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## Literatur zum ethischen Relativismus

### Bibliography on ethical relativism

Alphabetische Ordnung / alphabetical order:

<http://www.ethikseite.de/bib/brelativ.pdf>

Chronologische Ordnung / reverse chronological order:

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<sup>1</sup> “The idea of universal human rights has been perhaps the most contentious concept of the twentieth century. Originally presented as a response to the atrocities of the past and an attempt to stifle the potential ills of the future, the concept has been under heated assault by adherents to the concept of ‘cultural relativism.’ The basic conflict between these two extreme perspectives lies with the degree to which either should be the primary consideration when dealing with the great diversity of peoples worldwide. While proponents of universal human rights believe that a fundamental group of human rights exist and can be applied uniformly throughout the world, cultural relativists are primarily concerned with protecting and understanding, usually in functionalist terms, the diversity of cultures worldwide. This overarching conflict is the underlying focus of ‘Cultural Relativism in the Face of the West’. Billet examines the debate between the uniform application of universal human rights and cultural relativism. In so doing, Billet outlines the foundations of both schools of thought and provides a history of their evolution. The book also examines case studies that involve either women or children and are typically viewed by the West as violations of fundamental human rights.

Table of contents: Introduction: Universal Human Rights versus Cultural Relativism. Female Circumcision. Female Infanticide. Female Child Prostitution. Female Child Labour. Trafficking Women and Female Slave Labour. Conclusions and Implications. Bibliography. Index.”

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<sup>2</sup> “In formulating this collection, Don Browning asked his contributors to respond to a simple question: has moral relativism run its course? The threats of terrorism, reproductive technology, and globalization have forced us to ask anew whether there are universal moral truths upon which to base political and ethical judgments. In this timely edited collection, distinguished scholars present and test the best answers to this question. This dialogue includes contributions from widely-recognized scholars Richard Bernstein, Amitai Etzioni, Jean Bethke Elshtain, William Galston, Franklin Gamwell, Timothy Jackson, James Turner Johnson, John Kelsay, and Jean Porter.

Although the conflict between universalism and relativism is a complex issue with many parts, the contributors to this volume tackle the question at hand in an engaging, thought-provoking manner. These insightful responses temper the strong antithesis between universalism and relativism and retain sensitivity to how language and history shape the context of our moral decisions. This important and relevant work of contemporary political and social thought is ideal for use in the classroom across many disciplines including political science, philosophy, ethics, theology, and law.

Contents: Preface. List of Contributors. Introduction (Don Browning). Part I: Foundationalism v. Antifoundationalism. Can We Justify Moral Norms? (Richard J. Bernstein). Self-Evident Truth (Beyond Relativism) (Amitai Etzioni). The Origin of Moral Norms (Franklin I. Gamwell). Part II: Approaches from Human Nature. Moral Ideals and Human Nature (Jean Porter). Can We Justify Universal Moral Norms? Yes, with Qualifications (William Galston). Part III: Common Ground through Historical Understanding. Searching for Common Ground: Ethical Tradition at the Interface with International Law (James Turner Johnson). Christians, Muslims, and the Conduct of War (John Kelsay). Part IV: Multidimensional Approaches. Universalism and Relativism: Some Lessons from Gandhi (Timothy Jackson). Concrete Levels of Being and

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Their Political Implications (Jean Bethke Elshtain). Response (Richard J. Bernstein). Response (Amitai Etzioni).”

<sup>3</sup> “Moral relativism is an attractive position, but also one that it is difficult to formulate. In this paper, we propose an alternative way of formulating moral relativism that locates the relativity of morality in the property that makes moral claims true. Such an approach, we believe, has significant advantages over other possible ways of formulating moral relativism. We conclude by considering a few problems such a position might face.”

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<sup>4</sup> “In this article I ask how moral relativism applies to the analysis of responsibility for mass crime. The focus is on the critical reading of two influential relativist attempts to offer a theoretically consistent response to the challenges imposed by extreme criminal practices. First, I explore Gilbert Harman’s analytical effort to conceptualize the reach of moral discourse. According to Harman, mass crime creates a contextually specific relationship to which moral judgments do not apply any more. Second, I analyze the inability thesis, which claims that the agents of mass crime are not able to distinguish between right and wrong. Richard Arneson, Michael Zimmerman and Geoffrey Scarre do not deny the moral wrongness of crime. However, having introduced the claim of authenticity as a specific feature of the inability thesis, they maintain that killers are not responsible. I argue that these positions do not hold. The relativist failure to properly conceptualize responsibility for mass crime follows from the mistaken view of moral autonomy, which then leads to the erroneous explanation of the establishment, authority and justification of moral judgments.”

