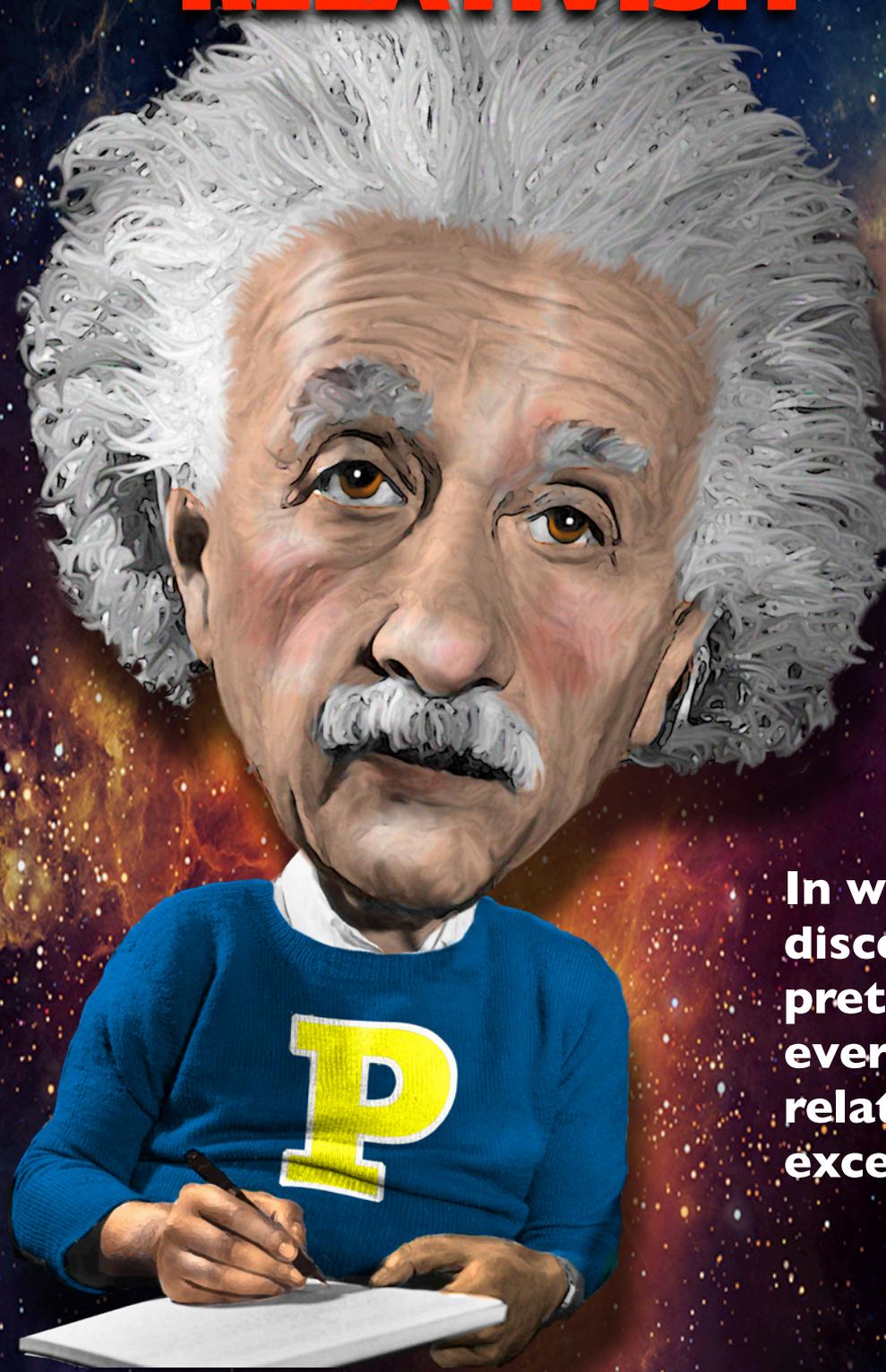


THE STORY OF ETHICS

How the media got moral, or not

RELATIVISM

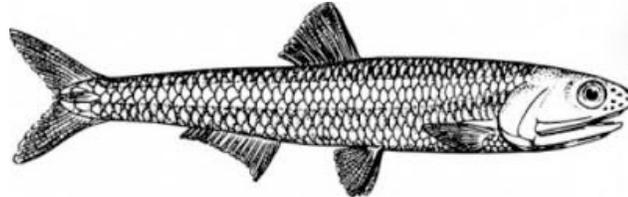


**In which we
discover that
pretty much
everything is
relative...
except ethics.**

**THERE ARE THREE TYPES OF MORAL CLAIMS:
SUBJECTIVE,
INTER-SUBJECTIVE, AND OBJECTIVE**

A claim or judgment is subjective if its truth depends on whether or not it conforms to the tastes, attitudes, and beliefs of the claimer (the person making the claim).

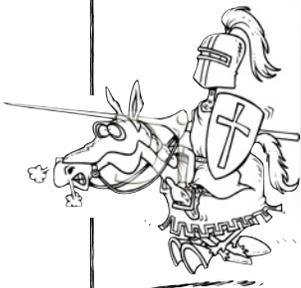
EXAMPLE: "Anchovies taste yummy." (a matter of taste)



TRUST ME... I DON'T TASTE GOOD AT ALL. REALLY.

A claim or judgment is inter-subjective if its truth depends on whether or not it conforms to the beliefs, attitudes, and conventions of the group to which the claimer belongs.

EXAMPLE: "It is rude to belch at the dinner table." (a matter of custom)



IF I BELCH, YOU'LL GET BARBEQUED.



A claim or judgment is objective if its truth does NOT depend on whether it conforms to the beliefs or attitudes of any group or individual.

