# Critical Core Signature Assignment: Moral Relativism

Personal Growth & Cultural Literacy

Key Indicator 2: Demonstrates Ethical Self-Awareness

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| **COMPETENCY: PERSONAL GROWTH AND CULTURAL LITERACY KEY INDICATOR 2: STUDENT DEMONSTRATES ETHICAL SELF-AWARENESS.** | | |
| **Level** | **Score** | **Requirements** |
|  | **Blank** | Indicates an assignment was not submitted. |
| **0** | Indicates submission of an assignment that does not allow for sufficient or appropriate scoring of skill, for example, an assignment that plagiarized. |
| **Beginning** | **1** | Student states either their core beliefs or articulates the origins of the core beliefs, but not both. |
| **Emerging** | **2** | Student states both core beliefs and the origins of the core beliefs. |
| **3** | Student discusses in detail/analyzes both core beliefs and the origins of the core beliefs. |
| **Proficient** | **4** | Student discusses in detail/analyzes both core beliefs and the origins of the core beliefs and discussion has greater depth and clarity. |

## **Essay 1** (5% of final grade): **Due by midnight Sunday May 25**

Define “Moral Relativism” and explain how you view ethics, i.e. questions of right and wrong, good and bad, obligation, etc..

Answer the following questions:

* Are there any such things as moral absolutes that remain constant across cultures and are applicable to all individuals? Or are all core moral beliefs true merely relative to one’s culture?
* Are all values purely subjective?
* **Clearly state your current beliefs,**
* **Discuss the origins of those beliefs (what influenced those beliefs and where did you get those beliefs?), and**
* **Explain why you think your perspective is correct.**

My moral compass has been profoundly shaped by the values instilled in me by my family and the culture I was raised in. From a young age, I was taught that the foundation of ethical behavior lies in treating others with kindness and respect. The guiding principle I carry with me is simple yet powerful: do right by others, and in turn, they will do right by you. This mutual respect and consideration form the core of my understanding of what is right and wrong. These values did not develop in isolation; instead, they are deeply intertwined with the teachings from my family, which emphasized honesty, empathy, responsibility, and fairness. Growing up in a culture that values community and reciprocal kindness further reinforced these lessons. Moral values are not abstract concepts but living principles that guide daily interactions and decisions.

Regarding moral relativism, the philosophical idea that morality is relative to one’s culture or perspective, I see it as a compelling framework to understand the diversity in human ethics. Moral relativism raises essential questions: Are moral principles absolute and universally binding, or do they vary depending on cultural context? Are all values merely subjective preferences, or do some transcend cultural boundaries? From my perspective, I believe that while there are specific universal values, such as fairness, kindness, and respect, the way these values are expressed often depends on cultural norms. For example, respect may manifest differently across societies, but the underlying concept of valuing others remains consistent. Thus, I align with a moderate view that acknowledges moral relativism’s insight into cultural influence without rejecting the existence of some core moral absolutes.

My ethical position feels correct because it balances respect for cultural differences with a commitment to fundamental moral principles. In my personal experience, growing up in a family-oriented culture, I witnessed how shared values create trust and harmony within communities. At the same time, encounters with people from different backgrounds have shown me that ethical perspectives can vary widely yet still hold validity within their cultural context. This realization has helped me appreciate moral pluralism without descending into moral chaos or nihilism. This stance encourages open-mindedness and tolerance while maintaining a stable ethical foundation. It is not merely an intellectual position but a lived experience that has enriched my relationships and decision-making.

In conclusion, my moral compass is rooted in family and cultural teachings, prioritizing treating others well. Moral relativism offers valuable insight into how ethics can adapt across cultures, but I also believe in some universal values that anchor moral judgments. This blend allows me to navigate complex ethical questions with sensitivity and conviction, reflecting personal growth and cultural literacy.

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## **Essay 2** (5% of final grade): **Due by midnight Sunday July 13**

After analyzing arguments for and against Moral Relativism, how have your views changed, if at all? Explain, and more importantly, argue for your current position on Moral Relativism (make sure you include in your essay ideas/philosophers//examples learned during the course).

