

TABLE 4.2 The Contemporary Theories Responding to Cultural Relativism

	Guidance for ethical action	Focus of our efforts	Typical questions asked in the effort to fulfill obligations	Strengths and weaknesses	Reaction to cultural relativism
Eternal return of the same	Be myself.	Think through the eternal return.	Would I do this if it had to be repeated in the same life, which recurred forever?	Maximizes individual authenticity but provides no specific recommendations for action.	Abandons morality altogether.
Cultural ethics	Follow local customs and practices.	Learn local customs and practices.	What do the locals do?	Helps you fit in but allows little hope for ethical improvement.	Accepts the proposal that moral rules are just a particular community's beliefs.
Virtue ethics	Develop good moral character.	Learn and practice the virtues.	Am I acting with integrity and in accordance with values learned?	Allows flexibility but provides little specific guidance.	Tries to protect against cultural relativism by developing an adoptable but consistently moral character.
Discourse ethics	Produce solutions to moral dilemmas.	Talk it out: use rational conversation to reach a peaceful, consensual agreement.	What do you think? How about this possibility?	Provides a broad range of possible solutions but every conflict must be addressed from scratch.	Replaces a culture's moral rules with the attempt to fabricate new rules to function in specific situations.
Ethics of care	Nurture and protect immediate relationships.	Respond to the needs of those nearest us.	Which solution preserves healthy and harmonious relationships among those involved?	Humanizes morality but risks tribalism.	Replaces a culture's moral rules with loyalty to those whose lives touch our own.