

# TOOLS FOR APPLIED ETHICS: 4 IN WESTERN HISTORY

1. Deontological ethics (Kant +)  
Means justify the ends
2. Consequentialist ethics (Bentham/Mill +)  
Ends Justify the means
3. Virtue ethics (Aristotle +)  
Living well as a developed skill
4. Culturalist ethics (Nietzsche +)  
Culture and perspective define ethics  
(Postmodernism)



# OUTLINE

What is Cultural Relativism?

Responses to cultural relativism

- Cultural ethics

- Nietzsche's eternal return of the same

- Discourse ethics

- Discourse ethics & Swarm ethics, Decentralization

- Ethics of care

## DEFINITION CULTURAL RELATIVISM

1. ChatGPT  
What is cultural relativism?
2. Nietzsche and the death of God
3. **Suspicion** that values, morality,  
+ are culture-specific,  
not result of universal  
reason. Reality *is* what  
community believes



“God is dead.”

- Nietzsche, 1883

“Nietzsche is dead.”

- God, 1900

# DEFINITION CULTURAL RELATIVISM

## 4. Examples

Height in Mexico/US/Amsterdam

$1 + 1 =$

$\infty + \infty =$

Eskimos and infanticide

Human sacrifice in LA

Darius of Persia: funeral customs  
of the Greeks and the Callatae:  
cremation and funerary cannibalism;  
each dismayed/horrified by the other  
tribe's practices.

“Very Italian woman next to a very Muslim woman”



## DEFINITION CULTURAL RELATIVISM

5. Rules & practices judged by culture, instead of culture judged by rules & practices
  - \*No way to criticize practices / rules as wrong / inferior to those from other culture

## DEFINITION CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Postmodernism as "*suspicion of metanarratives*"

Is cultural relativism true? False? Neither?

\*Relativism versus perspectivism...

Jean-François Lyotard

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### The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge

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Translation from the French by  
Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi  
Foreword by Fredric Jameson

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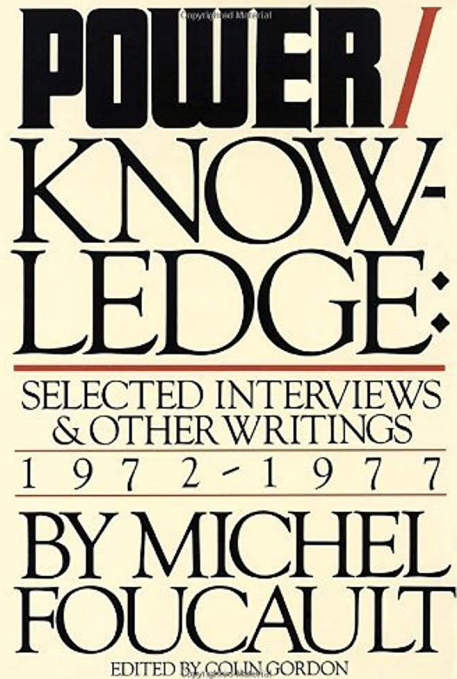
Theory and History of Literature, Volume 10

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## DEFINITION CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Power/knowledge (of ethics) reversal...

