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2015

Moral Relativism: Can One Community Give Another a Reason to Change?

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submitted to
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and
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by
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for
Senior Thesis in Philosophy
Spring 2015
April 27th, 2015

Abstract:

This paper examines the popular philosophical theory of moral relativism. Traditionally, the theory argues that communities have their own conceptual frameworks of morality that are inaccessible to those outside of the community. Thus, one community cannot give another community a moral reason to change a practice. In this paper, I will examine David Velleman's version of the theory presented in his book *Foundations for Moral Relativism*. This version posits that the drive towards mutual interpretability is a universal drive among human communities. From this drive stem all the practices and moral values of communities. However, Velleman does not believe that this implies that communities can understand each others' conceptual frameworks. In this way, his account remains a normal version of moral relativism. I will argue that there are some cases in which a person can understand a different community's conceptual framework enough to provide a reason for that community to change a practice. Importantly, my argument will not say that the reasons for change are moral reasons. They will be practical reasons based on the normative fact that human communities should strive towards mutual interpretability. Thus, my account will also maintain the crucial tenets of moral relativism. If accomplished, this argument will add a great power to the theory.

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I.   Introduction

The term moral relativism is usually met with confusion or disgust. It is asked, "Does moral relativism mean that there is no right or wrong morality?" Yes and no. It states that within our own communities, the morals that we have are true for us. We can determine that, for example, murder is worse than stealing, and this will be a true judgment in our community. However, moral relativism argues that we cannot accurately understand or make judgments of another community's morality. We cannot determine with any validity that murder is worse than stealing in any community besides our own. This community has a different conceptual framework that makes certain practices right for that community. How could someone believe a theory like this? It seems so obviously wrong. There are certain actions or practices that we tend to believe (or maybe even need to believe) cannot be morally acceptable no matter what community they are in. In general, the appeal of moral relativism is that it explains the large, sometimes enormous, gaps in moral values from community to community. Yet it fails to account for the things that still seem obviously wrong even after the relativity of morality is acknowledged.

In this paper, I will examine a defense of moral relativism entitled *Foundations for Moral Relativism*. This book, written by David Velleman, is consistent with many versions of moral relativism in in stating that no community can understand the morality of any other community. It differs from most accounts of moral relativism, though, in that it posits a universal condition of human communities: the drive towards mutual interpretability. This drive, which I will explain in detail, leads Velleman to argue that some communities can be more advanced than others. They can be more advanced in

their facilitation of mutual interpretability, but, importantly, they cannot be more advanced in any moral sense (a claim that I will focus on in this paper). He still does not allow an understanding of any other community's morality, nor does he allow one community to give another community a reason to change a practice. I differ from David Velleman in that I believe the notion of mutual interpretability can allow one community to give another community a reason to change a practice. My account remains morally relative because I argue for this ability to give reasons on practical grounds, not moral grounds. This maintains the legitimacy of moral relativism while still accounting for the feeling that there are certain practices that as outsiders we can provide reason to change.

In the first section of my paper, I will explain and defend David Velleman's particular version of moral relativism. In the second section of my paper, I will explain the crucial differences between our two versions of moral relativism. Lastly, I will explain and defend why these differences allow one community to give another community a reason to change in certain cases.

II.   Doables and Mores

To understand the concept of mutual interpretability, we must begin with chapter three of *Foundations for Moral Relativism*, entitled "Doables." In any given community, there is a domain of "doable" actions, actions that are normal and acceptable. What is doable in one community may be totally foreign and unnatural in another. The way in which people greet each other is a doable, and it varies greatly from one society to the next. In Ibo society (south-eastern Nigeria), a normal handshake involves a grip of the forearm. In England, a normal handshake involves simply grasping hands. If an Englishman and an Ibo man were to meet, both would be perplexed as to what the other person was doing (29). The function of doables is to create a sense of ordinariness. With a set of normal and acceptable actions, people know how to act in a way that will allow them to be interpreted. In order to function in a society, one must be able to interpret others, and must be themselves interpretable to others. A society without any sort of widely accepted set of doables is unfathomable. It would be chaos. People would not be able to interact with one another. That doables play a governing role in society and allow people to be interpreted is obvious. However, "doables" is a limited term. Velleman has another term, "mores," (pronounced *more-ase*) which includes not just actions, but also attitudes. This term is more all-encompassing than doables, as it includes the "ways of thinking, feeling, *and* acting" on which a community converges.

Moral actions can be considered mores in the same way that non-moral actions can. Therefore, because any society or community has its own conceptual framework of mores, it also has its own conceptual framework of morality. Velleman's example of lying illustrates this point nicely. Different communities have different ideas and

conceptual frameworks of what lying is, which fundamentally change how the practice is understood. The Javanese have a practice called *étok-étok*, in which it is customary to withhold certain information from strangers, even if that information would cause the person no harm and might help the stranger (35). In our western conceptual framework, it is tempting to ask the Javanese, "Why don't you tell the truth?" But this would be to get things wrong, Velleman says. To tell a Javanese person to tell the truth would not make any coherent sense to that person, because we would be using "a concept of truth-telling that may not be rationally salient, or even available, in a community where *étok-étok* is a common form of indicative utterance" (44). Our western conception of truth might be totally foreign in many communities where truth functions on more of a sliding scale, or is not given as much importance socially. That is why we cannot simply say that lying is wrong. When we say the word lying, we are already using our own conception of truth- and also turning it into a moral issue, because we view it as a moral issue in our community. Rather, we must say "lying is wrong for members of our community" (45).

Not only do conceptual frameworks vary in different communities, he argues, they also provide motivating reasons for action in that community. The practice of *étok-étok* is an anthropological fact about Javanese society, but it is also an action-guiding principle. One utilizes *étok-étok* because it is an ordinary action for a Javanese person to perform, and people perform ordinary actions because they want to be understood in their community. Their reasons for acting are based on their community's ways of acting, and their situation in the community. Reasons for acting are then perspective-dependent, in Velleman's words.

Velleman uses the example of receiving directions to show that something is only action-guiding by virtue of what "position" a person is in. If David Velleman himself asks someone on Fifth Avenue for directions to Washington Square, the answer he will receive is "It's straight ahead" (48). This is a valid, action-guiding statement only because of David Velleman's position. If he were on Sixth Avenue, the direction "It's straight ahead," would not be a valid, action-guiding direction. Velleman uses this as an analogy to explain the relativity of morals. A member of the Mbuti tribe might say, "Female circumcision is wrong." For those in the Mbuti tribe, this has an action-guiding ring to it. The Mbuti are, metaphorically, in the right "position" for this proposition to be action-guiding, because it is a practice that is not acceptable in their community. But jump to another community, and the case may be totally different. To tell a member of the Kikuyu tribe that female circumcision is wrong (the Kikuyu practice female circumcision) would be false. That would be like telling a David Velleman who is on Sixth Avenue, not Fifth Avenue that Washington Square is straight ahead. Additionally, his use of the words true and false is not an elastic use. He believes it is completely true for the Mbuti that female circumcision is wrong, and also completely true for the Kikuyu that female circumcision is right. The difference is in their "positions"- meaning their community's ways of thinking, feeling and acting.

