

# Cultural Relativism

- Callatians (tribe of Indians) and the Greeks
- The Callatians practiced ate the bodies of their dead fathers
- The Greeks practiced cremation
- Darius, the great Persian king, wanted to instill a sense of appreciation of cultural diversity of the world among his subjects.

# Eskimos

- “Morality differs in every society, and is a convenient term for socially approved habits.”  
Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (1934)
- Eskimos of North America and Greenland have a very liberal marriage customs. Their men had more than one wives. They shared their wives with guests as a sign of hospitality. A dominant male might demand and get regular access to other men's wives.

# Customs

- The Eskimo women can also leave their partner for some other man.
- Infanticide was very prevalent, especially female infanticide. Knud Rasmussen, a famous explorer, reported that a woman who had borne 20 children had killed 10 of them.
- Old people were left out to die in snow
- Is there a universal ethic?

# What is cultural relativism

- According to William Graham Sumner, a pioneer in sociology:
- “The “right” way is the way which the ancestors used and which has been handed down. The tradition is its own warrant. It is not held subject to verification by experience. The notion of right is in the folkways. It is not outside of them, independent origin, and brought to test them. In the folkways, whatever is, is right. This is because they are traditional, and therefore contain in themselves the authority of the ancestral ghosts. When we come to folkways we are the end of our analysis.”

# What is cultural relativism

- 1. Different moral standards for different social grouping
- 2. Social moral code determines what is right or wrong.
- 3. No objective standard to measure the moral standards of other societies
- 4. The moral code of one society is only one among many.

# What is Cultural Relativism

- 5. There is no universal truth in ethics.
- 6. We cannot judge the conduct of other people and hence should adopt an attitude of tolerance.
- Aren't we confusing opinions and values?
- Can opinions be justified?
- Can opinions be based on reason?