

Example of the ideas of ruth benedict biography

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



In one of her prominent works, Ruth Benedict explains the story of a certain community that lives on an island northwest of Melanesia. Ruth Benedict describes the community as one in which people are so mistrustful of one another to the extent that they can barely afford to share anything or do anything together. The community, which is characterized by paranoia and mistrust, does not approve of such things as sharing food or accepting gifts from neighbors. Rationally, such behavior would be considered abnormal in the modern societies (Young 99). Ruth Benedict further tells the story of a man that went to the island. He was philanthropic and enjoyed sharing things and helping others. The people of the island considered the man abnormal. According to Ruth Benedict, the people of that community are not abnormal, they are perfectly normal in their society. If they were to be brought to our society, they would be considered abnormal. If we were to be taken to their society, we could be considered abnormal as well. This, according to Ruth Benedict, is what is referred to as cultural relativism. This paper endeavors to explain the ideas of Ruth Benedict, which advocate for moral and cultural relativism.

Born on the fifth day of June 1887, Ruth Benedict is considered one of the most controversial anthropologists, thanks to her unique philosophical approach to anthropology and cultural studies. Known for her works such as *Patterns of Culture*, Ruth Benedict argues that there is nothing absolute. In other words, there is nothing that is universally accepted as right or wrong. She argues that the definition of that which is either right or wrong varies from one culture to another. The anthropologist, who was at some point the president of the American anthropologists association, argues that what is

considered normal in one society could be considered abnormal in another society (Arkes 140). This way, the definition of good and bad varies from generation to another, place to another as well as it varies from culture to the next. It is for this reason, argues Ruth Benedict that if a man was to be picked from an extreme primitive society to a postmodern society, his ways could be considered abnormal. Similarly, she argues, if a man was to be taken from a postmodern society and transplanted in a primitive society, he would be seen as an abnormal being. As such, something can only be described as normal if it falls within the accepted conduct of a society.

In her work, *The Races of Mankind*, Ruth Benedict establishes a link between normality and morality. The anthropologist argues that, the same way that which is normal varies from society to another, so does morality. Something considered to be immoral in one society can be morally accepted in another society. Ruth Benedict gives the example of homosexuality. Arguably, homosexuality has gained acceptance in modern cultures in the recent past. In the olden days, such a behavior was condemned as an abomination in most societies. Even so, the behavior was considered perfectly normal in ancient Greece. As such, Ruth Benedict argues that morality, much like normality is a variety of good. In straightforward terms, good varies from society to another. It is for this reason, according to Ruth Benedict, that ethics cannot be a universal concept (Moore 176). As much as the word ethics may exist in all societies and cultures, that which defines ethics varies from one society to another. Ethical conduct is relative as it is highly determined by the practices, traditions and morals of a community.

In her works such as *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Ruth Benedict

explains that the difference between primitive cultures and modern cultures is time (Porter 74). During the time of the primitive cultures, the activities that took place in society were different and were perceived differently. For instance, Ruth Benedict explains that during the time of the primitive cultures, there were many superstitions. Such superstitions as black magic brought about suspicion and paranoia. Following such black magic, the paranoid members of the community did not interact as freely as are people in the communities of the modern world. As such, such things as sharing food were considered abnormal in the primitive societies. Being abnormal, it was immoral to ask for food from a neighbor. As time went by, Ruth Benedict explains, people overcame such barbaric ideas as black magic.

With the adoption of such religions and cultures as Christianity, people changed their ways of thinking. As they changed, so did their definition of morality. This, according to Ruth Benedict, explains how time relates to moral and cultural relativity. Further, Ruth Benedict explained that the only thing that had a universal outlook was the aspect of temperament (Waldram 112). Temperaments are universal since society does define an introvert differently, for example. An introvert will remain to be an introvert in whichever society. By the time Ruth Benedict was dying, on the 17th day of September 1948, she had made a name as the most controversial anthropologist. Her acceptance of the theory of moral relativism has been critiqued by many believers of the philosophy of absolute truth, a theory that Ruth Benedict dismissed as being more ideal than real.

Works cited

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