Velleman uses a different analogy to explain why specific moralities are binding on certain groups. If someone on earth says, "Rocks tend to fall downwards," this is a true statement, because they are on earth. This would also carry practical guidance with it. One could learn that if they pick up a rock, it is going to feel heavy. (Obviously, this is not advice that we need, because we already know it, but pretend that we did not). An

astronaut in outer space saying the same thing would be lying. It would not carry

practical guidance with it, because in outer space, rocks do not tend to fall downwards.

Velleman believes the same mechanism follows with morality. If you say to someone

who occupies position P (someone in the Kikuyu community) that female circumcision is

right, this provides practical guidance by virtue of the person's position P (52). To be in

position P is to be in a community where female circumcision is acceptable. One has to

occupy position P to feel the weight of the reason (why to act a certain way), just like

someone has to be on Earth to understand that a rock will fall when dropped. In morality,

normativity guides by virtue of position. However, this analogy faces a problem.

Gravity has an explanation. It exists wherever two things have physical weight.

Velleman claims that normativity exists "wherever considerations have the weight of

reason." But what gives these considerations so much weight? What is it about being in

a particular community that influences one so strongly to follow that community's way of

life?

Velleman's answer to this question is essentially a psychological claim. This

claim is that people have a strong, inherent drive towards sociality. This drive facilitates

the convergence on ways of life, i.e. the convergence on mores and therefore morality.

And once these ways of life are developed, they become binding on the members of the

community.

In general, people tend to hold values that are similar to the values of other people

around them. That is, communities tend to converge on certain beliefs and valuations.

One community can value a type of person that is completely devalued in another

community. Wealthy people are admired in the United States, while poor people are

admired in communities of ascetic monks. This phenomenon, Velleman argues, is a result of his gravity principle. He uses himself as an example of how being part of a community determines ones values. Velleman is a member of the community of Greenwich Village in New York City. Residents of Greenwich Village assert that widely cited scholars are admirable (58). For these residents, this is true. It is true by virtue of the fact that someone's being a widely cited scholar is a reason to admire them, because as Velleman says, "that's the sort of people we admire" (58). Yet no one could assert that widely cited scholars are admirable to everyone. A 7 year-old would not admire a scholar. He would admire a funny cartoon character. One must remember, though, that the fact that 7 year-olds admire cartoon characters is not in itself the reason for a 7 year-old to admire a cartoon character. It is simply the frame of reference from which we can see that 7 year-olds are likely to admire funny cartoon characters. If you tell a 7 year-old that there is a funny cartoon character named Eeyore, this will give the child a "complete reason" for admiration (58).

Obviously, this is a simplification of the issue. Not everyone in a community admires the same type of person. And not everyone in a community holds the same moral values. However, the strong convergence on values inside any given community provides strong evidence for this phenomenon in general.

Just like the gravity example, someone being admired in another community with which we share no reasons gives us no reason to admire them. However, the fact that someone is admired in our community does give us a reason to admire them. We are pulled towards the similar ways of thinking, feeling, and acting (mores) which others in our community share. These mores largely determine who we admire and what we value,

including our moral beliefs. Velleman's hypothesis is that the drive to converge on these things is predicated on a desire for mutual interpretability. This concept will be the focus of my next section, but it must wait a little longer. First, there are some criticisms concerning what I have written so far. Velleman's examples of Greenwich Village and a Kikuyu tribe have important differences. Residents of Greenwich Village likely decided to live there because the community's values aligned with their own. Thus, they converged on shared ways of thinking, feeling, and acting before becoming a part of the community. A Kikuyu tribesman, in comparison, has no choice whether he is a part of the community. He is born into the tribe, grows up there, and has no choice to join another community. There are other worries about the definition of community. Can one be a part of multiple communities? Are people really powerless against the drive to converge with others, even if the ways of the community seem wrong? These are higher-level concerns with Velleman's argument that I will have important implications in my paper.

There is also a question at this point about evaluating mores. Mores vary greatly from community to community. How do we evaluate which community's mores are better? Velleman deems this a "nonsensical question" because it asks one to ignore the fact that all reasons for acting are based on perspectives (62). Does the fact that all reasons are based on perspectives mean that there are no real reasons? Also no, Velleman replies. Reasons are real when they are normative and action-guiding. The Kikuyu have real reasons to practice female circumcision, and the Mbuti have real reasons not to. A "true" reason above and beyond the community is essentially a

perspective-independent reason, which is not possible, says Velleman. If there is no

perspective then there can be no normativity!

III.   Mutual Interpretability

One can see by now that the concepts of doables, mores, and mutual interpretability are quite intertwined. The desire for mutual interpretability, which for Velleman is the key in explaining relativism, requires converging on certain mores, which are made up in part by doables. Mutual interpretability allows human beings to have societies in which people can understand each other. The desire for mutual interpretability led both the British and Nigerians to develop normal ways of greeting with a handshake. However, these handshakes turned out very different, and as a result, the two cultures have different mores of greeting, each uninterpretable to the other culture.

This mutual interpretability allows us to successfully greet people, to order food at a restaurant, and to understand a shared language. Our level of mutual interpretability runs even deeper than those instances, though. We can instantly read complex emotions and body language and understand the social forces shaping them. We can know if someone will be upset if you lie to them, or more importantly, if they *should* be upset. These complexities are different within every community. A smile on the street in Italy does not mean the same thing as a smile on the street in San Francisco. Yet, whether a smile is perceived as friendly or as sensual is predicated on the same thing- a desire to make attitudes or actions consistently interpretable. The reason that David Velleman posits this as his main evidence or his theory of moral relativism is simple. It is that people want to be understood. They don't want to live in a state of perpetual confusion and meaninglessness.

He also argues that there are communities that do a better job of ensuring mutual interpretability than others. He writes the following about how we should evaluate a society's level of mutual interpretability: "How well do those reasons (for acting and reacting) help [people] to understand themselves as the kind of creatures they are, endowed with a somewhat fixed nature as human beings?" (67). He is not simply asking how well a group's reasons help them to understand what someone may want for lunch. The criterion is how well a group's reasons for action help them to understand each other and themselves as human beings.

