



Microensayo

**Should the diversity of cultural (moral) customs be respected, or, instead, should we must find a way to institute a universal morality, which should apply to all human society?**

*¿Se debe respetar la diversidad de costumbres culturales (morales) o, en su lugar, hay que encontrar la manera de instituir una moralidad universal, la cual deba aplicarse a cualquier sociedad humana?*

Cuauhtli Axelle Deverge Talavera (estudiante)  
Fernando Salcedo García (asesor de Ética)  
*Prepa Entorno*

**Abstract**

This text characterizes cultural relativism in general terms (based on the five statements that J. Rachels offers), in addition to analyzing some of the challenges that this ethical conception of moral diversity faces, taking as its axis the concept of "universal morality." Thus, this essay addresses the following topics: 1) conceptualization of cultural relativism; 2) challenges that this form of relativism faces; and 3) a middle point between relativism and moral universalism.

**Keywords:** cultural relativism, cultural diversity, moral codes, tolerance paradox, universal morality, human rights.

### Resumen

El presente texto caracteriza en términos generales al relativismo cultural (a partir de las cinco afirmaciones que J. Rachels ofrece), además de que analiza algunos de los retos a los que esta concepción ética sobre la diversidad moral se enfrenta, tomando como eje al concepto de "moral universal". Así, este ensayo aborda los siguientes tópicos: 1) conceptualización del relativismo cultural; 2) retos a los que esta forma de relativismo se enfrenta; y 3) un punto medio entre el relativismo y universalismo moral.

**Palabras clave:** relativismo cultural, diversidad cultural, códigos morales, paradoja de la tolerancia, moral universal, derechos humanos.

Recibido: 13 de marzo de 2024

Aceptado: 7 de mayo de 2024

It is really well known that most (if not all) societies have different moral codes that diversify in customs and ways of seeing things. These differences in the moral codes are what can be seen as unnatural or weird behavior for other cultures, depending on the traditions each society has.

To know a little more about respect towards different cultures, it's important to know about "cultural relativism" and on what it is based on.

Basically it says that there are no such things as universal truths in moral and ethical fields, and that there's only a plurality of cultural codes, nothing more. This theory has five claims that act as the base of its arguments, which are: 1) different societies have different moral codes, 2) the moral code of a society determines what is right within that society, 3) there is no objective standard that can be used to judge one society's code as better than another's, 4) the moral code of our own society has no special status, and 5) it is arrogant for us to judge other cultures (Rachels, 2012).

Cultural relativism offers a rich framework for understanding diverse moral customs, but it is also very criticized due to the fact that it can be said that it is a theory that can lead to accept things like human rights violations in the name of culture. This challenge is called the "tolerance paradox", which says that being too tolerant might end up accepting harmful behaviors against society. An example of this is female genital mutilation in some cultures; it is seen as a violation on human rights and a way of torture, but according to cultural relativism, we should tolerate this actions due to it being part of a specific culture, even if we do not agree with it (Rachels, 2012).

There are many more existing examples of diversity in moral codes and actions per society that can be part of the tolerance paradox. We also have the case of Eskimos and the way they had the moral tradition of killing baby girls. They had reasons for doing this: males were the main food providers, so they couldn't kill them, and the hunters suffered a high casualty rate. So if male and female infants had survived in equal numbers, the female population would have outnumbered the male adult population. After knowing the reasons, it seems kind of okay for them, in some measure, to do that, and killing baby girls is the last resort (Rachels, 2012).

But for many societies this act may still seem inhuman and unethical, and it is here where universal morality appears. This term is focused on finding a universal criterion in which all moral codes should be based on, without minding where you come from, the customs your ancestors had, etc. Thus, many cultures would be completely banished with this universal code, and it would limit the social customs that exist.

Due to all the counterparts of both theories, the best solution would be to find a middle ground. With this, both cultural and social customs, and human rights would be respected. It's about having open conversations, educating each other, and being open to changing things for the better. While cultural relativism reminds us of the importance of understanding and respecting diverse customs within their unique contexts, it also brings to the front the "tolerance paradox" and the potential acceptance of human rights violations under the guise of cultural tradition. On the other hand, universal morality aims to establish a consistent moral framework for all, but it may risk erasing valuable cultural diversity. Recognizing the merits and criticisms of both perspectives, the middle ground emerges as the most reasonable approach. It is in this balanced approach that we can achieve a harmonious society of universal character, where both cultural-relative codes and human rights find their rightful place.

### References

Rachels, J. (2012). Chapter 2: The Challenge of Cultural Relativism. In Rachels, J. *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (pp. 14- 31). McGraw Hill.

### How to cite this article

Deverge Talavera, C. y Salcedo, F. (2024). Should the diversity of cultural (moral) customs be respected, or, instead, should we must find a way to institute a universal morality, which should apply to all human society? *Tsaloa - Revista Multidisciplinaria de Educación Media Superior*, 1, 47-51. <https://revistas-entorno.net/tsaloa/article/view/6>



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