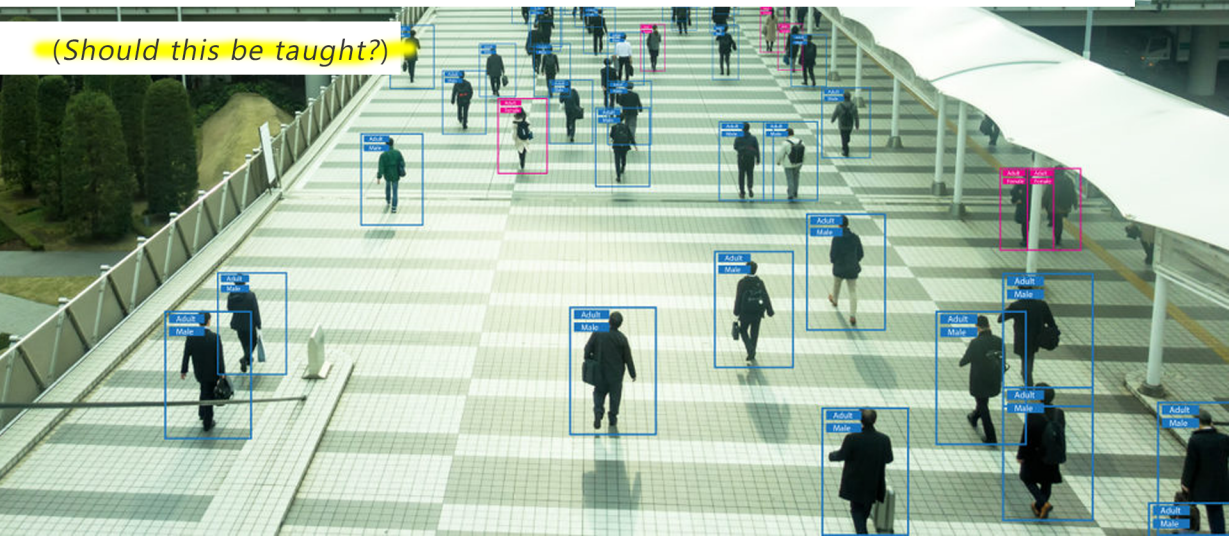
\*Knowledge (of power/knowledge reversal)  
as good... or dangerous?



## CASE: CULTURAL PERSPECTIVISM & PRIVACY

How is the: Knowledge → Power → Knowledge... dynamic represented here?

*(Should this be taught?)*



## HISTORY: CULTURAL RELATIVISM

"Justice is the advantage  
of the stronger."

Glaucon, in Plato, *Republic*

**FRIEDRICH  
NIETZSCHE**

# THE WILL TO POWER

Translated by  
Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale  
**Edited by Walter Kaufmann**

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# WHAT IS CULTURAL/CULTURALIST ETHICS?

## 1. ChatGPT

What is cultural/culturalist ethics?

## 2. Cultural ethics

Moral doctrines are only the rules  
a community believes

- Ethically recommendable action  
= learning/following local guidelines
- "When in Rome..."

*35mm photo that figuratively represents  
the concept: "When in Rome do as the Romans do"*



# WHAT IS CULTURAL/CULTURALIST ETHICS?

## 3. Versus the tradition

Traditional ethics goes opposite direction.

- Not matter what people actually do: point of ethics = *escape* conventional/unreflective/instinctual/emotional habits

Now: Instead of escaping local customs and traditions in favor of global rules, abandon global rules in favor of local customs and traditions

# CASE: CULTURAL/CULTURALIST ETHICS

Google CEO search: *What do you do?*



## ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES: CULTURAL/CULTURALIST ETHICS

Respectful of others and their culture

Adapts well to contemporary reality

No clear path to making things better

Provides few routes to resolving conflicts within a society

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# WHAT IS THE ETERNAL RETURN /RECURRENCE?

## 1. ChatGPT

What is the eternal return  
/recurrence?

## 2. "The Greatest Weight..."

*"35mm photo that depicts concept  
of Nietzsche's "Eternal Return" "*



# WHAT IS THE ETERNAL RETURN/RECURRENCE? THE GREATEST WEIGHT

## The Greatest Weight

What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you:

“This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence - even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!”

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine"? If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are, or perhaps crush you. (GS 341)

# WHAT IS THE ETERNAL RETURN/RECURRENCE?

## 3. Thought experiment

What you would do if the life you chose to lead now will be repeated forever?  
When faced with a dilemma: imagine living the decision and subsequent life over and again, forever.

(No escape from your own life: *Blessing or curse?*)

## 4. Rule for decision

No overarching theory, just an immediate decision: The life you choose now will be repeated forever, so which will yours be?

## 5. Why?

No external benefit: life must be own reward: There is no "later" in the ER

## CASE: ETERNAL RETURN/RECURRENCE, WALLACE SOUZA...



1958–2010, died, heartattack  
while awaiting trial...