An example from a lecture by David Velleman at Claremont McKenna College in November 2014 helped clarify this definition. Nazi soldiers in World War II, he said, were terribly confused on an existential level. They may have all acted the same, but that did not mean they had a high level of mutual interpretability. In fact, acting the same probably lowered their level of mutual interpretability. They were absolutely unsure of why they were acting the way that they were, and even more unsure of why everyone else was acting the same way. Sadly, they could not see that they themselves were furthering this confusion by appearing unfazed to their fellow soldiers. This example shows that Velleman believes mutual interpretability to be more than just knowing how to act in a community. More importantly, mutual interpretability is about knowing *why* oneself and the community act the way they do. Some groups do not achieve this deeper level of mutual interpretability very well. Other groups do a much better job.

At this point, we should examine whether David Velleman's account is really moral relativism at all. There are two major concerns. The first concern is that he seems to be asserting some universal truth of what it is to be a human being. He argues that our

"somewhat fixed nature" as human beings includes a drive towards mutual

interpretability, making it a universal matter. This does not seem very much like

relativism. The second concern is that one community can be more advanced than

another community in terms of mutual interpretability. If morality is relative, how can

one community do a better job than another? Velleman's response to both of these

questions is dependent on the same point: that the drive towards mutual interpretability is

not a moral issue. The drive towards mutual interpretability is the determinant from

which all mores grow and develop (including morals). However, the moral values that

are set up in each community can differ greatly. One community can converge on

monogamous relationships as the best way to facilitate mutual interpretability in that

community. Another community may converge on polygamous relationships. Although

the drive towards mutual interpretability is universal, the morals that descend from it are

not. They can be drastically different. Thus, there is nothing universal about morals, or

any kind of mores. However, the drive towards mutual interpretability *is* universal.

Our second concern must now be addressed. How can one community be deemed

better than another community at facilitating mutual interpretability in a relativist

framework? Doesn't relativism imply that no one community can be better than another?

Velleman would respond in like fashion to the last criticism by saying that a claim about

one community being more advanced than another does not mean that any one society's

morality is more advanced. It simply means that one society does a better job of

facilitating mutual interpretability, a non-moral issue. Clearly one community can have

mores that better help people understand themselves and each other. This might seem

like a victory for the moral objectivists. Can't one just say that the communities with

superior mutual interpretability have superior morality? After all, they have the highest mutual interpretability, the thing we should strive for! Yet it does not work that way. This is because even the brute distinction of what qualifies as a moral issue can vary from community to community. What is considered a moral issue in one community might not count as a moral issue in another community. Remember the example of *étok-étok*. We outsiders might look in and deem that lying. Our word "lying" carries with it a moral connotation, turning it into a moral issue. However, to the Javanese, *étok-étok* is no more a moral issue than is blowing one's nose in our community. The evaluation of how well a community's mores (including morals) produce mutual interpretability is understandable only to those inside the community. Thus, although we can say conceptually that one community can do a better job than another at producing mutual interpretability, we cannot make that judgment ourselves.

Yet we still might remain skeptical of Velleman's claim that we cannot truly understand another community's mores. Once we learn how to give a proper handshake, or what a smile on the street means in another community, it seems like we have the requisite knowledge to assess mutual interpretability in that community. Velleman argues that it is not quite that simple. A more complex example illustrates the sometimes much larger gaps in understanding. In some communities, self-sacrifice is viewed as a tremendously honorable thing. Communities such as the Japanese samurai warriors practiced such self-sacrifice. In the United States today, no such thing is viewed as honorable. As an outsider, I could not comment with any reason on whether samurai self-sacrifice is a good or bad thing, because I don't understand the complex and culturally-specific concepts behind it. I may study the practice, but without inhabiting

the perspective of someone living in the community, I have no true knowledge of how it makes one feel. I can speculate, but I won't know whether this practice allows people to understand themselves and others as human beings, thus increasing mutual interpretability.

If Velleman is right that one cannot gain true knowledge about another community, then he is correct in saying that one cannot give another community a reason to change. I may think that I can present the Kikuyu community a reason to eliminate female circumcision: that it causes women shame and pain. Velleman would say that my claim is an over-extension of knowledge that I do not really possess. As an outsider, I do not have the right conceptual framework. The concept of shame that I employ in my attempt to give reason for change is specific to my own community. I do not have access to the concept of shame unique to the Kikuyu community. It is accessible only to those inhabiting perspective P, to return to the gravity metaphor. Therefore, if I were to make my criticism from within the community (say I were a member of the Kikuyu tribe), I would understand how it affects mutual interpretability. In that case, my criticism *would* carry reason with it. Velleman is quick to point out that criticism from the outside is perfectly acceptable. Part of human nature is to criticize other communities where morality is very different. The important thing, he says, is that people realize that their criticism does not give reason to the community in question to change their practices. This leaves Velleman in an interesting place with regard to his theory of progress. Progress cannot be judged from outside of the community in question. It can only be assessed from the inside. As a result, we have no way to compare different communities

in any meaningful way. This theory is useful only for assessing progress within our own community.

One worry about Velleman's definition of progress and his argument in general are his stipulations for what exactly decide community membership. Anyone can agree that distinct communities exist in some form. My community at the Claremont Colleges has drastic differences in terms of mores when compared with the Kikuyu community. What happens when communities are similar, but still have slight distinctions? Does it have any implications for Velleman's argument that I could travel across the world to England and still end up in a community with mores very similar to my own? What about immigrants who are a part of two very different communities with opposing mores? Velleman argued that reasons are perspective-dependent. If someone is able to inhabit opposite perspectives at different times in their life, doesn't that mean that they will feel the weight of opposing reasons? If so, the person should be able to legitimately comment on which mores better produce mutual interpretability- thus making the matter objective and not relative. These are some issues that should be very concerning for Velleman.

These questions have been answered at least partly. A community, for Velleman's purposes, is defined by frequent interaction of people in the community, whether this interaction is voluntary or forced. Implied in this definition is that the interaction is face-to-face (although this may certainly be changing in the digital age). The boundaries of a community are purposefully unclear, as people interact with all sorts of communities on any given day. A person may in a single day be a part of a school community, a church community, a city community, and the community of their country

as a whole. That one can belong to many different communities is obvious, and it does not hurt Velleman's argument. On the second question, whether someone who is a part of two distinct communities can determine which community's practices better produce mutual interpretability, Velleman would grant that they could. Anyone who is a member of a community can give reason to their community to change a practice if it does not facilitate mutual interpretability. And by being a member of any community, a person possesses knowledge of the level of mutual interpretability in that community. Yet, importantly, when saying which community's mores better facilitate mutual interpretability, they would not be comparing the two communities morally. They would simply be determining which community has a higher mutual interpretability, and then, within each community, analyzing which mores are beneficial or harmful. A certain practice might help mutual interpretability in one community, but hurt it in another community. This is because the more or practice might be conceptually completely different in the two communities.