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<sup>5</sup> „In diesem Buch wird nach einem Überblick über die Ideengeschichte relativistischen Denkens sowie einer systematischen Darstellung philosophischer und religiöser Relativismuskritik der Versuch unternommen, relativistischem Denken von der Beobachtung der moralischen Vielfalt über ihre Deutung bis hin zu normativen Implikationen nachzuspüren. Die Ergebnisse der Untersuchung werden schließlich aktuellen gesellschafts- und globalpolitischen Diskursen zugeführt.“

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<sup>6</sup> “I argue that evolutionary strategies of kin selection and game-theoretic reciprocity are apt to generate agent-centered and agent-neutral moral intuitions, respectively. Such intuitions are the building blocks of moral theories, resulting in a fundamental schism between agent-centered theories on the one hand and agent-neutral theories on the other. An agent-neutral moral theory is one according to which everyone has the same duties and moral aims, no matter what their personal interests or interpersonal relationships. Agent-centered moral theories deny this and include at least some prescriptions that include ineliminable indexicals. I argue that there are no rational means of bridging the gap between the two types of theories; nevertheless this does not necessitate skepticism about the moral – we might instead opt for an ethical relativism in which the truth of moral statements is relativized to the perspective of moral theories on either side of the schism. Such a relativism does not mean that any ethical theory is as good as any other; some cannot be held in reflective equilibrium, and even among those that can, there may well be pragmatic reasons that motivate the selection of one theory over another. But if no sort of relativism is deemed acceptable, then it is hard to avoid moral skepticism.”

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<sup>7</sup> “In this article, various objections will be discussed that have been put forward against ethical relativism, but which haven’t been considered seriously enough on the part of relativists and have been overrated on the part of their opponents. The objections will be concentrated into three arguments: the action-theoretic, the epistemological and the truth-theoretic argument. The article will discuss whether they can be rebutted by proponents of the two main types of relativism: indexical relativism and truth-relativism. The conclusion will be as follows: (i) one version of indexical relativism, the analytical version, gets into serious troubles by the action-theoretic argument, while its revisionary version will remain unaffected, (ii) the epistemological argument fails with respect to indexical relativism and stands on shaky ground as regards truth-relativism, (iii) the truth-theoretic argument puts considerable pressure (solely) on truth-relativism.”



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<sup>8</sup> „Im vorliegenden Aufsatz werden die begrifflichen Verbindungen zwischen dem Standpunkt des Wertrelativismus und dem Toleranzgrundsatz erörtert sowie die beiden im gegebenen Zusammenhang vorgebrachten Einwände des Trugschlusses und der fehlenden Begründung für die vorausgesetzte Toleranzbereitschaft diskutiert. Anhand eingehender Argumentation wird gezeigt, dass jene Einwände der tatsächlichen konzeptionellen Struktur entsprechender relativistischer Lehren und ihren möglichen Ausformungen nicht ganz gerecht werden. Somit kann der relativistische Standpunkt erhalten bleiben.“

<sup>9</sup> “This book aims to clarify the debate between moral relativists and moral absolutists by showing what is right and what is wrong about each of these positions, by revealing how the phenomenon of moral diversity is connected with moral relativism, and by arguing for the importance of relationships between persons as key to reaching a satisfactory understanding of the issues involved in the debate.”

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<sup>11</sup> “Contents: Introduction. Part I: Living with Cultural Paradoxes. Paradoxes of Culture. The Ethical Significance of Culture. A Cultural Critique of Cultural Relativism. Part II: Transcending Dichotomies. Destructive of Cultural Community? Intolerant of Cultural Pluralism? Part III: Human Rights: The View from Anywhere. Cross-Cultural via the Inter-Subjective. From Human Values to Inherent Rights. From Practical Reasons to Extrinsic Rights. An Unfair Utopia?”