EXAMPLE: "The earth is spherical." (a matter of fact)

SO, THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS UPSIDE DOWN.



MORE EXAMPLES...

- It's normal to eat meat.

INTER-SUBJECTIVE

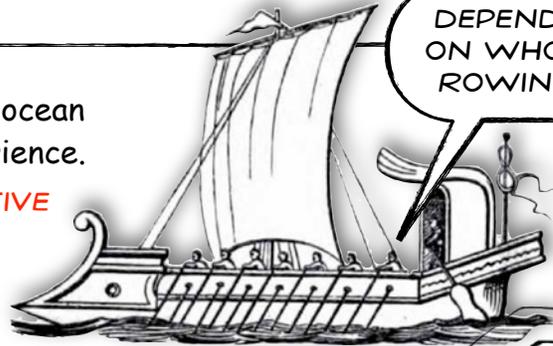
IT
MOST
CERTAINLY
IS **NOT**



- Sailing in the open ocean is a pleasant experience.

SUBJECTIVE

DEPENDS
ON WHO'S
ROWING.



I SURE
HOPE THIS
IS DENVER!

- The boiling point of water is 100°C.

OBJECTIVE

[Note that although the boiling point of water is "relative" in the sense that it varies according to atmospheric pressure, it is not relative in the sense defined above.]



- The time it takes to travel from earth to another planet, 20 light-years away, at 50% of the speed of light is 10 years.

OBJECTIVE

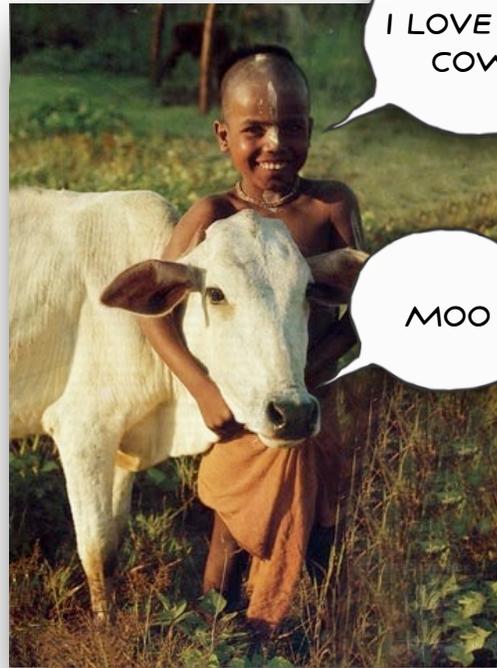
[Again, although the time it takes the spaceship to travel this distance is relative to one's position, See Einstein's Theory of Special Relativity, it is not relative in the sense defined above.]



