

**WRAP Exams · wrapexams.com**

Prelims PYQ, Mains model answers, and copy evaluation. Write to the desk for this paper, a doubt, or the AI waitlist.

**ask@wrapexams.com · +91 85951 84903 · wrapexams.com**

Q1(b)

**Cultural Relativism.**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · PSIR GS 1 · 10 marks · Political Theory

Political Theory: meaning and approaches.

**Core demand of the question**

- **Comment on the following in about 150 words:** Cultural Relativism. (10 marks)

**Revision summary**

Cultural relativism asks that meaning be read inside a culture, against racial ranking.

**Boas** and **Herskovits** are the canonical names.

As method it blocks ethnocentrism; as absolute ethics it can protect domination.

Parekh and Kymlicka keep culture with exit and equality.

Indian minority rights sit beside **Article 17**, which relativism cannot erase.

**Introduction**

Cultural relativism holds that practices and values must be understood inside the culture that gives them meaning. It was a reply to ranking peoples on a single civilisational ladder.

**Body****The claim**

- **Franz Boas** rejected racial hierarchy and insisted that each culture is a historical whole, not a delayed copy of Europe.
- **Melville Herskovits** stated cultural relativism as a method and, more strongly, as a moral warning against ethnocentric reform.
- The American Anthropological Association's 1947 statement on human rights used this warning against a premature universal code.
- In political theory the idea challenges a single list of rights taken from **Locke** or **Mill** as if it were nature.

**Politics and limit**

- **Relativism is a research discipline:** do not judge before you can describe.
- As a political doctrine it can shield caste, gender violence, or authoritarian custom from **Ambedkar**'s civil equality and from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- **Bhikhu Parekh** and **Will Kymlicka** keep cultural context without surrendering exit, sex equality, and a public law of the state.
- Indian **Articles 25** to 30 protect culture; **Article 17** and Part III still bind custom. Relativism cannot cancel that hierarchy of norms.

**Flow diagram**

Cultural relativism -> Boas historical cultures  
Cultural relativism -> Herskovits anti-ethnocentrism  
Cultural relativism -> Limit: rights and Article 17  
Universal rights -> Public argument

## Conclusion

Cultural relativism, after Boas and Herskovits, is a method against ethnocentrism. It is not a veto on human rights or on Ambedkar's attack on caste. Description first, then a public argument about which harms a state may forbid.

## Facts & figures

### Boas

Founded American cultural anthropology against evolutionary racial ladders.

### Herskovits

Formulated cultural relativism as both field method and a caution to reformers.

### AAA, 1947

Anthropological statement that a universal rights draft risked Western cultural projection.

### Article 17

Abolishes untouchability, a constitutional limit on 'our culture' as a defence.