<sup>12</sup> “Moral relativism is often regarded as both fatally flawed and incompatible with liberalism. This book aims to show why such criticism is misconceived. First, it argues that relativism provides a plausible account of moral justification. Drawing on the contemporary relativist and universalist analyses of thinkers such as Harman, Nagel and Habermas, it develops an alternative account of ‘coherence relativism’. Turning to liberalism, the book argues that moral relativism is not only consistent with the claims of contemporary liberalism, but underpins those claims. The political liberalism of Rawls and Barry is founded on an unacknowledged commitment to a relativist account of justification. In combining these two elements, the book offers a new understanding of relativism, and demonstrates its relevance for contemporary liberal thought.”

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<sup>13</sup> “The multicultural composition of the United States can pose problems for physicians and patients who come from diverse backgrounds. Although respect for cultural diversity mandates tolerance of the beliefs and practices of others, in some situations excessive tolerance can produce harm to patients. Careful analysis is needed to determine which values are culturally relative and which rest on an underlying universal ethical principle. A conception of justice as equality challenges the notion that it is always necessary to respect all of the beliefs and practices of every cultural group.”

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<sup>14</sup> „Welche Wahlmöglichkeiten haben Vertreter des metaethischen Relativismus hinsichtlich des Wahrheits- und Rechtfertigungsbegriffs, den sie für ihre Position in Anspruch nehmen? Und wie wirkt sich ihre Entscheidung auf die Plausibilität dieser Theorie aus? Anhand des bestehenden Angebots prominenter Wahrheits- und Rechtfertigungskonzeptionen, so der erste Teil der in diesem Buch vertretenen Antwort, ergibt sich für den Verfechter einer relativistischen Position zunächst eine breitere Auswahl als gemeinhin angenommen. Betrachtet man jedoch für den zweiten Teil der Ausgangsfrage die konkrete Verwendung dieser Wahrheits- und Rechtfertigungsbegriffe in führenden metaethisch-relativistischen Theorien, fällt auf, dass die an sie herangetragenen Anforderungen für sie aufgrund anderweitiger theorieinterner Entscheidungen umso schwieriger einzuhalten sind, je puristischer die Positionen auftreten. Varianten des Relativismus, die sich stärker zu ihren realistischen/objektivistischen Kontrahenten hin orientieren, können diese Anforderungen besser integrieren; dafür entstehen hier Spannungen zu den verbleibenden relativistisch geprägten Elementen dieser Theorien.“

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<sup>15</sup> “I attempt to rebut the following standard objections against cultural relativism: 1. It is self-defeating for a cultural relativist to take the principle of tolerance as absolute; 2. There are universal moral rules, contrary to what cultural relativism claims; 3. If cultural relativism were true, Hitler’s genocidal actions would be right, social reformers would be wrong to go against their own culture, moral progress would be impossible, and an atrocious crime could be made moral by forming a culture which approves of it; 4. Cultural relativism is silent about how large a group must be in order to be a culture, and which culture we should follow when we belong to two cultures with conflicting moralities.”

<sup>16</sup> “I give the label “ethical pluralism” to the meta-ethical view that competing moral views are valid. I assume that validity is conferred on a moral view by its satisfying the relevant meta-ethical criteria in a maximally satisfactory way. If the relevant meta-ethical criteria are based on something roughly like the wide reflective equilibrium model, then ethical pluralism is likely to be correct. Traditional moral views do not grant exemptions from their own binding rules or principles to agents – should any exist – who adhere to a competing valid moral view. Given the usual conception of accepting a moral view, an ethical pluralist cannot honestly accept a traditional moral view. Consequently, I argue, an ethical pluralist is committed to the view that all traditional moral views are invalid. Given the likelihood of ethical pluralism, this conclusion

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- 1992 [217] Putnam, Hilary (1992): Pragmatism and Relativism: Universal Values and Traditional Ways of Life, in ders., *Words and Life*, Cambridge, Mass., S. 182–97.
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- 1993 [219] Rachels, James (1993): *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, New York, 2. Aufl., S. 15–29 (“The

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is alarming. I set forth a weak conception of accepting a moral view that is designed to allow an ethical pluralist honestly to accept a traditional moral view. In particular, my conception is designed to explain how someone can (a) be guided by the view that she accepts; (b) accept her own moral view while rationally not accepting competing views that she thinks are equally valid; and (c) not be prepared to prescribe morally to those who are following other valid views. Central to my formulation are what I call a stance of modest respectful disapproval toward other people’s wrong behavior, together with acceptance of decisive moral reasons for oneself that are generated by the valid moral view that one accepts.”

