

# Revisiting Kwame Gyekye's Critique of Normative Cultural Relativism

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## Abstract

This article examines Kwame Gyekye's critique of normative cultural relativism. It argues that the implications of normative cultural relativism mentioned by Gyekye do not necessarily undermine the theory. Nevertheless, the article concedes that the fact that Gyekye's arguments do not undermine normative cultural relativism does not make the theory itself plausible.

## Key Words

Contextualism, Cultural Relativism, Communitarianism, Values

## Introduction

Professor Kwame Gyekye's influence on African socio-political thought and western theories is profound. His main socio-political and moral thoughts are well developed in *Tradition and Modernity* (1997). In a recent publication, I challenged Gyekye's moderate communitarian identity (Famakinwa 2010, 65-77). In this article, we

consider his critique of normative cultural relativism in another of his books, namely, *Beyond Cultures: Perceiving a Common Humanity* (2004).

An examination of Gyekye's objections to normative cultural relativism is important because as a communitarian, he would ordinarily be expected to support the methodology traditionally favoured by communitarians. Most communitarians support socio-historical contextualism (MacIntyre 1981, 2; MacIntyre 2000, 205; Walzer 1993, 3; Gyekye 2004, 42). Indeed, normative cultural relativism is a form of socio-historical contextualism. The latter is the core communitarian methodology. The communitarian socio-historical contextualism denies the existence of universal standards. For it, there is no single standard free from a specific cultural background. This view is well entrenched in the communitarian methodology found in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and Michael Walzer. Normative cultural relativism, like the communitarian socio-historical contextualism, also denies the existence of universal standards or values.

*In Beyond Cultures: Perceiving a Common Humanity* (2004), Gyekye recognizes the strength of socio-historical contextualism: the cultural community is the arbiter of values (Gyekye 2004, 29). The cherished values of a community "are responses to the varied experiences of a people; they are ways of negotiating the problems and enigmas encountered in human life" (Gyekye 2004, 30). Despite this recognition, Gyekye rejects normative cultural relativism.

Gyekye's subtle acceptance of the traditional communitarian methodology and his rejection of normative cultural relativism create a paradox. It is a paradox because as mentioned above, normative cultural relativism is a form of socio-historical contextualism. Thus the acceptance of socio-historical contextualism and the rejection of normative cultural relativism appear contradictory. Nevertheless, I think Gyekye could take care of the paradox. His recent support for universalism is consistent with the current methodology shift in the whole communitarian theory (Etzioni 2004, 10; Gyekye 2004, 8).

However, in this article, we are not interested in the paradox, but rather in Gyekye's rejection of normative cultural relativism. Among the questions we seek to answer are the following:

- What is normative cultural relativism?
- What are the minimum normative cultural relativist claims?
- How plausible are Gyekye's objections to normative cultural relativism?
- Do Gyekye's objections to normative cultural relativism really undermine the theory?
- Does normative cultural relativism imply what Gyekye says it does?

The next section of this article briefly considers the minimum normative cultural relativist claims, with a view to situating subsequent arguments in their proper context. The section that follows it examines Gyekye's universalist alternative to normative cultural relativism. Thereafter, the article critically examines Gyekye's reasons for rejecting normative cultural relativism.

### **The Claims of Normative Cultural Relativism**

The central thesis of normative cultural relativism is the rejection or denial of objectivity and universality of values, principles or standards of right and wrong (Gyekye 2004, 31). The theory says that "there is no such independent standard, every standard is culture-bound" (Rachels 2006, 652). James Rachels presents six tenets of normative cultural relativism:

- (i) Different societies have different moral codes.
- (ii) There is no objective standard that can be used to judge one societal code better than another.
- (iii) The moral code of our own society has no special status; it is merely one among many.
- (iv) There is no universal truth in ethics, that is, there are no moral truths that hold for all peoples at all times.
- (v) The moral code of a society determines what is right within that society, that is, if the moral code of a society says that a certain action is right then that action is right at least within that society.
- (vi) It is sheer arrogance for us to try to judge the conduct of other peoples. We should adopt an attitude of tolerance toward the practices of other cultures (Rachels 2006, 653).

The claim in (i) is clearly a statement of fact. The assertion that different societies have different moral codes is almost obvious: it is a claim in descriptive (not philosophical) ethics. No one denies this. Point (ii) denies the objectivity of standards of right and wrong. The point is contested by moral objectivists. The claim in (iii) demands the moral need to treat all moral codes in different cultures with similar respect. The points in (iv) to (vi) restate the normative cultural relativists' central thesis - the denial of universal standards of truth, right and wrong. Gyekye's formulation of normative cultural relativism is in perfect agreement with Rachels'.

