

## ***One final ethical approach: Focus on the social context***

**Conformity** The person acts as expected in the social context. This means that what is considered ethical varies by society and by place based on what is acceptable.

This school of thought is similar to *moral relativism* in which there is no universal sense of right and wrong but depends entirely on each place. Contrast this with the concept of *universalism* which states that there are some beliefs and actions that are right and wrong regardless of the place and time. Some things are universally true.

People who believe in this might say:

- What's right for you may not be what's right for me.
- What's right for my culture won't necessarily be what's right for your culture.
- No moral principles are true for all people at all times and in all places.

Ex. In the United States, most people can marry whomever they want regardless of their parents' wishes. In many parts of the world, it is considered terribly immoral to disobey your parents and marry a person they disapprove of. In each case, we look at what is normal for the given society.

**Examples of actions that may be considered ethical in one place but unethical in another:**

**What are the strengths of this approach to ethics? What are the limitations?**

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## **TOK Day 54**

### **Bullfighting: Art or Not?**

Bullfighting has its roots in rituals dating back many centuries. In its modern Spanish style, bullfighting first became a prominent cultural event in the early 18th century. Yet despite its cultural significance, bullfighting continues to face increasing scrutiny in light of animal rights issues.

Some people consider bullfighting a cruel sport in which the bull suffers a severe and tortuous death. Many animal rights activists often protest bullfighting in Spain and other countries, citing the needless endangerment of the bull and bullfighter. Some cities around the world where bullfighting was once popular, including Coslada (Spain), Mouans-Sartoux (France), and Teocelo (Mexico), have even declared themselves to be anti-bullfighting cities. Other places, including some towns in Catalonia (Spain), have ceased killing the bull in the fight, but continue bullfighting.

To other people, the spectacle of the bullfight is not mere sport. The event is not only culturally significant, but also a fine art in which the bullfighter is trained in a certain style and elicits emotion through the act of the fight. Writer Alexander Fiske-Harrison, in his research and training as a bullfighter, defends the practice and circumstances of the bull, "In terms of animal welfare, the fighting bull lives four to six years whereas the meat cow lives one to two. ...Those years are spent free roaming..." And others similarly argue that the death of the bull in the ring is more humane than the death of animals in a slaughterhouse.<sup>1</sup>

### **Questions**

Respond to the following questions. I will collect your responses.

1. How is the controversy over bullfighting related to the concept of relativism?
2. How would a relativist interpret this controversy?
3. Do you believe that bullfighting is an ethically wrong practice or a justifiable cultural event? Explain your reasoning.
4. Do you agree that the death of the bull in the ring is more humane than the death of animals in a slaughterhouse? Why or why not? What ethical concerns are raised by both situations?

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Ethics Unwrapped  
<http://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/video/all-is-not-relative>