## CASE: ETERNAL RETURN/RECURRENCE

“The thought process that went into building these applications, Facebook being the first of them, was all about: 'How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?’

That means that ***we need to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while,*** because someone liked or commented on a photo or a post or whatever.

And that's going to get you to contribute more content, and that's going to get you... more likes and comments.”

-Sean Parker, Facebook's founding president



# ETERNAL RETURN / GREATEST WEIGHT / AUTHENTICITY

1. Does ER produce authenticity?

1a. Should authenticity  
be the goal of ethics?

1b. Which is the better  
authenticity engine:  
Nietzsche or predictive  
analytics...?

“Human authenticity”



## ETERNAL RETURN/RECURRENCE - ADVANTAGES AND A DRAWBACK

### Advantages:

- Adds gravity to life

- Makes you take decisions seriously

- Forces you to make your own decisions

### Disadvantage:

- Does little to help individuals live together in a community

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# WHAT IS DISCOURSE ETHICS?

## 1. ChatGPT

What is the discourse ethics (Habermas)

## 2. Method

Resolve ethical dilemmas by gathering involved parties and discussing until a consensual and peaceful solution

Discussion constrained by two limits:

Reasonable and civil

Consensual resolution

## 3. Reverses conventional approach

Instead of start with one theory and take into world to solve problems, start with a problem and try to create a moral structure to solve it.

# WHAT IS DISCOURSE ETHICS?

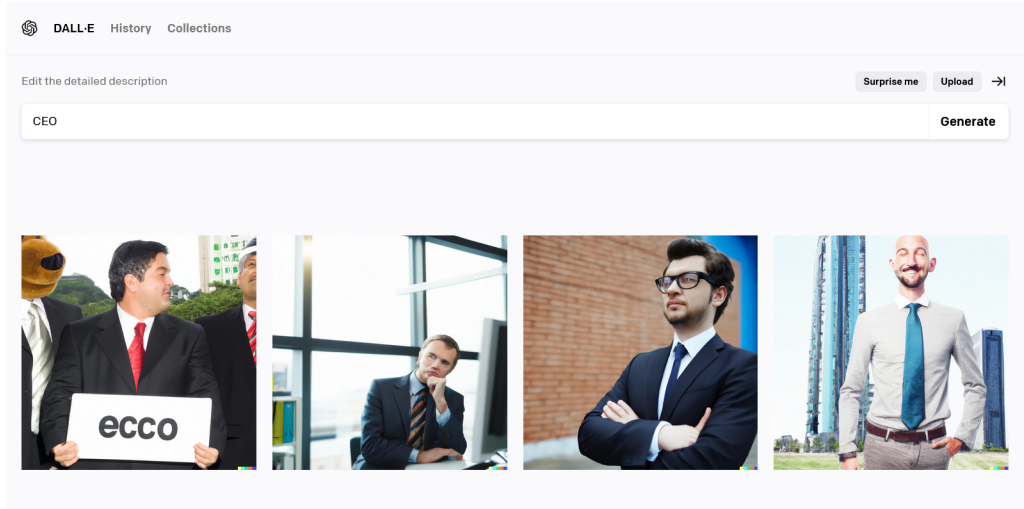
## 3. Steps:

- Define the immediate stakeholders
- Establish a language for discussion
- Establish the goal
- Define the problem
- Propose solutions

Jury duty

# CASE: DISCOURSE ETHICS

How can the question of representational fairness be managed?