According to Gyekye, normative cultural relativism denies the universality or objectivity of cultural values. It claims that values are fundamentally relative to culture: "Any culturally dominant conception of the good is as valid as any other, there being no single or common culture – neutral (trans-cultural) standard by which the various goods or values can be evaluated" (Gyekye 2004, 31). Thus in the case of a clash between two different cultural values, neither is morally superior to the other. Different communities celebrate different moral codes. Is the wife equal or subordinate to the husband? Should a young lady be permitted to walk on the street half nude? Is the marriage between a sixty year old man and a ten year old girl morally justifiable? Should the dead be buried with pomp and pageantry or without any ceremony? Is polygamy morally preferable to monogamy? Is polyandry morally justifiable? The list is endless. These questions receive different answers in different cultural communities.

### **Gyekye's Universalism**

Contrary to the traditional communitarian methodology, Gyekye presents an absolutist solution to the problem of contradictory inter-cultural prescriptions. For him, in the case of a moral clash between two different communal values, one of the values must be right while the other must be wrong because, quoting Isaiah Berlin, "All men have a basic sense of good and evil no matter what culture they belong [to]" (Gyekye 2004, 44). According to Gyekye, universal standards refer to "beliefs, perceptions, outlooks, values and practices that are not features, properties or characteristics of a particular culture...transcending cultural particularities" (Gyekye 2004, 42).

Gyekye's support for universalism is based on some anthropological evidence and certain shared human values. In his view, every community or society recognizes the need to respect certain self-sustaining values. For instance, no culture tolerates lies, stealing or unjustified killing (Gyekye 2004, 45). Thus for Gyekye, human well-being and the golden rule are central to any human value system.

Although Gyekye's point in support of universalism is germane, it evades the issue that is of primary concern to normative cultural relativism, namely, the denial of the objectivity or universality of values or standards of right and wrong. In defense of normative cultural relativism, the global rejection or acceptance of a practice does little or no harm to the appropriate normative questions the practice itself could generate. The question: "is lying or breaking promises always wrong?" remains morally legitimate even if the entire world believes that either lying or breaking promises is wrong. The question is legitimate even if anthropological evidence shows that the two acts are considered to be wrong globally. The point is well argued in G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*: whatever is said to be good, it is still an open question to ask if the thing is really good (Moore 1978, 17). Any human observation is theory laden. The evaluation of human actions or omissions depends on the theory the assessor endorses (Harman 2006, 626).

What can we make of the Eskimos' practice as presented by James Rachels? According to Rachels, among the Eskimos, "a husband is permitted to share his wife with guests, lending her to them for the night as a sign of hospitality. ....old people also, when they became too feeble to contribute to the family, were left out in the snow to die" (Rachels 1978, 15-29).

Undoubtedly, the Eskimos' domestic magnanimity would be strange in several other cultural communities. Most men would consider the sharing of a wife with a guest disgusting. Likewise, the ill-treatment of an old man or woman would be a sacrilege in several communities. Again, the universal acceptance of the golden rule (if at all it is universally accepted) does not make the rule itself morally compelling. Not every action we would want others to do to us would be morally binding on them. For example, the unprovoked killing of someone by a depressed or frustrated person is never morally justified by his or her desire to have the same action done to him or her by his or her victim. Similarly, a rapist's desire to be raped would not justify his or her

act of rape. What is the implication of the point just made? The golden rule is not the ultimate solution to normative problems. These are initial observations. In the next sections, Gyekye's suggested implications of normative cultural relativism are critically examined.

### **Gyekye's Objections to Normative Cultural Relativism**

Three key objections are central to Gyekye's arguments against normative cultural relativism:

- (i) Objection to the subjectivity of values. According to Gyekye, normative cultural relativism unjustifiably denies the possibility of objective assessment of other values.
- (ii) Objection to Normative cultural relativists' equal treatment of different cultural values.
- (iii) The claim that normative cultural relativism implies the uncritical celebration of difference.

Below we examine these three objections.