At this point, we may want to deny that conceptual frameworks matter at all in our ability to give reason for change. When told that we cannot give the Kikuyu tribe a reason to get rid of female circumcision because we don't understand their conceptual framework, we might respond: "That doesn't matter. One just has to understand what it is like to be a human being. Human beings flourish better with total freedom, something that is clearly lacking in the Kikuyu community." This seems reasonable. After all, we all have a shared nature as human beings. Isn't being human simply enough to truly understand another community? Again, Velleman would say that it is not. He would reply that our reasoning about "total freedom" is primarily a result of the society we are

raised in. Our mores center on individuality and the freedom of each person. That is the framework through which we understand ourselves and others. Not every community has the same focus as ours on individuality. The term "total freedom" we are using is a term specific to our own conceptual framework, tailored to our understanding. In a community less focused on the individual (and more on the community), freedom would not be viewed in the same way. Freedom might be viewed as being free of want, or lust, or something else. It might not be freedom to *do things*. It might instead be freedom to *feel things*. A different example that would help Velleman's point: many Asian communities focus much more on the community than on the individual. Are we really in a position to say that our western conceptual framework does a better job at accounting for mutual interpretability than the other community, without being a part of that community?

However, there are still some things that seem so obviously wrong that anyone could give a reason to change them. This list includes but is not limited to slavery, mass murder, subjugation, and torture. I will pursue this intuition in forming my critique of David Velleman's argument. My argument will not claim that perspective is not important. In fact, I will reaffirm its importance. However, I differ from Velleman in that I believe there are ways to gain a valid perspective of a community other than actually living in it. In the next section of my paper, I will discuss how and to what degree one can gain an inside perspective of another community. Then I will discuss whether this justifies one in giving reason to another community to change one of these horrible practices. By the end of my paper, I will have shown that David Velleman

should agree that there at least some cases in which anyone can gain a sufficient

perspective of another community to give that community a reason to change a practice.

IV.   **An Outsider's Perspective**

It might be helpful to start by examining our intuitions about reason-giving. There are many practices in the world, both in one's own community and other communities, that do not seem directed towards increasing people's ability to live with and understand each other. Some of these practices may seem not so important, but others seem too important to ignore. I may not have lived in the southern United States during the early 19th century, but it still seems like I understand something about slavery and its effects on people. The institution of slavery in the United States seems to have caused great pain to a large number of people. Can I not justifiably say that an institution such as slavery damages mutual interpretability, and thus give reason for its elimination? I have not lived in the particular community that I am criticizing, but why is that the only qualification that allows me to understand the level of mutual interpretability in the community? This intuition that we may have understanding from outside of the community is very strong. It gnaws at us when we hear or read about systems of oppression and discrimination in other communities (as well as our own). We believe that we have reasons for these systems to disappear. For a moral objectivist, this is not a problem. They believe in universal moral truths, and the inability to understand the conceptual framework of another community is not an issue. For the relativist, it is more of a problem. We don't like to think that all of our criticisms are just ignorant gibberish from an outsider. How does a relativist explain the feeling that they can give another community a reason to change, while admitting that everything is relative?

In order to explain this feeling, the relativist must appeal to the idea that we can gain an adequate understanding of another community's conceptual framework without

living in that community. This is the argument that I will now make. I will attempt to show that as outsiders, there are certain cases where enough relevant knowledge can be gained to criticize a practice or institution of another community. Of course, not all practices are fair game in this argument. Many practices involve a deeply nuanced understanding of the social dynamics of a community. However, these cases are generally not as pressing as others. They may involve practices of lying, or swindling, or other minor moral infractions. The cases that seem clearly wrong to us, such as slavery, will be my main focus.

Imagine a refugee from a community in which slavery is still practiced. He flees from enslavement in the diamond mines of Africa to Europe and experiences freedom from the force of threat for the first time (he has been in slavery since a child). This newfound freedom liberates the man in all sorts of ways. He begins to regain mental and spiritual stability. He begins to recover from the trauma of being enslaved. Of course, it is not as if he needed to flee the slave-society in order to realize its wrongness. It is obvious to anyone in such an awful situation that what they are experiencing is awful for mutual interpretability. Velleman agrees with this. Anyone can give reason from within their own community for it to change its moral practices. As someone with the inside perspective, the slave understood the reasons for acting and the effects of actions on the psyches of the people. This is uncontroversial. He may no longer live in the community in question, but he is still obviously justified in giving a reason to this community to change. I believe there is a hidden controversy in this that will be damaging for Velleman. Let's examine why we believe the refugee can give reason to his former community to change, even though he no longer lives there. The clear answer is that his

experiences living in the community justify this ability. Certainly this is true. His experiences gave rise to knowledge. Through this knowledge, he recalls the lack of interpretability in the community, and gives a reason for his former community to change. In essence, it is knowledge that gives justification for reason giving.

Now, another hypothetical scenario: the refugee makes friends with a European who has never lived in a slave-holding community. Over time, the refugee tells the European all about his time in the community. He relays every detail of the experience, communicating just exactly how subjugation makes the slaves feel. Over time, the European develops a quite vivid understanding of the experience. He comes to understand to some degree the complex emotions involved in being a slave. He learns how people think and act in such a community. Is this knowledge gained by the European relevantly different from the knowledge of the former slave in its ability to provide reason for change? Obviously, it is different. The refugee lived the experience, and the European did not. I agree that this distinction seems important. However, when we look further, it appears there is no legitimate reason for maintaining it. What might this reason be? Velleman might say that the experience itself is what provides the reason-bearing force. Yet it is not the experience itself that provides the reason-bearing force. It is the knowledge gained from the experience. If, then, the knowledge can be accurately and vividly conveyed, there is no need for the direct experience. The European will possess the relevant knowledge to determine that mutual interpretability is not well accounted for in the community. He is not conjuring up some dream of what it is like to be a slave. Through the refugee's experience, he understands a real, lived perspective- the original perspective P. This perspective, under Velleman's view, is what gives someone the

ability to provide reasons to their community to change. If the European is able to inhabit the perspective to an adequate degree, he should be able to provide a reason for a community to change just as the former slave can.

