

1. Relativism seems to be arbitrary. If slavery was right in the United States (and not just legal) before, say, January 1, 1863 (the date of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation), but wrong after that, what possible reason could there be for this change? Did God perhaps change his mind about the ethics of slavery on that day? Or are ethics simply dictated by governments, whether they be of the United States, the Confederate States, the Taliban, or Nazi Germany?
2. Relativism seems to be false. If cultural relativism is correct, then every culture at every time is right, whatever it believes. In that case, though, while there could certainly be change in ethics, there could never be improvement or decline. Instead of saying "Society is much better now that we no longer officially sanction racial segregation" or "Society has gone downhill since the 1950s," we could only say that society was right in the 1950s; right in the 1960s; right in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s; and right today. But it surely is not true that this is all we can say on such subjects. As an individual, I might express a preference for some particular time or culture; but if I am a relativist, I cannot regard this preference as right in any absolute sense. This creates problems of coherence, as we will see in point 4.
3. Relativism seems to be **immoral** (ethically bad) or at least **amoral** (ethically neutral). What kind of person honestly believes that the Holocaust was right, in any sense of the word? Or that slavery or segregation could ever be right? Or that women should, in any time or place, not have had the same rights as men? The short answer is "A Nazi." But Nazis are not relativists. They are not live-and-let-live types who think that every culture is just as good as every other. This brings up a final objection.
4. Relativism seems to be incoherent or impossible to believe. Relativism tells you that the Nazis were *right* to murder millions of Jewish people and invade the countries around Germany in the name of the Third Reich. It also tells you that the people attacked by the Nazis were *right* to fight against the Nazis, in line with their cultural beliefs. Nazism is right, communism is right, Islamism is right, free market democracy is right, equal rights are right, unequal rights are right, and so on. Who has right on their side? Everybody! You have to root equally for every team at once, including your own and the ones that are against yours. This seems to be impossible, unless by "rooting for all teams" we really mean rooting for none. In the end, perhaps relativism is just another name for the belief that nothing is right or wrong. There is no distinction between an illusion that something is right and a true belief that something is right because the whole *idea* of right and wrong is an illusion. That is not relativism, though. It is what we might call "amoralism." If you believe that, or suspect that it might be true, or want a way to prove that it is not true, then this book is for you. It is precisely what this book is about.

--Duncan Richter, *Why be Good?*