#### **Argument 1: On the Objective Assessment of other Values**

According to Gyekye, normative cultural relativism is false because it implies the denial of the possibility of an objective assessment of other people's values. For Gyekye, the assessment of other people's values and practices is not always influenced by the assessor's cultural background alone, but also by values that are independent of the assessor's moral or cultural background (Gyekye 2004, 35). In other words, for Gyekye, cultural evaluation is not always carried out through the cultural lenses of the valuer. For instance, the promotion of human well-being influences cross-cultural evaluation (Gyekye 2004, 34). According to Gyekye, normative cultural relativism is not plausible because it makes cultural borrowing impossible. Cultural borrowing cannot be plausibly denied due to genuine cross-cultural appreciation of values. Therefore, Gyekye concludes, an assessor's moral evaluation of other people's cultural values and practices is not always parochially influenced (as normative cultural relativism implies) by the person's cultural background.

The argument appears to be very strong. As Gyekye correctly observes, someone's membership of a particular cultural community does not prevent the possible external influence in his or her assessment of other people's values. Direct or indirect exposure to other cultural practices could influence someone's moral judgments even while he or she lives within his or her cultural community. However, does the denial of the objectivity or universality of values really imply the absence of external influence on value assessors as Gyekye seems to suggest? This is doubtful.

The point about cross-cultural influence is not new. Translation in language depends on the manual the translator holds (Quine 1960, 27). Wiredu mentions the "colonial mentality" underlying the evaluation of African thoughts and practices by many African scholars (Wiredu 1996, 4). In Gyekye's own *Tradition and Modernity*, the cultural community influences not only the articulation of "the values and goals shared by several individuals, it alone constitutes the context, the social or cultural space, in which the actualization of the potentials of the individual can take place" (Gyekye 1997, 39).

Thus contrary to Gyekye's interpretation, normative cultural relativism is not a denial of the possibility of either direct or indirect influence of the value assessor. Rather, it says that whenever someone engages in moral evaluation, the judgment is always culturally influenced. Normative cultural relativism says that when someone (a member of a particular cultural community) makes a value judgment, the judgment is influenced by a certain cultural background. The background could turn out to be his or hers or that of other communities. However, the background itself is never universal but cultural. Cultural relativism is basically about the nature or source of values, not about the influential power of those values. Normative cultural relativism is basically about the moral status of various standards of evaluation, not about the influential power of the values. The point about the influential power of values is only, if it is part of it at all, tangential to the theory. The denial of objectivity of values or standards need not imply the denial of the influential power of those culture-bound values on people who do not belong to a specific cultural context.

Fundamentally, as mentioned above, normative cultural relativism denies the objectivity or universality of values while, at the same time, accepting that someone can be influenced by those values. Ordinarily, every individual is a victim of various

kinds of influence. Normative cultural relativism however maintains that the root of the influence is never universal but cultural (MacIntyre 1981; 2000). In fact, this interpretation of normative cultural relativism is implied in Gyekye's own formulation of it considered above.

Thus the moral evaluation of an action or practice carried out by an Isoko person from Nigeria could be influenced by the Akan cultural values and beliefs. The Isoko person need not live in Ghana for the influence to occur. The influence could occur through direct or indirect exposure to Akan cultural values. It might occur through several means - the reading of books about Akan cultural values, a short stay in an Akan community, or regular viewing of television programmes on Akan values and other forms of social interactions. Members of a community could be influenced by any value of any other cultural community due to direct or indirect exposure to those values. Wiredu's point about the "colonial mentality" earlier mentioned confirms the present point: colonization and contacts with western values now shape the worldview of most African philosophers (Wiredu 1996,4). What then is the point?

Normative cultural relativists are of the view that value judgments are influenced by the manual the judge holds. The cultural root of the manual itself need not be that of the judge's immediate cultural community. Contrary to Gyekye's position, normative cultural relativism never denies the possibility of external influence on value assessors. Rather, it says that the value that influences the person is never universal but cultural (MacIntyre 1981, 2; 2000, 205; Walzer 1983, 3; Gyekye 1999, 39-40; Etzioni 1998, p.xxv).

Second and most importantly, Gyekye focuses on the individual (the direct object of influence), while normative cultural relativism focuses on the source or root of the influence. Naturally, every human being is born into a particular cultural community. Aristotle says that man is *Zoon Politicon* (a political animal) - a being who cannot survive except in a human society.<sup>1</sup> Though it is in the nature of the individual to be a member of a human society, it is not in the nature of any individual to be a member of

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle Politics 1253(a)



a particular cultural community. As a matter of fact, every individual, at birth, has the natural capacity to be a member of any human community in any part of the world. Therefore, it is not in the nature of any particular individual to be influenced only by a particular culture alone. Anyone can be influenced by any culture to which he or she is exposed. Normative cultural relativism simply says that the root of human values is cultural, not universal. As already indicated, the point about influence is only tangential to normative cultural relativism. For normative cultural relativists, the so-called universal values are, as a matter of fact, cultural (MacIntyre 1981, 2; 2000, 205; Walzer 1983, 3).