Yet Velleman may still want to maintain that there is some importance in being the refugee. The slave, he might argue, has an irreplaceable primary experience of how it feels to be subjugated and discriminated against in that community. This, and only this, gives someone the ability to give their community a reason to change. Yet, he does not seem to believe this. If this is the case, then why does he allow other people in the community, including the very people doing the enslaving, to give reason for the community to change? When the slave master gives the community a reason to change, it is presumably a reason based on how the community's mores make the slaves feel. This requires the slave master to access the slave's experience, which, importantly, is not his or her own lived experience. So, lived experience cannot be the criterion for reason-giving. Granted, this slave master understands the mores of the community from an inside perspective, a difference from the European. So it is true that he has felt the "weight" of the community's mores in a way that the European has not. But again, is this what justifies him in giving reason for the practice to change? It does not seem like it is. This slave master would simply feel more pressure to perpetrate the practices of the community. Does he need to somehow "overcome" this pressure and triumphantly give reason for his community to change? This seems like an arbitrary criterion. After all, it seems like the pressure would only make it less likely for real, lasting improvements in mutual interpretability to develop.

There is another way that Velleman might attempt to counter my argument. Early on, I described his claim that conceptual frameworks are so different from community to community that no community can understand another. Velleman could argue something along these lines: that as much as the refugee tries to convey what life was like in his former community, something about the mores of the community will remain inaccessible to the European. When the refugee tries to explain his experiences, he will use terms or concepts that are understood totally differently in each community. The European will bring along his own preconceptions of how sociality should be in a community. When he listens to the refugee's story, he will listen to the experiences through his own framework. I am not sure there is sufficient justification to believe that there can be absolutely no adequate understanding of a more in another community. I will accept that there can be some misunderstanding between communities about concepts that are more nuanced, such as lying or cheating. But can there really be any confusion about concepts as important to mutual interpretability as slavery? Perhaps there can be some confusion about what exactly slavery entails in a given society. Yet I refuse to concede that there could be such a great rift between communities that one could not accurately perceive a complete lack of liberty and its detrimental effects on mutual interpretability. When the refugee tells the European, "I do not believe that those who enslaved me thought of me as another human being," there is little room to misinterpret. This matter of conceptual frameworks is obviously a matter of degree. I will not argue that an outsider can access and evaluate all of the mores of another community. Only for mores that obviously damage mutual interpretability is one justified in giving a reason for change. Of course, this may seem to fall into dangerous

territory. Many things seem obviously wrong to outsiders who are actually just conceptually confused. How do we prevent this confusion and limit our reason-giving to cases that we actually can gain a real understanding of? In the next section, I will give several criteria that must be met for one to be justified in giving a reason for change.

V.   Criteria for Reason Giving

These criteria are not based on one's own moral opinions of another community. They are based on whether that community fails to adequately account for mutual interpretability. In certain cases, this knowledge is accessible to an outsider with a different conceptual framework. My first criterion addresses a community's failure to include a certain group of people in the development of a shared way of life. In cases where a group is deliberately constructed as uninterpretable, or excluded from interpretability, we can give this community a reason to change.

Oftentimes, this takes the form of subjugation that is reinforced through social custom or institution. Naturally, people in this position come to be very confused existentially. They are distressed and distraught, unable to understand themselves or others around them. The slave finds himself constantly bewildered at the community's inability to understand him as a human being, instead of just a tool to be used for wealth accumulation. It might be asked what exactly I mean when I say that the slave is not able to understand himself or the mores of the community. One could argue that the slave has a pretty clear understanding of both of these things, even if he is subjugated. He understands that he is a victim of a system in which he is used for profit. He may feel badly, but that does not mean he does not understand why he feels badly or why the community has structured its mores in the way that it has. In responding to this criticism it might help to return to Velleman's original question of how to assess the level of mutual interpretability in a community. He writes, "How well, in other words, have the members of a community managed to develop a *shared* way of life?" (67). Clearly, in such a case, not very well. Their way of life involves one side of the community

controlling the other side of the community. The more powerful half utilizes their power to deny the less powerful half any input in designing the community's mores. It is not a "shared" way of life. It is a way of life designed by some for the benefit of some.

Note that this is not a moral criticism of a community. It is a practical criticism of a community. If we know that a community has very low mutual interpretability because one faction of this community has imposed their mores on another, then we are not placing our own conceptual framework on the situation or dipping into moral territory. We remain safely outside of moral territory, an important point if we want Velleman to grant the validity of our reason-giving. Such a community did not converge on mores. Mores were imposed on one group forced to remain in the community. This ability to give reason is of course contingent on our having accurate knowledge of the community, which I will address shortly.

In his earlier book, *Practical Reflection*, Velleman reinforced the importance of mutual cooperation in sociality. He writes: "If you want to be understood, then one of the things you must understand is that [the other party is] trying to be understood. And if [the other party] desires to be understood by you, then his so desiring is one of the things that he must make you understand" (33). This appears complicated at first. It can be simplified as follows: in any interaction, the actors must show the other that they are both trying to understand and trying to be understood. Cooperation is a prerequisite for sociality and the quest for mutual interpretability. A community must converge on mores, a cooperative process that takes into account the desires of all parties involved. When a community develops in the manner of the slave-holding society that I just described, it is not a cooperative effort. There is no attempt to understand the slave class

or converge on mores that might take into account their desires. It is this lack of a basic level of mutual interpretability that gives an outsider the ability to give a reason for change. Not even the bare requisites of sociality appear in this community. We can use another example to illustrate this point: apartheid-era South Africa.

In this community, the colonial class used their power to construct the mores of the community. These mores perpetrated an ignorance of the desires of the black South Africans on a systematic and personal basis. The systematic basis included laws and strict social codes. The personal ignorance involved face-to-face interactions in which individual whites reinforced the subjugated status of the black South Africans. They made rude comments, or physically assaulted them, or scorned their request for a raise. The black South Africans must have wondered how these things became acceptable (how they became "doables"). Surely, if they were to reciprocate the treatment they received, it would not be acceptable. Then why, they must have thought, is it acceptable for them to do the same thing to us? This example illustrates exactly how ignoring the desires of a portion of the community leads to difficulty in understanding the mores of the community. Surely, the black South Africans could come to understand the mores in a literal way. They would know not to make rude comments to white South Africans, and especially never to physically assault them. What they would not be able to understand is how it became acceptable for it to happen the other way around, and on a systematic basis.

