META-ETHICAL CULTURAL RELATIVISM

PHIL 361, Sumeet Patwardhan

AGENDA

1. Brief syllabus and Zoom follow-ups

2. Brief review of May 5

3. Defining meta-ethical cultural relativism (and its rejection)

4. Arguments for and against meta-ethical cultural relativism

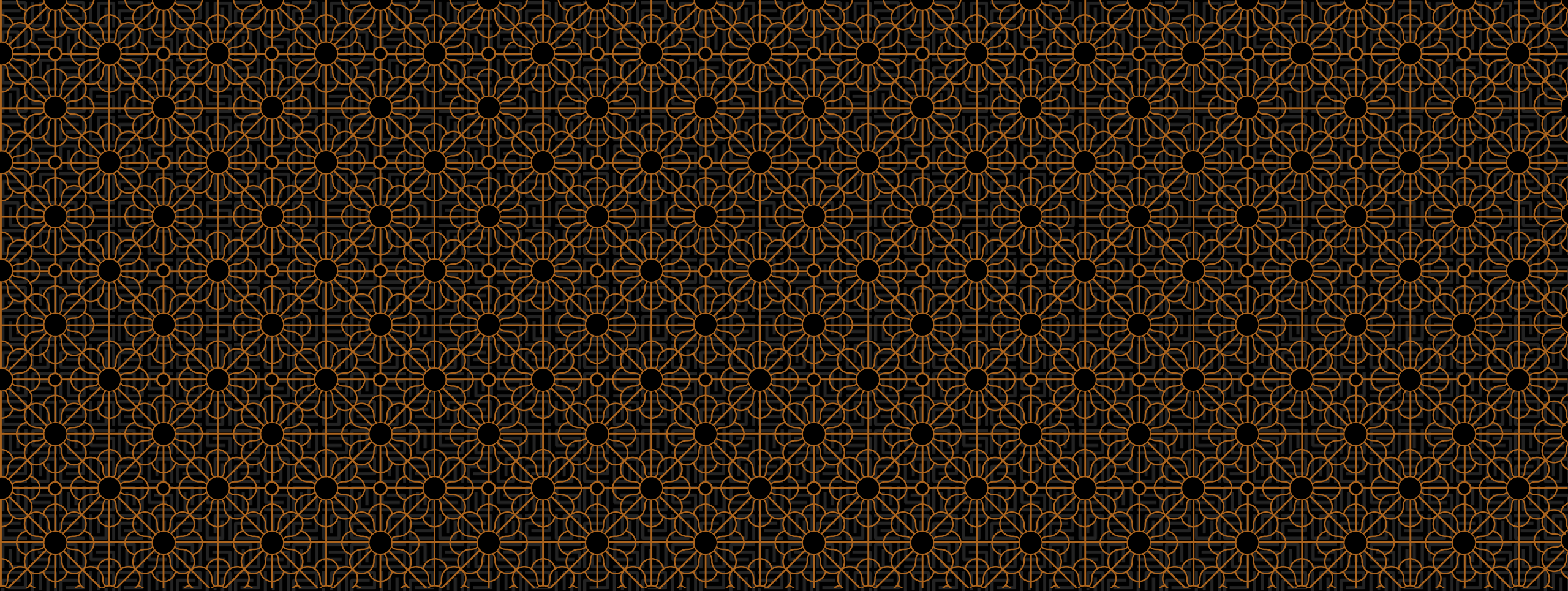5. Reconstruction and Objection Assignment

SYLLABUS/ZOOM FOLLOW-UPS

Office hours = Thursday 12-2 PM EST

Returning/explaining assignments, group work, four-day mark

Do not disturb feature

Cameras on (use your discretion), audio off, raise hands for participation, yes/no buttons

BRIEF REVIEW OF 5/5

ETHICS – THREE BRANCHES

1. Meta-ethics
2. Normative ethics
3. Applied/practical ethics

HOW ARGUMENTS WORK

An argument is a set of reasons (or 'premises') for a conclusion.

Most of the arguments we'll discuss in this course involve a set of reasons that, if true, *guarantee* a conclusion. When an argument has premises that, if true, guarantee its conclusion, it's called 'valid'. When it doesn't, it's called 'invalid'.

HOW TO OBJECT TO ARGUMENTS

Two basic kinds of objections:

Are the premises true?

Assuming that the premises are true, how strongly do they support the conclusion?