Today, most fundamental human rights are regarded (contrary to the history of those rights) as universal values. Are they? No. Rights used to be values celebrated only in the traditional Western liberal or libertarian societies. In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Karl Marx is of the view that “right can never be higher than the economic structure of society” (Marx 1985, 569). In the communist society, the rights of the individual are not the ultimate values.

Thus contrary to Gyekye's interpretation, normative cultural relativism is basically about the denial of universal values, implying that different cultures have different moral codes (Rachels 1978, 15-29).

Is there a way Professor Gyekye could deal with the point just raised? Let me perform a brief thought experiment on his behalf. Gyekye could argue that the view just expressed represents a new formulation of normative cultural relativism. He may argue that the very fact that someone could be influenced by values other than those of his or her cultural background confirms his position about normative cultural relativism. He may as well contend that the above stated argument does not amount to a denial of his view.

*First*, this formulation is not new. The interpretation is couched in different strands of normative cultural relativism (Bond 1996, 22; Mackie 1977). *Second*, the core issue is about, as just explained, the nature of values. The central normative cultural relativist claim is that values are cultural, not universal. If normative cultural relativism is to be undermined at all, it cannot be through a point that is only tangential to it.

## **Argument 2: On the Equal Treatment of different Cultural Values**

In Gyekye's interpretation, normative cultural relativism says that "cultures and societies must be understood in their own terms" (Gyekye 2004, 32). This is in agreement with point (v) in the tenets of Rachels (2006) above. The import of Gyekye's interpretation is that cultural relativism implies the equal treatment of values from different cultures. Thus, for example, the cultural practices among the Callatians and the Greeks, which permit and reject the eating of the dead respectively, ought to command equal respect. Similarly, a community which supports the marriage between a sixty year old man and a ten year old girl on the one hand, and a community which abhors it on the other, are equally right. Gyekye rejects the equal treatment of values. According to him, "from the statement 'S1 is different from S2', it does not necessarily follow that S1 and S2 must necessarily be held as of equal standing in all respects when they are considered from certain angles" (Gyekye 2004, 32).

As a matter of fact, Gyekye is correct in observing that the difference between two things need not justify their equal treatment. For instance, the difference between aliens and citizens cannot be used to justify their equal treatment in certain respects. Citizens have certain entitlements usually denied aliens. In similar fashion, in a court of law, the "accused" and the "defendant" are different, and it would strain even common sense to use the difference to justify their equal treatment: an accused is charged with a criminal offence, while a defendant is in court for a civil offence, and they ought to be treated differently.

However, the fact that two things are different could also justify their equal treatment. Contrary to Gyekye's view, the fact that S1 is different from S2 does not mean that they should not be treated equally under certain conditions. For example, a male human being is naturally different from a female human being in certain respects. However, from a moral point of view, the two sexes ought to be treated equally. Similarly, the fact that S1 is a Black man and S2 is a white man does not foreclose their equal treatment.

As a matter of fact, different conceptions of equality support the equal treatment of things different in certain respects. Thus for John Rawls, equality means equal

opportunity: social and economic inequalities ought to be “to everyone’s advantage” irrespective of social, economic and political status (Rawls 1995, 60). On the other hand, Ronald Dworkin’s notions of equality (the right ‘to equal treatment’ and the right to ‘treatment as equal’) support the equal treatment of two different individuals. The right to equal treatment requires that individuals, irrespective of their status, be given the same opportunities in the distribution of material and non-material goods. Every citizen is equally treated in the general election when each has only one vote and none has more than a vote. Again, the two teams in a football match are usually different in certain respects (at least they normally wear different jerseys), yet the centre referee is obligated to treat them equally.

Nevertheless, in fairness to Gyekye, the point just made does not mean that two different individuals must receive equal treatment in all respects. For instance, it would be unethical for a physician to give the same treatment to two different patients with different ailments in order to justify their equal treatment. Two patients, with different ailments, are treated equally when they receive different but appropriate medical attention. How do all these address the problem of values?

