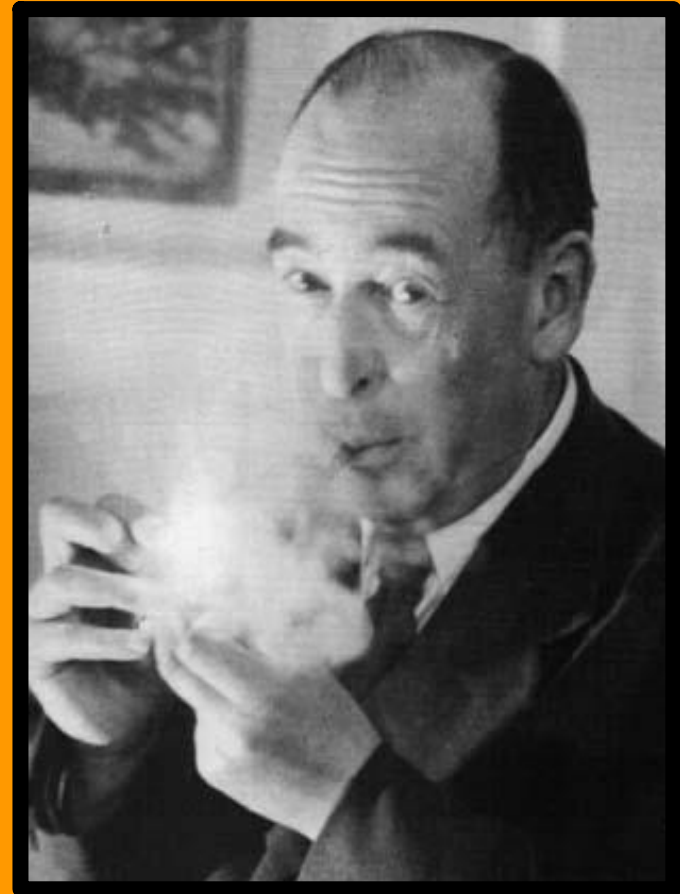


MORAL REALISM

Ethics, Politics, & Law
Spring Quarter 2007
Dr. Jeff Johnson
Lecture Three

Moral Universals?

- **All values might be socially constructed**
- **Are there moral universals?**
- **C. S. Lewis**
- **Cultural selection**
- **Might they still be socially constructed?**



Moral Realism



- **Values objective existence**
- **Values are universal**
- **Values are knowable**
- **Values affect behavior**
- **How is this possible?**

MORAL REALISM

According to moral realism:

- 1. Moral statements are the sorts of statements which are (or which express propositions which are) true or false (or approximately true, largely false, etc.);**
- 2. The truth or falsity (approximate truth . . .) of moral statements is largely independent of our moral opinions, theories, etc);**
- 3. Ordinary canons of moral reasoning—together with ordinary canons of scientific and everyday factual reasoning—constitute, under many circumstances at least, a reliable method for obtaining and improving (approximate) moral knowledge. [Boyd]**

ETHICAL SKEPTICISM

There are no objective values. . . . The claim that values are not objective, are not part of the fabric of the world, is meant to include not only moral goodness, which might be most naturally equated with moral value, but also other things that could be more loosely called moral values or dis-values—rightness and wrongness, duty, obligation, and action's being rotten and contemptible, and so on. [Mackie]

ETHICAL RELATIVISM

[M]orality does depend, at least in part, on external sanctions. If these are not divine, they must be human; that is, they must be social. Morality must, then depend on some sort of social law enforced by custom and social pressure. . . . We can define social custom theories loosely as theories that say morality derives from the rules or customs that society enforces in a certain way, a way that may be specified differently in different theories. [Harman]

VERSIONS OF MORAL REALISM

- **Divine command theory**
- **Natural law theory**
- **Utilitarianism**
- **Kant's theory**

PROBLEMS FOR REALISM

- **“Queerness”**
 - **Ontological**
 - **Epistemological**
 - **Motivational**
- **Cross-cultural relativity of values**
- **Secularism**
- **Relativity in the culture**

PRACTICE EXAM QUESTION

Describe the position of ethical relativism. How might a relativist assess the practice of female genital mutilation? What response might a moral realist make to this assessment? Where do you stand on these questions?