<sup>17</sup> “Jesse Prinz argues that recent work in philosophy, neuroscience, and anthropology supports two radical hypotheses about the nature of morality: moral values are based on emotional responses, and these emotional responses are inculcated by culture, not hard-wired through natural selection.

In the first half of the book, Jesse Prinz defends the hypothesis that morality has an emotional foundation. Evidence from brain imaging, social psychology, and psychopathology suggest that, when we judge something to be right or wrong, we are merely expressing our emotions. Prinz argues that these emotions do not track objective features of reality; rather, the rightness and wrongness of an act consists in the fact that people are disposed to have certain emotions towards it. In the second half of the book, he turns to a defence of moral relativism. Moral facts depend on emotional responses, and emotional responses vary from culture to culture. Prinz surveys the anthropological record to establish moral variation, and he draws on cultural history to show how attitudes toward practices such as cannibalism and marriage change over time. He also criticizes evidence from animal behaviour and child development that has been taken to support the claim that moral attitudes are hard-wired by natural selection. Prinz concludes that there is no single true morality, but he also argues that some moral values are better than others; moral progress is possible.

Throughout the book, Prinz relates his views to contemporary and historical work in philosophical ethics. His views echo themes in the writings of David Hume and Friedrich Nietzsche, but Prinz supports, extends, and revises these classic theories using the resources of cutting-edge cognitive science. *The Emotional Construction of Morals* will stimulate and challenge anyone who is curious about the nature and origin of moral values.”

<sup>18</sup> “Among naturalist philosophers, both defenders and opponents of moral relativism argue that prescriptive moral theories (or normative theories) should be constrained by empirical findings about human psychology. Empiricists have asked if people are or can be moral relativists, and what effect being a moral relativist can have on an individual’s moral functioning. This research is underutilized in philosophers’ normative theories of relativism; at the same time, the empirical work, while useful, is conceptually disjointed. Our goal is to integrate philosophical and empirical work on constraints on normative relativism. First, we present a working definition of moral relativism. Second, we outline naturalist versions of normative relativism, and third, we highlight the empirical constraints in this reasoning. Fourth, we discuss recent studies in moral psychology that are relevant for the philosophy of moral relativism. We assess here what conclusions for moral relativism can and cannot be drawn from experimental studies. Finally, we suggest how moral philosophers and moral psychologists can collaborate on the topic of moral relativism in the future.”

Challenge of Cultural Relativism“).

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<sup>19</sup> „Im Zeitalter von Individualismus und Globalisierung werden in der aktuellen Wertediskussion die traditionellen, metaphysisch fundierten und universal ausgerichteten Ethiken des Abendlandes fragwürdig. In der modernen Moralphilosophie wird versucht, dem Faktum unterschiedlicher kulturspezifischer Moralvorstellungen und dem Pluralismus verschiedener Weltbilder auch theoretisch gerecht zu werden. Vor diesem Hintergrund gewinnen relativistische Modelle wieder an Bedeutung. Im vorliegenden Buch wird die Theorie des Ethischen Relativismus klar strukturiert erläutert und in ihren unterschiedlichen konkreten Ansätzen beschrieben. Vor allem findet aber eine analytisch-kritische Auseinandersetzung statt, in welcher die Thesen



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und Argumente der verschiedenen vorgestellten Konzepte hinsichtlich ihrer Voraussetzungen, Ansprüche, logischen Konsistenz und ethischen Konsequenzen auf ihre Möglichkeiten und Grenzen hin geprüft werden. Im Schlusskapitel werden die Anforderungen, die an eine moderne Moral zu stellen sind, erörtert und das Modell des Ethischen Föderalismus vorgestellt.“

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<sup>20</sup> “Moral relativism comes in many varieties. One is a moral doctrine, according to which we ought to respect other cultures, and allow them to solve moral problems as they see fit. I will say nothing about this kind of moral relativism in the present context. Another kind of moral relativism is semantic moral relativism, according to which, when we pass moral judgements, we make an implicit reference to some system of morality (our own). According to this kind of moral relativism, when I say that a certain action is right, my statement is elliptic. What I am really saying is that, according to the system of morality in my culture, this action is right. I will reject this kind of relativism. According to yet another kind of moral relativism, which we may call epistemic, it is possible that, when one person (belonging to one culture) makes a certain moral judgement, such as that this action is right, and another person (belong to another culture) makes the judgement that the very same action is wrong, they may have just as good reasons for their respective judgements; it is even possible that, were they fully informed about all the facts, equally imaginative, and so forth, they would still hold on to their respective (conflicting) judgements. They are each fully justified in their belief in conflicting judgements. I will comment on this form of moral relativism in passing. Finally, however, there is a kind of moral relativism we could call ontological, according to which, when two persons pass conflicting moral verdicts on a certain action, they may both be right. The explanation is that they

