several views that challenge the nature of fundamental truths: facts and truths about the world do not represent objective realities; that there are merely different ways of viewing the universe.

At the other hand, ethical relativism is a label given to many views that challenge the nature of moral universals: that there are no moral rules or standards by which anyone is expected to live; that what is fundamentally 'good' or 'just' cannot be determined; and that there are various ways of understanding what it means to be moral (Bernecker, 2014).

While relativism was not formulated and discussed well before the mid- to the late twentieth century, in the history of ideas, it is by no means unparalleled. For example, Protagoras (famous for his dictum, "Man is the measure of all things"), the ancient Greek Sophist, articulated doctrines that could be called relativistic (López 2012).

Historically, however, skepticism the theory that knowledge is impossible was more common than the view that knowledge or reality is relative to persons, communities, societies, or systems (Gowans, 2014).

Explicit relativism is Modernity. Europeans constructing imperial empires, the revolutionary plurality of moral values and worldviews possessed by non-Western societies started to collide. Like through ethnic empires, such as the Roman Empire, the Europeans viewed this diversity as an introspection tool. They institutionalized the study of diversity in academia, especially in the field of cultural anthropology. Early anthropology continued believing Western philosophy and ethics (i.e. science and Christian) were superior to those found in "primitive" societies, which became the subject of extensive empirical research. However, this changed with the work of Franz Boas and his students (Ruth Benedict, Melville J. Herskovits, and Margaret Mead), who began articulating strong and compelling arguments in favour of relativism (Gowans, 2014).

Indeed, in 1947, following the United Nations debate on universal human rights, the American Anthropological Association released a statement claiming that moral norms are proportional to cultural and social structures and that there is no way to show that one society's principles and morals are greater than those of another (Kölbel, 2013).

According to Bernecker (2014), the birth of moral relativism may be regarded as this. Debates on relativism have entered almost every field of inquiry today. More significant for this review, however, is the fact that forms of relativism have made their way into daily life in post industrial informational societies. There is everywhere evidence that relativism is woven into the web of mutual cultural common sense. How these diversity patterns impact the first generations socialized within this multicultural environment is unclear; it is also unclear how these developments can be assessed. The value of relativism seems ambiguous: It leads toward tolerance, learning and diversity, but can also give way to conflict, fragmentation, and confusion.

### **Types of relativism**

According to Hales (2014), the types of relativism include;

#### **Cultural relativism**

Public discussions on relativism often revolve around the often quoted but vague notion of cultural relativism. The notion that norms and values are born out of traditions can be traced back to the Greek historian Herodotus (c. 484–425 BC), but it was only in the twentieth century, and particularly with the emergence of social anthropology, that cultural relativism gained broad popularity.

### **Conceptual relativism**

Conceptual relativism is a loosely delineated type of relativism in which ontology, or what exists, is relativized to conceptual structures, empirical paradigms, or category constructs rather than ethical and epistemic norms. In this context, philosophical relativism is also defined not as a type of epistemic or cultural relativism but as a metaphysical doctrine.

Alethic relativism. In its simplest sense, relativism about the fact, or alethic relativism, is the argument that what is true for one person or social group might not be true for another, and there is no context-independent point of view to adjudicate the matter. Whatever is real or false is often relative to a textual, cultural or conceptual context.

### **Epistemic relativism**

Information arguments and justifications have proved to be receptive to relativistic interpretations. Epistemic relativism is the theory that cognitive norms that decide what counts as knowledge, or whether a belief is moral or justifiable, may differ with and rely on local conceptual or cultural contexts, and lack the universality to which they aspire or claim (Carter 2015).

### **Contemporary Relativism**

There is a new interpretation of relativism according to which some of the views that have been considered until now. Variety of moral relativism can be interpreted as contrasting variations of conceptualism with bona fide relativism. This recent form, sufficiently distinct from the relativisms so far considered to be worthy of consideration in its own right, is what we term "Contemporary Relativism," a type of relativism that originated from research in the philosophy of language in the empirical tradition, and for which the leading proponents included Max Kölbel (2013, 2014), Peter Lasersohn (2015), Crispin Wright (2016) and, in particular, John MacFarlane (2014).

Peter argued that "A is wrong" argument is approximately the equivalent of "A is wrong according to the moral standard I embrace." Thus two utterances of (say) "Torture is false" will vary in the sense of truth if they are pronounced by speakers who embrace very different moral systems. Conceptualists regarding (for example) political, aesthetic, and epistemic discourse would likewise see social, aesthetic, and epistemic expressions as indexical expressions but (as we shall see) with some difficulty describing apparent genuine disagreement in these areas of discourse. Contemporary relativists hold a substantial advantage over conceptualists on this level. In comparison to conceptualism, contemporary relativism seeks to achieve this advantage through a much less common form of context dependence (Peter, 2015).

The truth-relativist about predicates of personal taste will, by insisting that the truth of Pretzels are tasty depends on the context of assessment, allow a single proposition to be (at the same time):

- true relative to the context of assessment where A's standards of taste are operative and
- false relative to the context of assessment where B's standards of taste are operative.