Contrary to Gyekye’s position, the fact that two cultures embrace two different values does not mean that those values should not be treated equally. Is the Eskimos’ practice which permits the sharing of one’s wife with a guest right or wrong? On one hand, a non-Eskimo may describe the practice as disgusting, repulsive, dehumanizing, oppressive and barbaric. On the other hand, an Eskimo might describe it as refreshing, harmonious, magnanimous and hospitable. Unfortunately, the adjectives in either case say little about the wrongness or rightness of the practice. Which of the two positions ought to be morally preferred? For normative cultural relativism, both ought to be respected. Contrary to Gyekye’s view, the fact that two things are different does not mean that they should not be equally treated or treated as equal. Two applicants for a vacant job are equally treated when they are provided with an equal opportunity to be employed, so that neither of them is secretly favoured to secure the job. In similar fashion, the individual’s right to equal treatment implies his or her right to uniform concern and respect in the political decision about how certain socially valued goods are to be distributed. Two victims of arson are treated as equal by the society if the victim with a greater loss receives more compensation (financial or otherwise) than the other victim with a minimal loss (Dworkin 1977, 273).

### **Argument 3: Normative Cultural Relativism as an Uncritical Celebration of difference**

Gyekye maintains that normative cultural relativism leads to the uncritical celebration of difference. The point is slightly similar to the one just considered. However, the word “uncritical” requires clarification.

According to Gyekye, normative cultural relativism is false because its proponents “betray themselves as uncritical celebrants of difference”. For him, the celebration of different values by normative cultural relativists is a product of poor reflection. Normative cultural relativism, in Gyekye’s view, cannot be defended “on moral or functional grounds” (Gyekye 2004, 33). Gyekye contends that the theory hinders human well-being and progress, and as such, we are morally obligated to abandon it. The import of Gyekye’s claim is that normative cultural relativism could not be an outcome of critical or rigorous reflection. What are the issues?

*First*, Gyekye’s preference for “reason” or “criticalness” is not helpful in his attempt to undermine normative cultural relativism. This is due to the fact that normative cultural relativism could very well be an outcome of critical reflection. “Reason”, as a method of justification, has no boundary. As such, it can be used to justify any theory, including normative cultural relativism. The elasticity of ‘reason’ allows its use for the justification of theories that even oppose reason” (Gewirth 1978, 3-4). The fact that cultural differences can be uncritically celebrated does not completely rule out the possibility of their critical celebration. Reason can even justify irrationality. What is more, irrationality can only be rationally (not irrationally) demonstrated.

Besides, certain actions generally believed to be wrong could be justified with supposedly convincing reasons. For example, killing is generally considered to be a morally wrong action, yet not all killing is wrong. Killing in self defense is morally and, in fact, legally justified. Similarly, accidental killing does not amount to murder, but rather to manslaughter. The identified exceptions are products of reason. Again, adultery, fornication and stealing are treated as morally condemnable actions. Nevertheless, a moment of reflection might reveal the contrary. According to Spinoza,

sins are due to ignorance (Spinoza 1996, 524). No one commits sins deliberately. Centuries before Spinoza, Jesus Christ prayed to his Father to “forgive them [his executors] for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). If it is true that sins are due to ignorance, reason could reveal that those generally condemnable actions might not be as wrong as generally believed.

*Second*, normative cultural relativism is not antithetical to reason. It only offers a cultural (not universal) account of reason. According to MacIntyre, there are different conceptions of rationality just as there are different conceptions of justice (MacIntyre 2000, 205). Normative cultural relativism is compatible with reason because, according to MacIntyre, the standard of rational justification, and even logic, are products of history and the specific cultures that produce them. We search for a universal standard as a result of the erroneous belief that the existing standards could not co-exist (MacIntyre 2000, 205).

As earlier indicated, Gyekye emphasises that normative cultural relativism makes it impossible to challenge cultural values and practices which are inimical to human well-being. Gyekye's point about human well being has a lot of moral weight. Human well-being is the hallmark of contractarianism. The state of nature did not guarantee human well-being because it was “brutish, nasty and short” (Hobbes 1969, 37). Though the state of nature is a state of liberty, the liberty is not guaranteed (Hobbes 1969, 37). Similarly, human well-being is one of the primary goals of Locke's contractarianism. The moral need to confront “certain inconveniences” to human well-being necessitates human exit from Locke's state of nature (Locke 1989, 28).

As earlier noted, this article is not a defense of normative cultural relativism. It may just turn out that normative cultural relativism is not a plausible theory. I cannot imagine the kind of argument a community could advance in support of terrorism or rape. This notwithstanding, normative cultural relativism might still be a plausible theory. Do different cultures share the same idea of human well being? Gyekye rejects human sacrifice, sexual abuse of children and even adults, and every other form of human domination.