ETHICAL/CULTURAL RELATIVISM

ETHICAL RELATIVISM IS THE VIEW THAT ALL MORAL CLAIMS ARE INTER-SUBJECTIVE.

- Cultural relativism holds that the moral conventions of a culture determine what it is right and wrong for the members of that culture to do.
- On this view, seemingly conflicting moral judgments can be equally correct when made from within different cultural contexts.
- ★ (Consider the claim "It is wrong to eat beef," which is true from within orthodox Hinduism but false from within certain other cultures.)



CULTURAL RELATIVISM CLAIMS THAT THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING MORALITY IS THAT DIFFERENT CULTURES HAVE DIFFERENT MORAL CODES.

- It says that there are no independent standards by which to judge "correct" or "incorrect" actions.
- Thus, all standards are "culture-bound."

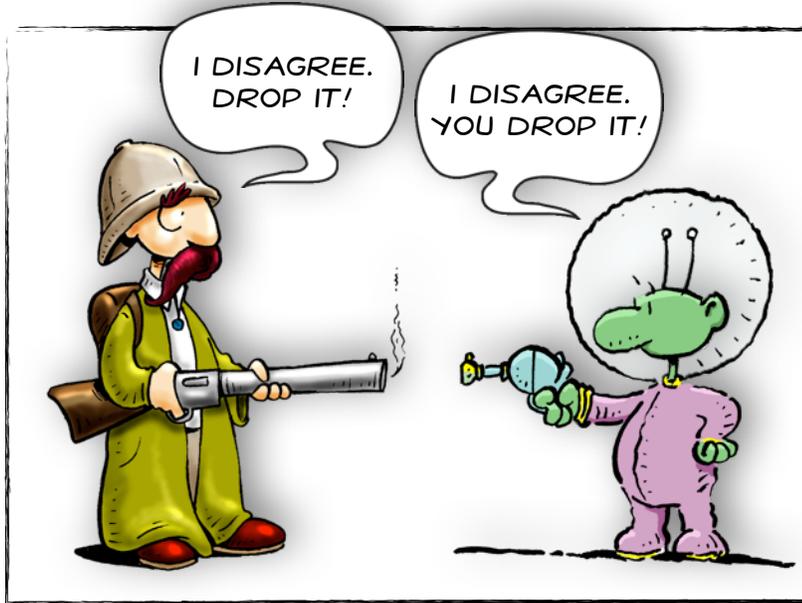
THE CONCEPT OF CULTURAL RELATIVISM CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING CLAIMS:

- There is no objective "truth" in morality. Right and wrong are only matters of opinion, and opinions vary from culture to culture.
 - There is no objective standard that can be used to judge one societal code better than another.
- Different cultures have different moral codes, and the moral code of a society determines what is right within that society.
 - The moral code of our own society has no special status.
- It is mere arrogance for us to try to judge the conduct of other peoples. We should, therefore, adopt an attitude of tolerance toward the practices of other cultures.



