

Practice Essay Outline

Thesis: The standard arguments for cultural relativism fail, so that there are no grounds to accept it.

Exposition: I will present two of Ruth Benedict's arguments for cultural relativism that she gives in *Patterns of Culture* (1934). Specifically, I'll present the argument from cultural variation in moral norms, and the argument from avoiding ethnocentrism.

Arguments: I will criticize Benedict's two arguments, roughly as follows. The cultural relativism argument is based on exaggerating the moral differences between cultures, and ignoring their substantial agreement. Also, the mere fact of divergent opinions, in any domain, goes nowhere near proving that there is no body of facts in that domain. The argument that cultural relativism is needed to avoid ethnocentrism also faces two difficulties. First, her own position is ethnocentric, so that she undermines her own view. Second, the alleged benefits of cultural relativism can be obtained in other ways, without having to accept such a controversial position.

Objections: I expect that some readers will object that colonising cultures, by assuming moral realism, have done immense harm to indigenous tribes. My response is that moral realism will be harmful only when it is combined with incorrect moral beliefs.