HOW TO RESPOND TO OBJECTIONS

Three ways to respond to a criticism (of a premise or of validity):
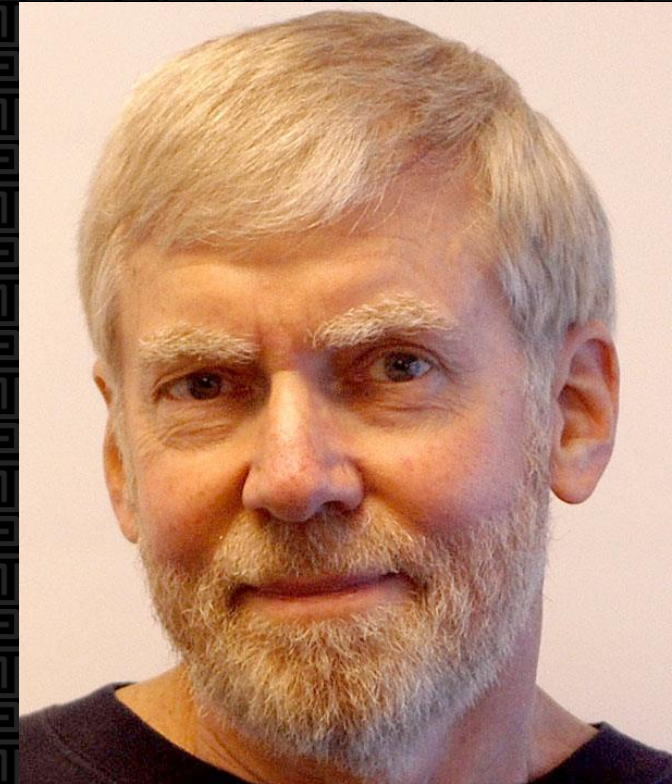
Criticize the criticism

Revise the argument to accommodate the criticism but maintain the spirit of the argument

Abandon the argument

META-ETHICAL CULTURAL RELATIVISM

READINGS: MOODY-ADAMS & GENSLER

META-ETHICAL CULTURAL RELATIVISM: DEFINITION

Something is 'good' or 'right' for the society in question (and its members) _if, only if,_ and _because_ the majority of that society judges that thing to be 'good' or 'right'.

META-ETHICAL CULTURAL RELATIVISM: THE 'IF' PART

Something is 'good' or 'right' for the society in question (and its members) *if, only if,* and *because* the majority of that society judges that thing to be 'good' or 'right'.

What actually is good/right

Society's judgments of what's good/right

META-ETHICAL CULTURAL RELATIVISM: THE 'ONLY IF' PART

Something is 'good' or 'right' for the society in question (and its members) *if, only if,* and *because* the majority of that society judges that thing to be 'good' or 'right'.

Society's judgments of what's good/right

What actually is good/right

META-ETHICAL CULTURAL RELATIVISM: THE 'IF' AND 'ONLY IF' PARTS

Something is 'good' or 'right' for the society in question (and its members) _if, only if,_ and _because_ the majority of that society judges that thing to be 'good' or 'right'.