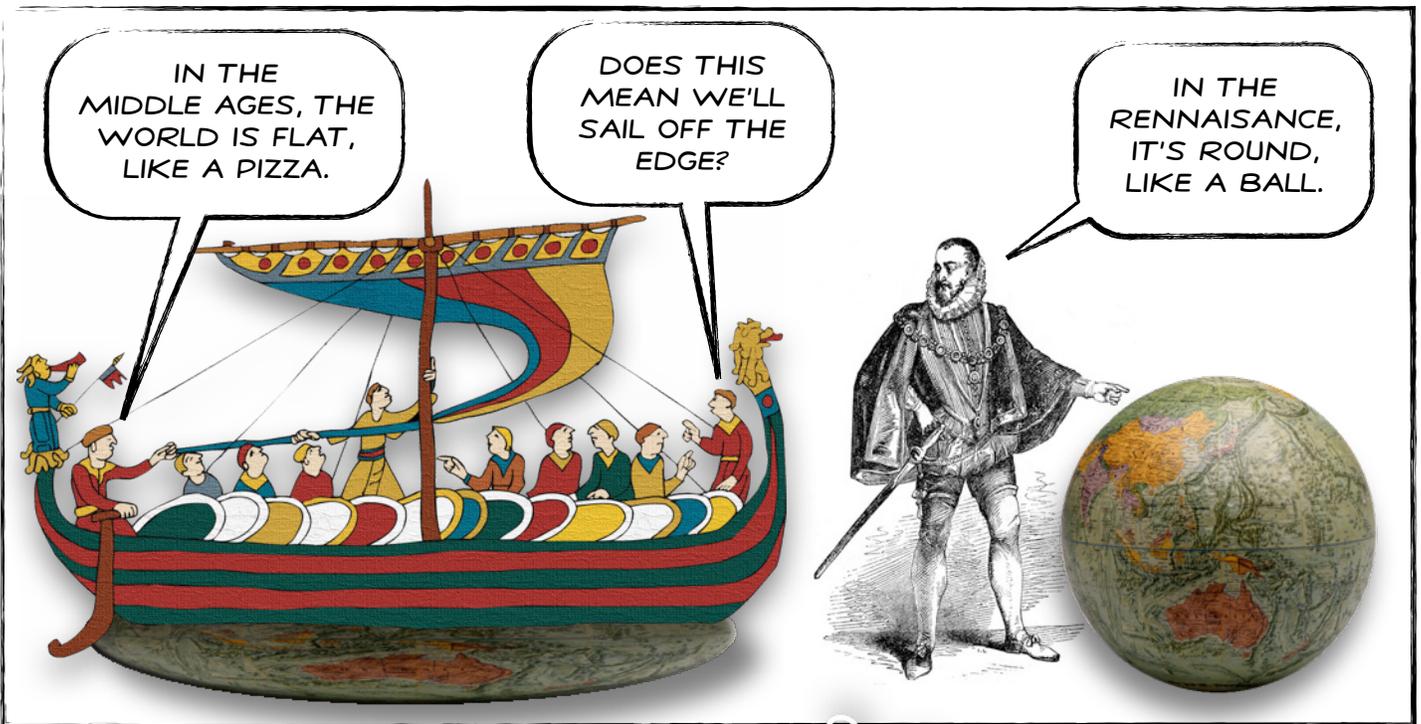
IS THIS A SOUND ARGUMENT?

DOES IT FOLLOW THAT JUST BECAUSE PEOPLE DISAGREE THAT THERE IS NO OBJECTIVE TRUTH? WHAT WILL THAT LEAD TO?



This may have really happened in 1883... or maybe not.

RELATIVISM SOMETIMES LEADS TO "TRUTHS" THAT ARE LATER DISPROVED.



A FACT THAT MADE SAILORS VERY HAPPY...



YIPPEE! NO MORE SAILING OFF THE EDGE!

I COULD HAVE TOLD THOSE FOOLS THAT..



CAN WE TAKE CULTURAL RELATIVISM SERIOUSLY?

If we did, could no longer say that the customs of other societies are morally inferior to our own. **ANY CUSTOMS!**

IT'S ONLY HUMAN SACRIFICE. WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

IT'S A BIG DEAL TO ME!!!

IF PIGS COULD FLY, WE WOULDN'T EAT BACON.