The initial exposure to moral relativism often challenges ingrained notions of universal moral truths, presenting a compelling argument that morality is a cultural construct rather than an objective reality. Before delving into the nuances, my understanding of morality was primarily shaped by a blend of societal norms and personal upbringing, leaning towards the idea that specific actions are inherently right or wrong, regardless of context. This perspective, often referred to as moral absolutism, posits that a universal moral code exists, applicable to all people at all times. However, the examination of diverse cultural practices and historical shifts in moral attitudes began to chip away at this conviction, revealing the profound influence of environment and tradition on ethical frameworks.

Engaging with arguments for moral relativism, particularly the descriptive claim that different cultures indeed have different moral codes, proved to be a pivotal point in my evolving perspective. The sheer variety of ethical systems across the globe, from dietary restrictions to acceptable forms of governance, provides compelling evidence against the existence of a single, overarching moral truth. For instance, what one society deems a heinous crime, another might consider a necessary act. This descriptive observation naturally leads to the more controversial normative claim of moral relativism, which suggests that there is no objective standard by which to judge one moral code as superior to another. This line of reasoning fosters a profound sense of humility and an appreciation for the intricate tapestry of human values.

My views have indeed shifted, solidifying my position in favor of ethical relativism, specifically in its cultural form. This stance is not an endorsement of moral anarchy, where anything goes, but rather an affirmation of the profound impact of cultural context on moral judgments. One of the strongest arguments in favor of cultural relativism lies in its promotion of tolerance and understanding. Suppose we accept that different cultures develop their moral codes based on their unique histories, environments, and societal needs. In that case, it becomes difficult to impose one's ethical framework as universally superior. This fosters respect for diversity and encourages a critical examination of one's own biases, recognizing that what seems intuitively right to us might be culturally specific.

Furthermore, cultural relativism offers a more nuanced explanation for moral disagreements both within and between societies. Rather than viewing differing moral perspectives as evidence of moral error or depravity, it allows us to understand them as products of different cultural lenses. Consider the varying attitudes towards individual rights versus communal harmony in Western versus some Eastern cultures. An absolutist perspective might label one as inherently better, while a relativist perspective recognizes the different foundational values at play. This framework helps to de-escalate moral conflicts by reframing them as differences in cultural emphasis rather than outright moral failures. It also prompts us to question the origins of our own moral beliefs, recognizing them as products of our cultural conditioning.

Moreover, the historical progression of moral thought provides additional support for the relativistic viewpoint. Concepts that were once widely accepted, such as slavery or the subjugation of women, are now almost universally condemned. This evolution suggests that moral truths are not static and eternal, but rather dynamic and subject to change as societies develop and acquire new knowledge and insights. If morality were truly absolute, such shifts would be inexplicable. The very idea of moral progress, therefore, implicitly acknowledges a degree of relativism, as it suggests a movement from one set of moral understandings to another, often based on evolving social consciousness and scientific knowledge. This dynamic nature of morality is a powerful argument against the rigidity of absolutism.

While acknowledging the strengths of ethical relativism, it is crucial to address common critiques, particularly the concern that it might lead to a lack of moral progress or the inability to criticize truly abhorrent practices. However, embracing cultural relativism does not mean abandoning all moral judgment. It means acknowledging the context of those judgments. We can still advocate for human rights, for example, not by claiming a universal ethical imperative that transcends all cultures, but by arguing for their instrumental value in promoting human flourishing and well-being, which are widely desirable outcomes across diverse societies. The distinction lies in the foundation of the argument: instead of asserting a universal moral truth, we appeal to shared human experiences and pragmatic consequences.

In conclusion, my journey through the arguments for and against moral relativism has fundamentally reshaped my understanding of ethics. I have moved from a largely intuitive and somewhat uncritical acceptance of moral absolutism to a firm belief in cultural relativism. This shift is not merely an academic exercise; it has profound implications for how I view cultural differences, resolve moral dilemmas, and engage in global dialogue. By recognizing that morality is essentially a product of cultural conditioning, we cultivate empathy, foster tolerance, and become more critically aware of the origins and limitations of our moral frameworks. This perspective, while challenging in its implications for universal moral claims, ultimately offers a more nuanced and accurate portrayal of the complex and diverse landscape of human morality. The strength of cultural relativism lies in its ability to explain the vast spectrum of human ethical behavior without resorting to ethnocentric judgments, paving the way for greater understanding and respectful coexistence in a diverse world.