Why have I specified this first criterion to react to a group's exclusion from mutual interpretability, and not just a single person's? There are several reasons. One, this systematic exclusion is more dangerous than any personal exclusion could be. When

something like this is built into the legal code and power structure, it gives citizens an excuse to be complicit in carrying out the exclusion. A citizen faces the threat of punishment for opposing the system in thought or action. However, it also makes it easier to notice and criticize from an outside perspective. It would be difficult for a community to defend to another community the exclusion of a group of people from the "game" of mutual interpretability. We can simply examine the legal code (or explicit social codes) of a community and get a good idea of whether mutual interpretability is respected. If we see that one group is excluded from what are seen as the basic rights of the other citizens, this is a clear sign that there is no true attempt to understand this group as people. No rational person would assent to having a social code systematically deny his or her desires (they would not converge on mores that involve a denial of their desires). These instances are sometimes easy to observe from the outside, and sometimes difficult. Yet these violations are often accessible given the right knowledge of the community's practices.

I have argued for my first criterion of when an outsider can give another community a reason to change: when a group of people is excluded from the "game" of mutual interpretability. There is another criterion that is equally valid. This criterion demands that no person be seriously limited by their community's set of mores in their attempt to understand themselves. Written another way, it can be said that there must be a sufficient range of mores available to a person. We do not have to find that people are discriminated against outright, as in my last example. Someone may follow the mores of their community perfectly well, yet only do so out of fear. This would be a legitimate

case for reason-giving from another community. What would such a case look like? Let's examine.

Imagine a community where only one sexual orientation is privileged (what a difficult thing to imagine!). Those who don't fall under the classification of heterosexual are socially isolated. They are subject to ridicule and discrimination. Now imagine being a gay person in one of these communities. There is a choice that you would have to make. Do you publicly announce your sexuality and open yourself up to ridicule and discrimination? To make this example stronger, let's assume that such a position would force your family to renounce you. It would limit the jobs you are allowed to hold. It would in all respects make your life harder. Do you make this announcement? Most likely, you do not. Instead, you obscure your true identity, live a false heterosexual life, and take this secret to the grave with you. All the while, you live your life wondering if there is something wrong with you. You regret the fact that your friends and family cannot know you as you truly are. Your ability to understand yourself, and more importantly, to have others understand you, is close to non-existent. You feel this way because your community does not have a sufficient range of mores. Note that this example is different from the example of apartheid South Africa. In South Africa, the mores of the community are actively structured around discrimination. It is the existence of certain mores that give that community a reason to change. In the community we are currently considering, it is the lack of certain mores that limit the community's level of mutual interpretability. A black person could not do anything to avoid discrimination in apartheid South Africa. In contrast, in our community, a person is forced to make a choice to avoid discrimination, one that damages their ability to understand themselves.

Thus, the examples are relevantly different. In the former, the harm to the community derives from the existence of a malevolent more. In the latter, it is the lack of a benevolent more.

One could argue that in the case of the latter, it is really also a malevolent more: discrimination against non-heterosexual people. This may be true, but it does not describe accurately how people are affected. Once someone is publicly known to deviate from the standard sexuality of their community, then I agree that the discrimination functions in the same way as in apartheid South Africa. Yet it is the initial social pressure to conform to the community's "normal" sexuality that causes people in my hypothetical community the most trouble in understanding themselves.

Although this criterion is slightly different from the first, it retains the same philosophical basis. This is once again an instance of a community failing to converge well on a shared way of life. We can accurately infer that the "acceptable" ways of life in this community were developed not through the discourse of all people, but only through a certain portion of the population. In developing these mores, there was a failure to take into account the desires of an entire segment of the population, something Velleman acknowledged as essential in mutual interpretability. And although it should be obvious at this point, I will emphasize that an implication of Velleman's particular brand of moral relativism is that we have a normative responsibility to move towards mutual interpretability. I will use this as a premise as well. Velleman's emphasis on progress means we should always try to advance towards mutual interpretability when possible. So to say, "It's all relative anyways, so why try?" is *not* something Velleman or I believe.

The principle I formulated, that no person be seriously limited by their community's set of mores in their attempt to understand themselves, may be subjected to criticism. What if someone complains that they feel restricted by their community's norm to drive at the speed limit? Or what if they feel restricted by their community's law against destroying other peoples' private property? How do we justify stepping in in some cases and declaring others to be defenseless? Part of our answer can appeal to the need for communities to do a good job converging on mores. To remove all traffic laws would not by any stretch of the imagination account for the desires of the population. It would increase deaths by automobile accidents, and increase confusion in the community about why there are no measures to prevent these deaths. Private property is a similar case. If the basic laws of property in the United States were abolished, total chaos would ensue. All sorts of other laws would be broken, and any and all convergence on ways of life would disappear.

There is a more difficult case we must answer, though. Why do we ignore the person who claims that allowing homosexuality in his community damages his ability to understand himself and his community? Let's truly assume that this person faces great confusion and distress upon his community's allowance of gay marriage, for example. Why is this not a valid concern? Can we just ignore this person's desires and needs in designing the mores of our community? The critic of my argument would say an affirmative answer on this question would be a double standard.

To respond to this argument, let's recall that developing a community requires converging on a shared way of life. Implicit in this argument is that some people are going to have to compromise. When examining a community, we should examine who

has the ability to compromise. In the previous case, only one group has the ability to compromise. Gay people do not have the ability to magically change their sexual orientation (although some communities have tried very hard to believe this). Conversely, the anti-gay group *does* have the ability to change their opinions. The case of apartheid South Africa is analogous. A white person in South Africa might have claimed that seeing blacks achieve equality damaged their ability to understand themselves and their community. However, the difference is that they had the ability to change this opinion, even if it was very deeply ingrained. It would have been unreasonable to expect the black South Africans to magically change their skin color.

I will allow the critic of this portion of my argument one more counter-argument. Let's say that there is a community of one thousand white South Africans and one black South African. To change this community's mores and allow equality to the black South African would "burden" one thousand people, and only help one person. Doesn't this seem like an argument for maintaining the practices of the community exactly as they stand? I do not believe so. This would be a utilitarian argument based on the number of people harmed; therefore it would be a moral argument. My argument is not a moral argument, it is a practical argument. My argument is that the first priority in a community's development of sociality must be those things that one does not have control over (skin color, sexual orientation, etc.). Any mores specifically designed to make someone uninterpretable for something they have no choice about must be eliminated first, before other desires can be taken into account.

There is one relevant failure of my argument. Imagine a community of white supremacists, living isolated from the rest of the world. There is no possible justification

under my rationale for giving this community a reason to change. Because everyone in the community is a white supremacist, and everyone's desires are accounted for, there is no lack of mutual interpretability. But is this really that disastrous of a failure for my argument? Upon examination, it doesn't really seem to be. This community is not hurting anyone. They may hold beliefs that we want to criticize, but as long as they do not actively harm anyone, they are protected from our ability to give them reason to change. The moment this community actively begins to do harm (make people uninterpretable through persecution), then we may be able to give them reason to change, granted that we have accurate knowledge.