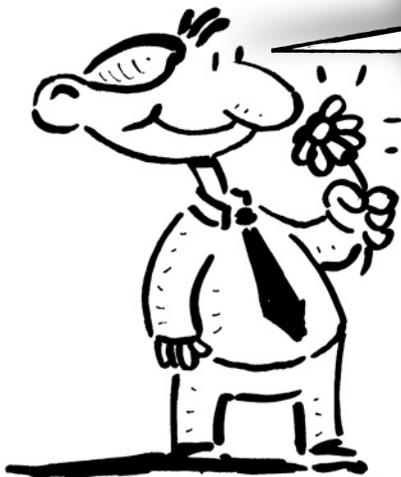
SERIOUSLY. IT'S ONLY A BULL.



SO, IS THERE ANYTHING GOOD ABOUT CULTURAL RELATIVISM?

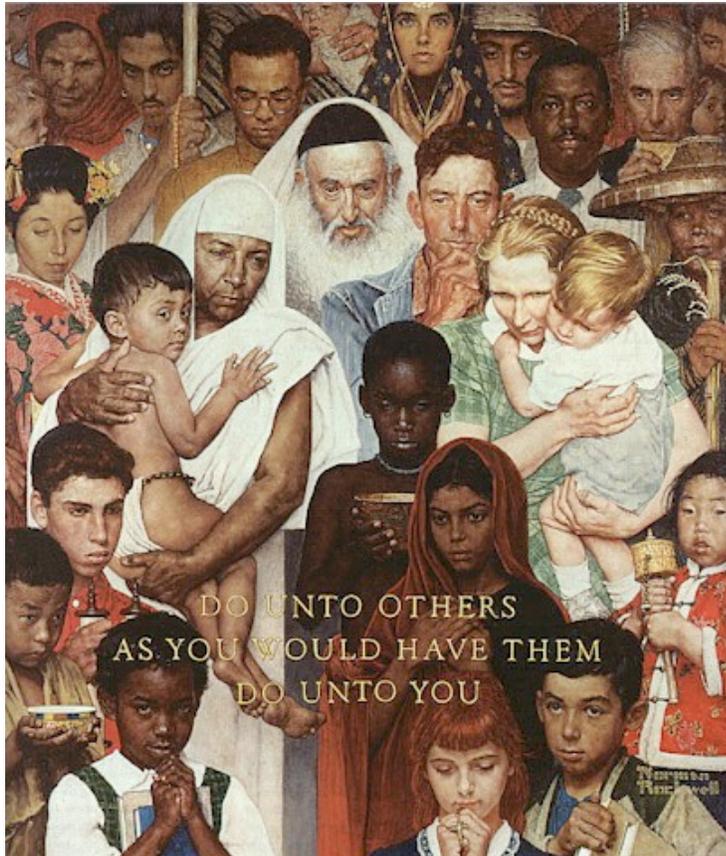
WHERE I COME FROM, BEING SMALL ISN'T SUCH A BAD THING.

We become more tolerant of other people and realize that we may be blinded by our own cultural prejudices.



ARE THERE ANY VALUES THAT ALL CULTURES MIGHT HAVE IN COMMON?