Contemporary Relativist views, which support fact-relativism locally for some sphere of discourse, are in contrast to the more conventional view of the propositional substance (what Cappelen & Hawthorne calls "The Simple View"), according to which propositions carry fact and falsity as monadic properties (MacFarlane 2011)

Contemporary relativists inherit Lewis and Kaplan's formal structure and add yet another parameter, but their reasons for doing so are somewhat different from the reasons that first inspired the system. Whereas the reasons for "proliferating" parameters by Lewis and Kaplan were largely based on factors relating to deliberate operators, the more contemporary reasons for adding a judge or standard parameter are also related to respecting (for example) discrepancy data (2015 by Kölbel).

Coliva and Moruzzi (2012), a broader kind of issue for this semantic theory (as well as to moral relativists more generally), is that it succumbs to the progress fallacy, a claim that common challenges, in particular, cultural relativists (as well as indexical contextualists) about moral judgments by arguing that moral change is both noticeable and not something the relativist can countenance.

John MacFarlane (2013) argues that both intuitions of indeterminacy and intuition of certainty can be taken at face value and that the only way to take into account the meaning of future contingents is, as he puts it, to allow the reality of future contingent claims to be doubly relativised: both to the sense of utterance and the sense of evaluation. When we evaluate a single "There will be a sea war tomorrow" utterance generated on (say) Monday, this counts as neither true nor false when the context of the evaluation is the context in which the utterance is made (as at this stage there are several possible histories open). The same argument, however, will have a calculated truth-value relative to the next day's assessment sense.

### **General Objections to Contemporary Relativism and human dignity**

In all its types, there are two basic claims against Contemporary Relativism. The first is a claim based on inference, while the second is a logic claim. Two statement-related objections to Contemporary Relativism emerge from research by Gareth Evans (1985) and Robert Stalnaker (1978), respectively. Greenough (2010) concisely summarizes the problem Evans faces with truth-relativism on assertoric grounds:

- Question "What is the purpose".
- Any valid response to this query should include a one-for-all answer.
- Every one-for-all approach is inconsistent with Truth-Relativism
- Truth Relativism is thus removed.

### **Human dignity and human rights**

In our contemporary language, a significant influence of dignity was its use in the legal sphere, and in particular as part of Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (2012), which reads: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and freedom." From this paper, the universal importance of human dignity is obvious-it is the first paper in one of the few internationally accepted legal systems and should therefore not be understated in its importance to the notion of global civilization. It is, therefore, almost self-evident that integrity requires thorough analysis into its precise nature and possible application worldwide because it has found its significance in the legal sphere. However, there is no clear definition of what integrity means in this Declaration beyond some consequences for specific fundamental rights, such as the right to education (McCrudden 2013; Waldron 2012).

The primary usage of dignity in the context of human rights has been in relation to the universal right of any human being in the world to be treated with dignity, and maybe perhaps more important from a judicial point of view, not to deny the dignity of someone or to abuse the dignity of anyone. Although a Kantian viewpoint shines through this argument, however, it is unclear how that can be interpreted and applied in a more realistic sense.

Once again, Rosen (2012) opposed the legal usage of dignity as it raises issues with the status and sense of dignity. We cannot direct a legal system without a simple definition of what dignity entails, and can only rely on jurisprudence. While some simple definitions of what violations of dignity entail, such as torture and abuse, maybe identified and therefore legally implemented as a breach of one's dignity, there remain two issues. The first concerns the validity of incorporating dignity in addition to human rights, since the establishment of certain human rights should be sufficient to enforce a legal sphere without automatically adding another legal term (i.e., dignity) to supplement it. The second is if, from a legal point of view, dignity can be understood at all when we take into account the conflict between autonomy (not necessarily from a Kantian point of view, but from a legal point of view), which argues that people should be free to act in ways they like, and violations of dignity which are not explicitly legally enforceable but are at their discretion.

For instance, Rosen (2012) presents the (true) case of a French village mayor who banned a dwarf-tossing competition at a local discotheque. The dwarf, who gained a living for this job, claimed to be autonomous and volunteer in this job, and so should be able to openly participate in this work, which the village's mayor believed to be a breach of one's integrity. Two things that are important to understanding integrity come up here.

However, as Rosen (2012) also states, it seems difficult to put dignity in a legal system, as it would imply that breaches of dignity would have led to punishment and sentences. The presence of a statute means that the legislation must be followed, and lawbreakers are punished. Although the Declaration of Human Rights provides the potential to do so, it is not enough because infringements of equality do not require themselves to be limited by the scope of the law.

More precisely, conceptualizations of religious dignity that presuppose a dignity obtained by God, through which the human being becomes subordinate to God and serves Him in every action (Rosen 2012). Thus, outward dignity is often related to non-action, a dimension of dignity that is not Kantian but resonates with non-Western views of dignity. For example, in traditional Chinese Daoism, non-action as dignity resonates (Qing-Ju 2014).

According to Qing-Ju (2014), dignity is achieved in one's actions. It also provides a specific viewpoint on what dignity means. Daoism recommends that integrity be obtained by abstinence and non-action. The individual becomes more dignified when one reduces his or her desires, so there is less tension with one's environment. Life should not be about finding more possessions but rather about refraining from desiring more.