I have presented my two principles for when an outsider can give a community a reason to change. The first is when a class of people is removed from "the game" of mutual interpretability. The second is when a community does not have a sufficient range of mores for a group of people. Of course, a person must have the requisite knowledge in order to present a reason for change to a community. As I wrote earlier, part of this knowledge entails being able to inhabit the perspective of someone in that community to an adequate degree. Through the example of the immigrant, I wrote that one person could come to understand two distinct communities and the basic mores in each community. The example of the European showed that it is not even necessary to live in both communities to understand a large amount about each community. We can come to learn much about a community by simply knowing someone from that community. Now, I will advance this point even farther. I will argue that one can gain the relevant knowledge about a community through other sources, such as biographies or testimonies.

VI.   Sources of Knowledge

We should revisit my argument about the refugee and the European. Remember that the European was able to gain reason-giving power by inhabiting the perspective of the refugee. He was able to inhabit the perspective of the refugee (at least partially) because the refugee gave him accurate and vivid knowledge of the forces acting on people in his community. If one accepts knowledge learned this way as adequate, then why not knowledge from another equally valid source? Why must the knowledge come from someone known personally? I argue that there are many other channels for gaining this knowledge.

Let's use the example of a written account. Instead of communicating his experience verbally, the refugee wrote a detailed biography about his experience as a slave. The book contained all of the same knowledge communicated to the European originally. And instead of becoming friends with the refugee, the European read his biography. Would there be any difference in the knowledge gained? It does not seem like there would be. The only possible rebuttal is that there is something gained from knowing the source of the information personally. This line of reasoning does indeed have some merit. For we tend to be more impacted by an issue when we know someone who is affected by it. We are more likely to donate money to a charity working to cure cancer if someone in our family has had cancer. We have a higher empathetic response, and the critic argues that this is essential in allowing one to access another's perspective. The critic also believes that the empathetic response is stronger when one knows the person whom they are in conversation with (so to speak). Reading a book, they would claim, does not transfer the same amount of knowledge as having a face-to-face

conversation. I admit that there is something valuable to this theory. However, I would argue that the empathetic response is strong enough to allow someone to develop an adequately powerful account of what life is like for a person in a different community, whether they know this person or not. Think of the ease with which you can become attached to a character, fictional or real, in a book or movie. This person takes on a real significance to you. You are happy when they succeed, sad when they fail. One's empathetic response is very high in these situations, sometimes even higher than it might be with people one actually knows.

Another response to the critic is that the ability to empathize is only half the battle. An objective understanding of a community's mores is equally necessary to give reason for change. For this, being able to inhabit another's perspective is important, but not for reasons of empathy. Its importance lies in understanding why people act the way they do. It also lies in understanding the weight (or gravity) placed on certain mores. Understanding the intense gravitational pull in a community towards the sexual orientation of heterosexual requires factual knowledge. It requires knowing that people who deviate from the norm are punished through social isolation or other means. It does not require knowing personally anyone who has faced these punishments. Of course, emotional understanding is important. Knowledge means nothing if one does not empathize with those who face social isolation or other similar punishments. One might reasonably have a more powerful perspective by empathizing more highly. However, I maintain that because one can empathize strongly with fictional characters or people who are not personal acquaintances, that having personal acquaintances is not as important as the critic might make it seem.

There are several problems with gaining knowledge of a community from a source other than personal experience. The first is accuracy. From reading a biography, or even listening to someone talk, we cannot know if what someone says about their community is true. There may be reason to doubt what the person says or writes. The second problem is one of scale. We may read the biography of one person, and this person might claim that the problem they face is a common one in their community. We cannot know if this is true. It might be a problem like the one faced by the man who feels limited by his community's restriction on speeding. How do we go about dealing with these potential problems?

I admit that we may not be able to completely solve either of these problems. But the same method may help us be surer that we are gaining accurate knowledge of the community in question. This method is to corroborate sources. The more sources one has that speak of the same problem, the more likely it is to be accurate. Also, by sheer number, one can tell that the problem is one faced by many in the community. Biographies aren't the only way to access another's perspective. Documentaries, news articles, and other like sources in sufficient number are equally helpful. Of course, if the source does not offer insight into how a certain practice makes someone feel, it is useless. We can't read a newspaper article about female circumcision and assume knowledge of how it makes people feel. Only when we hear the perspectives of many people affected by the practice can we form an adequate perception of the perspectives in the community. And even once we gain this perspective, if it does not fit into one of our two categories of outside reason-giving, then we cannot claim to have this power. Otherwise, the powers of reason-giving would become too expansive and in many cases inaccurate. This is

because, as Velleman pointed out, there are many cultural concepts that remain inaccessible to outsiders without sufficient time in the community. These concepts tend to be lower-level issues such as lying or stealing. The concepts of truth-telling or private property may be sufficiently different in another community that we may not understand them. What can be more easily grasped are concepts such as slavery or legally coded discrimination. Any situation that ignores a large group of people in developing the mores of the community is obviously a candidate for reason-giving. We must cede some ground by claiming at this point to only have authority in the most obvious cases. Otherwise, we risk over-extending our argument and losing the ground we have gained.

There is one more important question on the topic of reason-giving: why should someone accept a reason to change that comes from outside of their community, especially if this change will not benefit them? It seems like a white South African might have no self-interested basis for helping to end practices of apartheid. After all, this system works quite nicely in his or her favor. By virtue of being a white person, he or she receives better education, opportunities and personal liberty. What could possibly convince such a person to let go of their privilege? Anyone attempting to answer this question faces an uphill battle. The answer must appeal to the desire to understand oneself and the community that one lives in. Imagine being a small white child growing up in apartheid South Africa. You become great friends with the children of your black housekeeper. Once you reach the age of five, though, you are told that you must attend a different school than your friends. You ask your parents why, and they explain that these children are not fit for the rigorous schooling that you will undertake. This confuses you. Your friends seem just as smart and capable as you are. Yet they seem to be separated

from you and judged inferior because of their skin color. As you grow up, you come to mostly accept and cease questioning the community you live in. Maybe you even come to hold some of the same prejudices as your fellow community-members. However, you can't shake certain instances in which the inequality of your society seems totally unjust. You frequent a certain market outside of the white part of town to buy your groceries. At the market, you notice how quickly the women working the shops are able to calculate change when handed money. You think to yourself, "She could be a very capable accountant." You hear a street performer eject barb after hilarious barb. He is very funny, much funnier than the white comics you seen on television performing on big stages. And you question why he could never be on those stages where the white comics perform. Perhaps you have a certain sense of resignation in those moments, knowing that it is easier for things to stay the same. Yet you can't shake the feeling that there is a fundamental confusion governing your society.