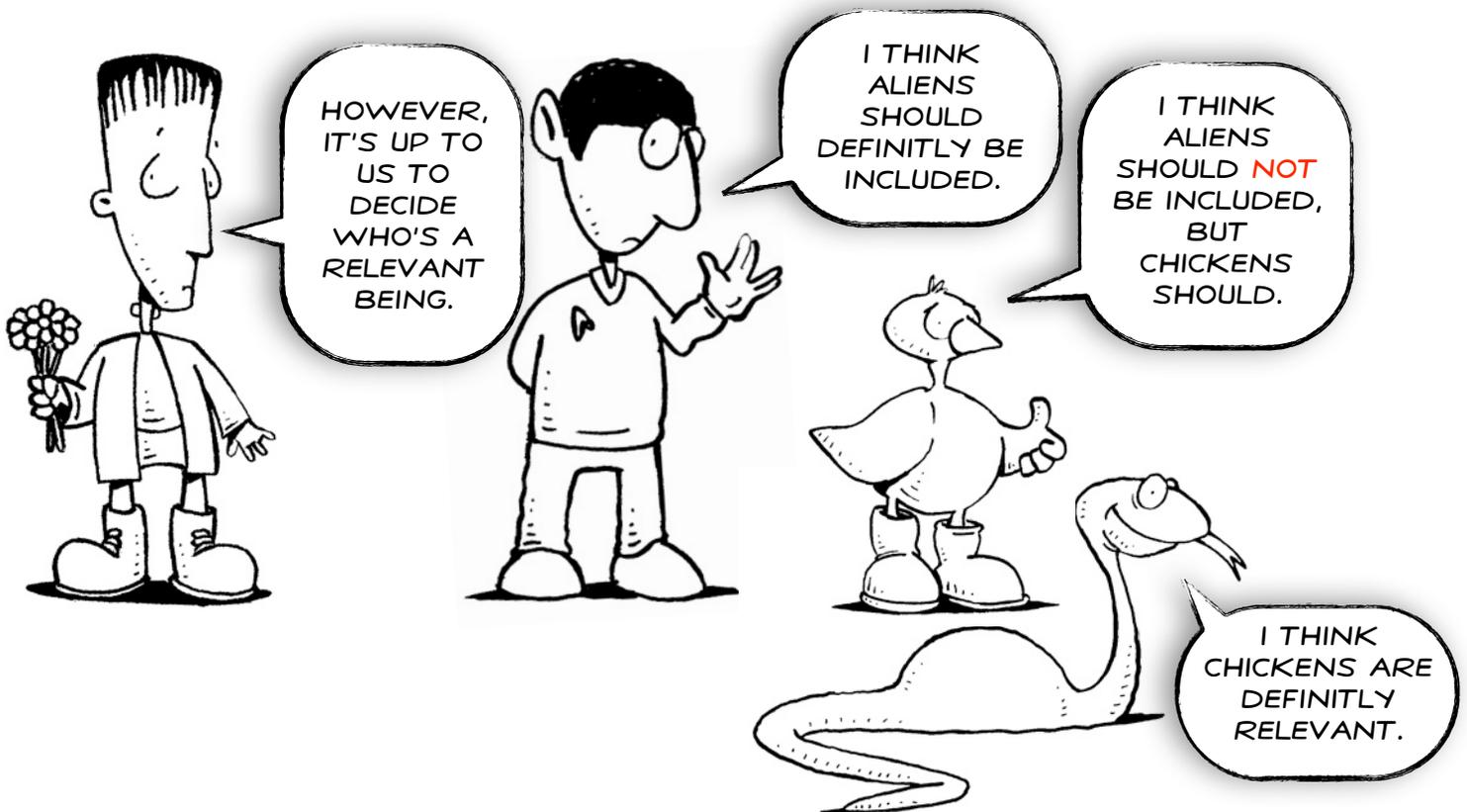
- Care for the young.
- Truth telling
- Prohibition against murder
- Others?



WHAT WOULD A CULTURE-NEUTRAL STANDARD OF RIGHTNESS BE LIKE?

(a standard that might be acceptable to all cultures)

- Objectively valid moral principles are those that promote and protect the interests of all relevant beings.
- On this view, whether a cultural practice is morally good or bad depends on whether it promotes or hinders the welfare of those who are affected by it.

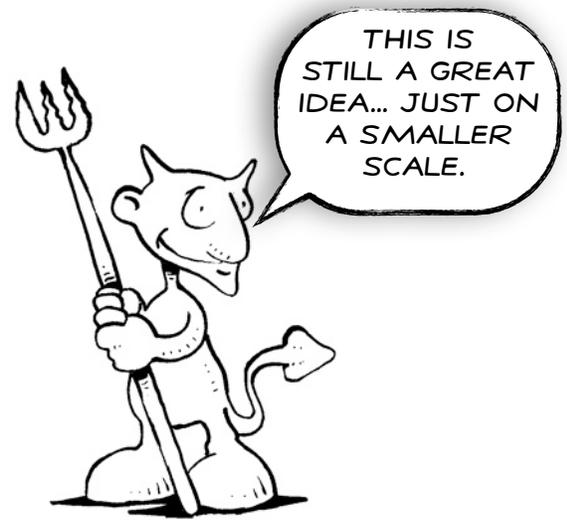


ETHICAL SUBJECTIVISM

It's all about us, isn't it.