### **Relativism and Human Dignity**

According to Bayefsky (2013), the early contributions of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism and the other major faiths of the world will illustrate relativism and its effect on human dignity. All of them discuss experiences of compassion and justice between people. It is

extraordinary if one considers that religions were traditionally raised in pre-modern, male-dominated societies formed by gigantic sexism, social inequality and deep hierarchies.

For Della Mirandola (2012), leaving aside the religious sector, the fair integrity of individuals is also highly regarded by non-believers as a fundamental internal law that is endowed with by all. As a result of this intercultural moral diversity, the concept of contemporary human dignity is not impartial among ethical codes around the world. International values, in particular those related to women's and children's rights – e.g. women's legal equality or free choice of partner; among others, may be foreign to certain current cultures because many of their members perceive them. If there is a conflict between human dignity and gendered norms found in some social patterns, it is unlikely that women's universal rights may be embedded in domestic laws and policies.

The evidence suggests that people who have grown up in a system that stresses their inferiority may be discouraged by more or less unconscious repression from thinking and behaving freely. In similar situations, the role of human dignity activists is to promote a critical view in order to make people aware of their agency and decision-making capacity, and then encourage them to choose for themselves honestly. There is an ongoing debate about the historical process that led to the formulation of modern values, established primarily within the Western culture as a secularized version of what was originally Christian precepts (Bayefsky 2013).

Charles Beitz, (2011), for example, believes that fundamental rights to social security, political asylum, membership in the country's government or free elementary education do not exist a priori without the social norms or institutionalized practices of reciprocity from which contemporary values emerge. One of the last chapters, Human Dignity Standards Authority, returns to the issue of intercultural moral diversity and advises that everyone must construct moral duties in a language rooted in their culture. The doctrine of human dignity should not be viewed simply as representing the socio-political values that predominate in Western Europe and America.

Compliance with global norms cannot be successful if they are viewed as foreign to the social customs and traditions of individuals themselves. On the contrary, it is important to "conquer" these norms from within each group. To have credibility, their abuses must be protested and also rejected at the local level. The Substantive Minimalism of Human Dignity offers a minimal centre of human dignity as the product of an intercultural agreement - 'overlapping consensus' that provides a foundation for all but the most basic negative freedoms (John Rawls 2013).

According to Kateb (2011), "global ethics" comes from human nature and a shared susceptibility to pain, a sort of universal purpose, and some common themes among existing behavioural trends. It indicates what is wrong to people regardless of their ethnicity, faith, nationality, among others. Imagine any conditions where you or someone you know may want to be kidnapped, abused without a good reason, or detained arbitrarily. This knowledge is focused on our ability to sense the pain inflicted on other human beings as if it were ours. Substantial minimalism defends against a small range of risks, but does not accept a broader set of civil and political ideals, and disregards social or economic norms altogether. Otherwise, under the guise of a more stringent approach to universal values, basic human integrity may be deprived of adequate resources to be efficiently regulated and implemented, or external interferences that impede domestic self-determination. 9



However, the implication that none in the liberal tradition can be extended to international cultures implicitly condemns the latter to underdevelopment for a long time to come.

From Overlapping Consensus to Radical Convergence, tackle the general interests beyond this "overlapping consensus" and explore new changes in societal standards that incorporate human rights through a "radical convergence" in worldviews. The global practice of human dignity develops according to the circumstances of modern life; this intercultural agreement must benefit from the best possible elaboration of the present cultures by means of an enlightened adaptive reinterpretation (John Rawls 2013).

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Relativism comes in a multitude of ways which are rooted in diverse theological motives themselves. There is no such thing as the Relativism simpliciter, and there is no single statement that would define or refute any proposed relativistic stance. Nevertheless, amid this diversity, there are commonalities and family resemblances that justify using the term "relativism" for the diverse views we have discussed. Relativism remains a highly contentious topic that still resists numerous efforts to remove it from political debate. What is most interesting, however, is the recent success in at least some circles of analytic philosophy of some interpretations of the doctrine.

As revealed, when that quality is absolute, it is not sufficient to base human integrity upon any other standard. Finally, it is essential to go deeper, not only to demonstrate what is wrong, but to create a constructive stance; otherwise, the critique seems incomplete, and we may infer that there are no ethical standards above and beyond what each person chooses as his or her values from time to time, should they even bother to do so.

Our experiment in opposing relativistic theories has been useful in that it has at least demonstrated that one could not search for a moral absolute that would explain and give substance to our 'human dignity' ideas: one cannot appeal to particular human attributes or property. Such values, such as rationality and autonomy, may be essential reminders of human dignity and provide grounds for respecting the dignity of others, but they cannot base it on it. Instead, the main basis of 'human dignity' as an integral whole must be in human nature.

Trying to split 'human dignity' into a continuum of white light, or translating it through reverence for a reason or the right to make an argument, is meaningless, and fundamentally incoherent.

To the degree that principles of 'human dignity' have any weight, they support the preservation of the euthanasia rule as it is in the world, for human integrity is not, and can not be, violated by personal disabilities or suffering, whether congenital or not.

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