I would guess that most people are able to shed this feeling through some sort of cognitive dissonance, safe with the knowledge that the community's mores benefit them more than they hurt them (I know I personally often fall into this mindset). To change the mores would hurt their lifestyle, limiting their economic opportunity and general privilege. So what do we say to this person who sees the mores for what they are but chooses to ignore them? We can point out to this person that it would be a lot easier to live day-to-day without the gnawing feeling that they are perpetrating certain practices that systematically ignore the desires of a large portion of the community. You can also point out that if they were a truly talented and motivated person, they would succeed in any community without the advantage derived from an unequal community. Thus, it

would be a win-win to change the inequality present in their community. Obviously it wouldn't be a total win-win. They would lose many advantages stemming from their privilege. Yet the argument could be made that sacrificing these advantages would be worth correcting the confusion that governs the community.

This doesn't solve the problem of convincing the people most certain of the apartheid system. These people believed strongly that black people were inferior and deserved to be subjugated. They did not feel that any sort of fundamental confusion governed their community, nor did they ever feel any distress about their community's mores. No amount of argumentation would have convinced them that the system should be changed. In cases like these, there may be nothing we can do. People will not always accept reasons for change. Yet it is important to note that these people are not resisting a reason for change simply because it comes from outside of their community. If someone within their community were to present an argument for change based on lived experiences, their reaction would be no different. Thus, there is really no difference in the effect of reasons that come from outside of the community, as long as these reasons are based in accurate knowledge. Nor does the response of the person presented with the reason affect the validity of the reason. People may act irrationally in the face of reason (a tendency we all fall victim to sometimes). What matters is that the reason comes from a valid perspective and promotes mutual interpretability.

VII.   Conclusion

Where does this leave us on the question of progress in a morally relative world? David Velleman originally argued that progress can occur, but that it must come from within each community. I agree that progress is possible in a world of moral relativism, as each community gets better at facilitating mutual interpretability. However, I differ from Velleman in that I believe communities can help each other make progress by providing an outside perspective with a valid reason-giving force. Therefore, progress moves from a small-scale issue to a large-scale issue. This does not mean that we have lost moral relativism. Certain issues become "universal" only because people from different communities are able to place themselves in the community in question. It is as if we can all travel to different communities, each with their own relative gravity (provided we have the requisite knowledge to inhabit the perspective). When we condemn a practice in a certain community, we are not condemning it morally. We are condemning it because it damages mutual interpretability in that particular community. We may be able to condemn female circumcision in a community where it is forced on those who don't desire it, rather than arrived at organically. We are not condemning female circumcision itself as morally wrong. If a woman freely chose to become circumcised at an age where she could rationally make choices for herself, we would not morally condemn her. The reason for our lack of condemnation here is that there is no loss of interpretability. It is the same reason that we do not charge a boxer with assault after he knocks out his opponent. Our judgments of actions are dependent on the context. And in this case, the context is whether the action damages a person's ability to understand themselves and the mores of the community.

True, some actions such as enslavement are likely to be considered wrong no matter what community they take place in. But this again does not mean we are moving towards a universal moral condemnation of slavery. Rather, we are looking at slavery in each community where it exists, examining its effect on the community, and likely deciding that in fact it does damage mutual interpretability. There is no universally wrong practice in the meta-ethical sense (to borrow Velleman's words again). We cannot outright say that killing is "wrong" in the moral sense, nor for slavery or stealing. Each claim requires us to inhabit the perspective of someone in the community, understand the mores as best we can, and judge whether mutual interpretability is harmed in one of the two ways I have posited in this essay. The reason for change one gives is never a moral reason. It is a practical reason. In practice, a certain set of the community's mores (or lack of certain mores) serves only to damage mutual interpretability. Whether this practice is something we personally deem morally wrong or right is irrelevant. If it damages mutual interpretability in that community, it must be changed for practical reasons.

My argument that in certain cases one community can give reason to another community to change should be encouraging. David Velleman's account argued that there are no such cases. No criticism could ever carry reason with it, he said. Upon encountering as an outsider a civilization such as Nazi Germany or the slave-holding United States, we would have to renounce any legitimate claim to tell them to change their practices. Of course, I do not believe David Velleman to be any sort of sympathizer of amoralists. He strongly encourages people to criticize the communities in which they

see some sort of wrong occurring. He simply wanted to emphasize that our criticism carries no reason with it as an outsider. I do not agree with this in all cases.

I attempted to argue that there is a way "in" as an outsider. This way "in" involves learning a sufficient amount about a community's mores and how they make the people in the community feel (how the community's mutual interpretability is affected). This knowledge, if adequate, can allow us to access the perspective *P* of a member of the community, thus allowing us knowledge of how the community's mores affect people. With the ability to inhabit the perspective *P*, we gain the ability to give reason for the community to change. As I pointed out, this reason-giving power is limited to the mores that are understandable to an outsider with sufficient knowledge. To make my argument even stronger, I limited this power more, allowing reason-giving power only in two cases. The first case is when one group of people is deliberately made uninterpretable, to themselves and to others. The second case is when a community lacks a sufficient range of mores to make a person or group of persons interpretable to themselves or others. Both of these cases qualify because they do not meet the requisites of sociality. They fail to account for the desires of a portion of the community in developing a "shared" way of life. Whether or not the community has purposely structured their mores this way, we as outsiders can provide reasons for these mores to change.

Everything I have argued is consistent with David Velleman's own arguments. He must allow people to understand different communities, or else his conceptual framework would not be able to accommodate our modern world in which people are increasingly multinational (or for the sake of our terminology, multi-communal). He also must allow people to access different perspectives even without living in the community.

Otherwise, he denies our ability to empathize with a person who feels unable to understand themselves or the people around them. Moreover, he denies our ability to interpret which mores are causing this sort of damage. This seems silly, as often we are told directly by our sources which specific mores damage their ability to understand themselves. For major violations of mutual interpretability, one only needs to understand the basic mores of the community to adequately understand why those mores should be changed.

Thus, we have shown that there is at least one version of moral relativism in which one community can give another community a reason to change a practice. This ability is premised on the claim that all communities should try to facilitate and respect mutual interpretability as much as possible. When it is obvious that there is no effort to converge on a shared way of life, or when one side is excluded from the development of mores, we can give a reason for this community to change.

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