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make their judgements from the perspective of different, socially constructed, moral universes. So while it is true in the first person’s moral universe that a certain action is right, it is true in the second person’s moral universe that the very same action is wrong. I explain and defend this version of ontological moral relativism.”

<sup>21</sup> “The paper undertakes a critical examination of three key strands – relativism, antirealism, and reflection – in Bernard Williams’s sceptical interpretation of ethical thought. The anti-realist basis of Williams’s ‘relativism of distance’ is identified and the way this threatens to render his relativism more subversive than initially appears. Focusing on Williams’s anti-realism, the paper argues that it fails because it is caught on the horns of a dilemma: either it draws on a conception of reality that is metaphysically incoherent, or else it employs a ‘best explanation’ criterion that question-beggingly excludes from further consideration the sort of reason-based explanations that disclose ethical properties to be real. Finally, it is noted that Williams’s relativism and anti-realism destabilize his picture of ethical reflection.”

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<sup>22</sup> “To be called a relativist, especially a moral relativist, is to be condemned as someone who holds that no objective values exist, and that in essence “anything goes.” This is as true in moral philosophy as it is in public circles where a social or religious conservative might use the term. Frequently the term is part of a dichotomy: either accept relativism or accept absolutism and universalism – the views that only one true morality exists and that it holds no matter the situation.

David B. Wong defends an ambitious and important new version of relativism that is both an alternative to, and fits between, universalism and the usual definition of relativism. He does agree with one aspect of relativism: there is no single true morality. Beyond that, he proposes that there can be a plurality of true moralities, moralities that exist across different traditions and cultures, all of which address facets of the same problem: how we are to live well together. Wong examines a wide array of positions and texts within the Western canon as well as in Chinese philosophy, and draws on philosophy, psychology, evolutionary theory, history, and literature, to make a case for the importance of pluralism in moral life, and to establish the virtues of acceptance and accommodation. Wong's point is that there is no single value or principle or ordering of values and principles that offers a uniquely true path for human living, but variations according to different contexts that carry within them a common core of human values. We should thus be modest about our own morality, learn from other approaches, and accommodate different practices in our pluralistic society.

Contents: I. How Pluralism and Naturalism Make for Natural Moralities. 1. Pluralism and Ambivalence. 2. Pluralistic Relativism. 3. Objections and Replies. II. Constraints on Natural Moralities. 4. Identity, Flourishing, and Relationship. 5. Community and Liberal Theory. 6. Does Psychological Realism Constrain the Content of Moralities? III. Having Confidence in Our Moral Commitments. 7. Moral Reasons – Internal and External. 8. Morality and Need. 9. Coping with Moral Difference. Bibliography. Index.”

<sup>23</sup> “The main aim of this paper is to advance, clarify, and defend a definition of relativism. On the definition, relativism does not contrast with absolutism, is not the same as pluralism, contrasts with universalism and nihilism, and is compatible with both moral objectivity and moral subjectivity. Advantages of the definition are noted, but the bulk of the paper is devoted to detailed discussions of the concepts that figure in the definition or are entailed by it. Such concepts include those of a moral code, of conflict between moral codes, and of a convention.”

<sup>24</sup> Introduction (Yong Huang and Yang Xiao). **Part I: Critical Essays.** 2. Human Morality, Naturalism, and Accommodation (Lawrence Blum). 3. Naturalism and Pluralistic Relativism (Steven F. Geisz and Brook J. Sadler). 4. Principle of Humanity vs. Principle of Charity (Chad Hansen). 5. Naturalism, Relativism, and the Authority of Morality (Christopher W. Gowans). 6. The Metaphysics and Semantics of Moral Relativism (Paul Bloomfield and Daniel Massey). 7. Toward a Benign Moral Relativism: From the Agent/Appraiser-Centered to the Patient-Centered (Yong Huang). **Part II: David Wong's Responses to Critics.** 8. Response to Blum. 9.

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