

Thinking Straight Ethical Reasoning Workshop 2-1, Tuesday, April 8, 2008

I The Cultural Relativist Argument and Rachels' general objection.

A. (Small Group discussion)

- (1) What, according to Rachel's is the Cultural Relativist argument. What exactly is his objection to it. What does it mean when he says it is not sound?
- (2) As part of his criticism, he points to a version of the culturally relativist arguments, not about ethics but about "scientific" belief, namely, that some cultures believed that the earth was flat and that others that it is rough spherical. Reconstruct this version of the argument. Discuss whether it shows that there is no "objective truth" about the shape of the earth?

B. Plenary Discussion about the Cultural Relativists Argument

II Rachels' Objections

A. (Individually) Review the list of statements on pp. 18-19 and Rachels' discussion of them in section 2.9. Which of these statements does Rachels end up supporting; which does he end up opposing.

B. (Small Group) *Discuss his assessment of each one in turn. Do you buy his argument.*

C. Plenary Discussion of Rachels' assessment of the list.

III Cultural Relativism and the Minimum Conception of Morality

A. (Small group) In chapter One, Rachels presented his "minimum conception of morality" and suggested that it captured basic features common to "most" of the ethical approaches he will cover in the text. Does it apply to the cultural relativist approach? If so, how?

B. (Full Group) Plenary Discussion of application of minimum conception of morality

IV Where do you stand on Cultural Relativism?

A. (Small group). On the basis of Rachel's discussion and any other ideas you might have, point to the as strong an argument as you can to convince a "cultural relativist" that his or her position is faulty. Are you convinced? If not, why not.

B. Plenary discussion: Taking a Stand on Cultural Relativism

V (Time Permitting) Rachels Chapter 3: *Subjectivism*

A. Small Group discussion:

- (1) What, according to Rachels is Subjectivism. He distinguishes two versions: simple subjectivism and emotivism. How do they differ, in what respect are they the same.
- (2) Rachels advances two arguments against simple subjectivism: that it cannot account for our fallibility and it can't account for disagreement. Do you find them compelling? How does emotivism escape these arguments? Do you find emotivism more compelling. If so, why?

B. Plenary discussion



Assignment for the Friday, April 14, ethics workshop. **Review** Rachels Chapter 3 (*Subjectivism*) and **Read** Chapter 4 (*Religion and Morality*). **Submit** a brief essay presenting the strongest argument you can in favor and against cultural relativism. Indicate which of the two (pro & con) alternatives you find ultimately most compelling and why you do so.