## DISCOURSE ETHICS + / -

### Advantage

Everything's on the table - This gives those involved best hope for a resolution benefiting everyone joined in the discussion

### Drawbacks

Everything's on the table - If what's morally acceptable can be as broad as anything a group agrees to, there's the potential for ugly solutions

For every ethical dilemma faced, you have to start over

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# DISCOURSE ETHICS & SWARM ETHICS, DECENTRALIZATION

## Swarm intelligence / Swarm ethics

Independent / dispersed actors following simple, local rules combine into a collectively intelligent behavior

## Example

Coherence of flocking not trace back to original / shared concept of flocking in each bird's intelligent mind, instead, each bird can be conceived as following three local impulses

- separation (maintain a minimum distance from neighboring flockmates)
- alignment (match speed and direction of neighbors)
- cohesion (steer towards the average position of nearby flockmates)

# DISCOURSE ETHICS & SWARM ETHICS, DECENTRALIZATION

Swarm intelligence / Swarm ethics

Independent / dispersed actors following simple, local rules combine into a collectively intelligent behavior

## Centralized versus Decentralized ethics

Principles come from outside (experts) and before (regulations) technology

Principles come from inside (users) and after (uses) technology

# CASE: DISCOURSE ETHICS

How can the question of representational fairness be *decentralized*?



DALL·E

History

Collections

Edit the detailed description

Surprise me

Upload



CEO

Generate



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# WHAT IS ETHICS OF CARE?

## 1. ChatGPT

What is the ethics of care (Gilligan)

## 2. Concept

Nurturing immediate communities / protecting those closest = moral obligation

### Example

Flaming car wreck trapping your sister and a Nobel Prize-winning medical scientist. You have strength/time to rescue only one of the two.  
A strict utilitarian will go for the scientist...



# WHAT IS ETHICS OF CARE?

## 3. Theory

- Independent actors replaced by a web of interrelated individuals as focus.  
**Connections count, not nodes.** (Ethics is not about me and you, it's about us.)
- Impartial application of abstract principles replaced by maintenance of human relationships. (Ethics is less about the fair imposition of rules and more about crafting social integration.)
- Tensions between the rights of individuals get replaced by conflicts of responsibility to others in established relationships. (Ethical tensions aren't my rights versus yours, it's me being torn between those I care for.)

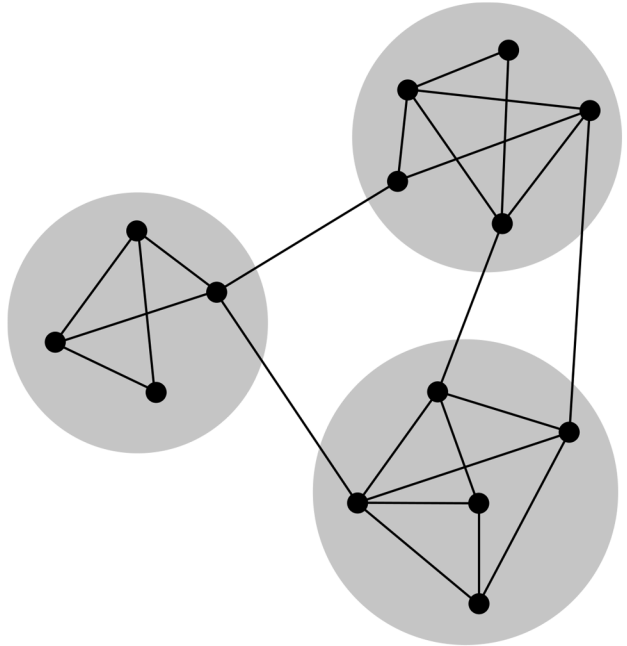
Switches focus of moral regulation from the individual to networks of social relationships.

# WHAT IS ETHICS OF CARE?

## 4. Guiding example: Family

Parents treat all their children identically — but if a sibling has special problems at one stage of their development, they'll get special treatment in the name of preserving the family unit.

Connections, not nodes...



## CASE: ETHICS OF CARE

Care as structure for technological  
healthcare administration as costs  
of maintaining patients alive shrink?



## ETHICS OF CARE + / -

### Advantages

- Coheres with what we actually do and think we ought to do, at least in cases like the car accident cited at this section's beginning

- Humanizes ethics by centering thought on real people instead of cold rules

- Allows focus our energy and concern on those who are closest to us

### Drawback

- Threatens to devolve into tribalism

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