Ordinarily, human sacrifice and human well-being are incompatible. However, does human sacrifice always clash with human well-being? Today, human sacrifice no

longer appeals to what Gilbert Harman describes as our “moral sensibility”. According to Harman, our moral disapproval of inhuman treatment of others is motivated by our upbringing, not by any concrete observational evidence (Harman 2006, 625-635). In our day, many would argue that human sacrifice is a violation of human rights. Yet as mentioned above, the history of rights is cultural. As such, not all cultural communities celebrate rights. For example, the welfare of the community rather than the rights of the individual was the basic value in most traditional African societies (Nyerere 1968, 10). The claim that human rights are universal has been declared to be Eurocentric (Lukes 1993, 20). The fact that human rights are violated in different societies and the violators do not consider their actions to be wrong brings into question the universality of rights (Rorty 1993, 112).

The word “abuse” refers to the act of using or treating someone or something wrongly or badly. Is there a universal agreement about child abuse? In the West, the flogging of a seven year old boy amounts to abuse. In most other communities, especially in Africa, flogging aims at instilling discipline: it toughens a boy and guarantees his future well-being. To those in the latter communities, “spare the rod and spoil the child”. Who’s position is right, and who’s wrong?

What about domination of women by men? The point about gender equality is regarded in most Non-Western communities as part of the western malady. In such communities, the husband is the head and “Commander-in-Chief” of the entire household. In the West, beating up one’s wife would be treated as an assault or battery punishable under the law. Is the act of beating one’s wife right or wrong? A cultural community in another continent could justify the same action with reason. Westerners legally and morally disapprove the act because of the general belief that beating and love are mutually exclusive. On the other hand, some non-westerners may not see them as mutually exclusive. According to Russell Hanson, “seeing is experiential” (Hanson 1972, 6). Our cultural and socio-political and economic experiences determine our value judgments.

Are love and beating really mutually exclusive? Not quite. The love a man has for his wife might, at times, overwhelm him. Imagine a husband who suddenly discovers that his wife (whom he loves so dearly) is dating another man, and, overwhelm by love, starts to beat her. A westerner sees abuse and battery in the act, while a non-westerner

sees the demonstration of love. Even in the Judeo-Christian tradition, God, the creator of Heaven and Earth, is not ready to share his Glory with anyone. Furthermore, our non-Westerner could reason that a man who makes such a great discovery about his wife and remains indifferent does not really love her. Ordinarily, we think that joy and crying are mutually exclusive. Yet an athlete who wins a hundred metres race which he or she least expected to win might express his or her overwhelming joy by crying instead of jubilating. Just as overwhelming joy and crying are not mutually exclusive, love and beating could turn out not to be mutually exclusive. In the first case, we have the "cry of joy" while in the second case we could have the "beating of love". Who is right, the westerners or the non-westerners? The two positions are the outcome of reason.

Normative cultural relativism denies the reality of universal standards, and claims that whatever standards are considered universal are, as a matter of fact, cultural. As strong as the latest arguments may appear, they do not make normative cultural relativism compelling. Similarly, it does not make Gyekye's suggested implications of normative cultural relativism strong enough to undermine the theory.

### **Conclusion**

This article has examined Kwame Gyekye's critique of normative cultural relativism. It has argued that Gyekye's critique is unsuccessful on at least three grounds. *First*, Gyekye's view that normative cultural relativism prevents the external influence of value assessors is a misrepresentation of the theory that basically denies the objectivity or universality of values. *Second*, although this article agrees with Gyekye that two different cultural values need not necessarily be treated equally, it suggests that the mere fact that two values are different could also justify their equal treatment. *Third*, in response to Gyekye's claim that normative cultural relativism leads to the uncritical celebration of difference, this article has argued that normative cultural relativism could very well be an outcome of critical reflection. As a matter of fact, normative cultural relativism is not antithetical to reason, although it denies the Universalist conception of reason. It claims that reason is, like justice, cultural.

We may therefore conclude that normative cultural relativism does not embody the implications that Gyekye imputes to it. Consequently, his arguments fail to undermine

normative cultural relativism. However, the failure itself does not necessarily imply that normative cultural relativism is a plausible theory. The reason for this last assertion is that a stronger argument than Gyekye's might succeed in revealing the weakness of normative cultural relativism.

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