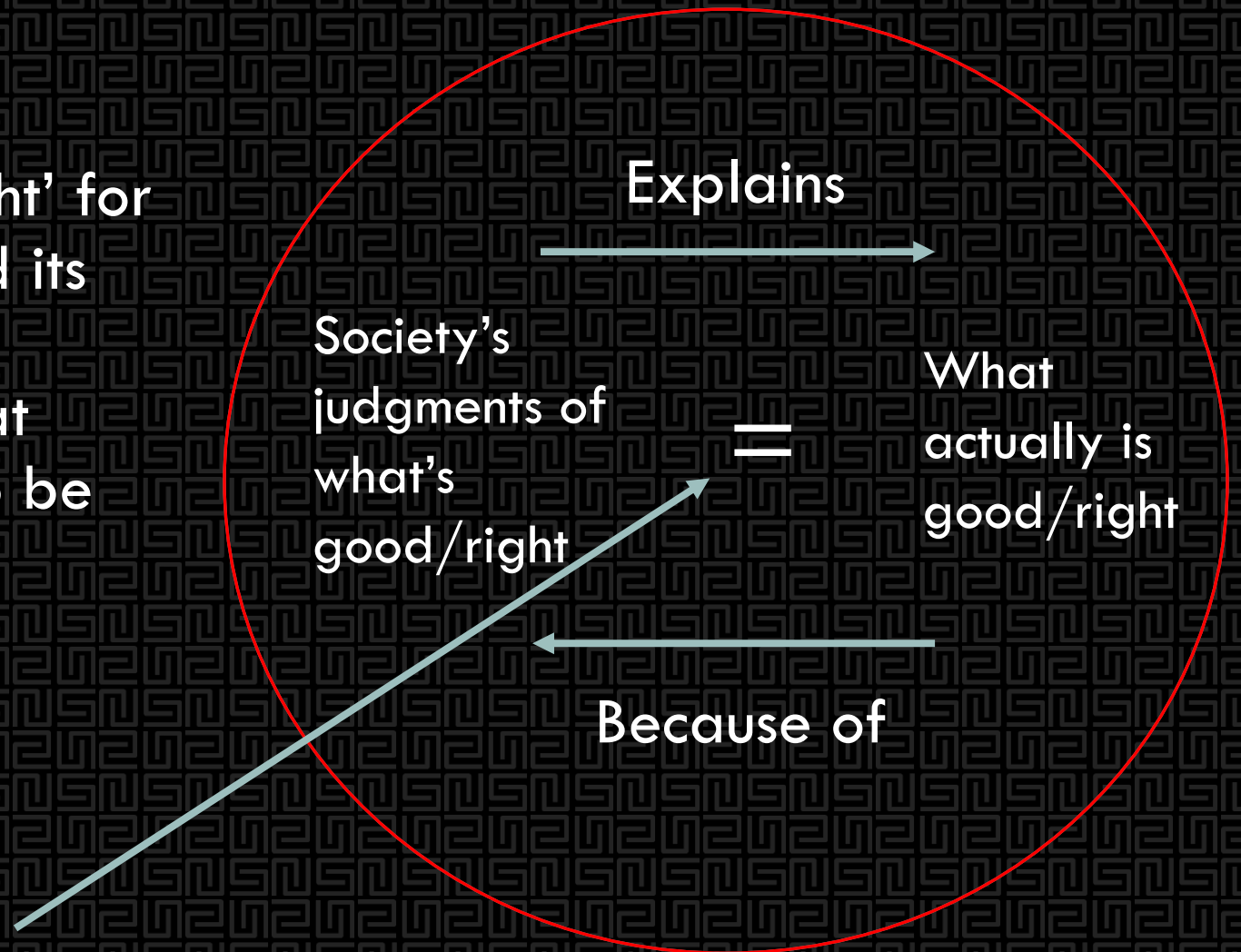Society's judgments of what's good/right

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What actually is good/right

META-ETHICAL CULTURAL RELATIVISM: THE 'BECAUSE' PART

Something is 'good' or 'right' for the society in question (and its members) *if, only if*, and *because* the majority of that society judges that thing to be 'good' or 'right'.

Explains

Society's judgments of what's good/right

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What actually is good/right

Because of

The equivalence is not a coincidence.

THREE (COMPATIBLE) WAYS MER COULD BE FALSE

1. There are things that the majority of the society in question judges to be good/right, <u>but are actually not good/right for the society in question.</u>

2. There are things that are actually good/right for the society in question, <u>but are not judged by a majority of that society to be good/right.</u>

3. What is actually good/right for the society in question is equivalent to, <u>but not explained by,</u> what a majority of that society judges to be good/right.

DISAGREEMENT ARGUEMENT FOR MER

P1: Differences in the moral practices of different social groups – e.g. differences in polygamy/monogamy practices – sometimes generate serious moral disagreements.

C1: Descriptive cultural relativism is true. In other words, differences in moral practices of different social groups sometimes generate 'fundamental' moral disagreements that are "neither reducible to non-moral disagreement nor susceptible of rational resolution" (Moody-Adams 15).

C2: MER is true. In other words, something is 'good' or 'right' for the society in question (and its members) *if, only if,* and *because* the majority of that society judges that thing to be 'good' or 'right'.

DISAGREEMENT ARGUMENT FOR MER: OBJECTIONS?

P1: Differences in the moral practices of different social groups – e.g. differences in polygamy/monogamy practices – sometimes generate serious moral disagreements.

C1: Descriptive cultural relativism is true. In other words, differences in moral practices of different social groups sometimes generate 'fundamental' moral disagreements that are "neither reducible to non-moral disagreement nor susceptible of rational resolution" (Moody-Adams 15).

C2: MER is true. In other words, something is 'good' or 'right' for the society in question (and its members) _if, only if,_ and _because_ the majority of that society judges that thing to be 'good' or 'right'.

TOLERANCE ARGUMENT FOR MER

P1: MER best promotes tolerance.

C1: MER is true.

TOLERANCE ARGUMENT FOR MER: OBJECTIONS?

P1: MER best promotes tolerance.

C1: MER is true.

SELF-CONTRADICTION ARGUMENT AGAINST MER

P1: If MER were true, disagreeing with the moral judgments of the majority of one's society would be self-contradictory.

P2: Disagreement with the moral judgments of the majority of one's society is not always self-contradictory.

C1: MER is false.

SELF-CONTRADICTION ARGUMENT AGAINST MER: OBJECTIONS?

P1: If MER were true, disagreeing with the moral judgments of the majority of one's society would be self-contradictory.

P2: Disagreement with the moral judgments of the majority of one's society is not always self-contradictory.

C1: MER is false.

UPCOMING ASSIGNMENTS

Guided Reading Quiz 2 (due before 5/12 Lecture)

Reconstruction and Objection Assignment (due 5/20)