ETHICAL SUBJECTIVISM IS:

- The idea that our moral opinions are based on our feelings, and nothing more.
- There is no right or wrong, only expressions of our feelings.
- Therefore, we can't judge another's opinion as being "wrong" or "right" since it is merely an opinion and nothing else.



HERE'S THE KIND OF ARGUMENT ETHICAL SUBJECTIVISM BOILS DOWN TO:

- "Using sex to sell products is morally acceptable." (in my opinion)
- "Using sex to sell products is morally unacceptable." (in my opinion)

SINCE BOTH ARE STATEMENTS OF OPINION, NEITHER CAN CONTEST THE OTHER.

DO YOU THINK I'M SEXY ENOUGH TO SELL COFFEE?

THUS, THERE ARE NO SUCH THINGS AS MORAL "FACTS," ONLY OUR **ATTITUDES** ABOUT MORALITY.

THE PROBLEM IS THAT THIS ARGUMENT ASSUMES ONLY TWO POSSIBILITIES:

- There are moral "facts" in the same way that there are facts about stars and planets; or
- Our "values" are nothing more than the expression of our subjective feelings.



THIS ARGUMENT OVERLOOKS A CRUCIAL THIRD POSSIBILITY:

MORAL TRUTHS ARE TRUTHS OF REASON.

That is, a moral judgment is true if it is backed by better reasons than the alternatives.

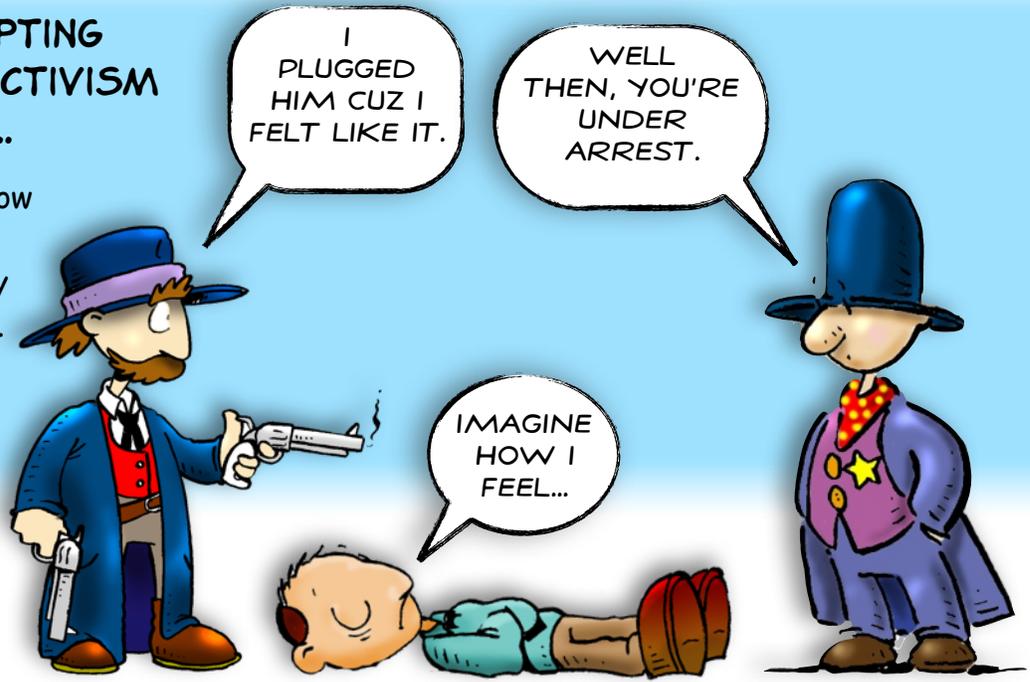
AH, REASON WATSON! THAT'S THE THING!



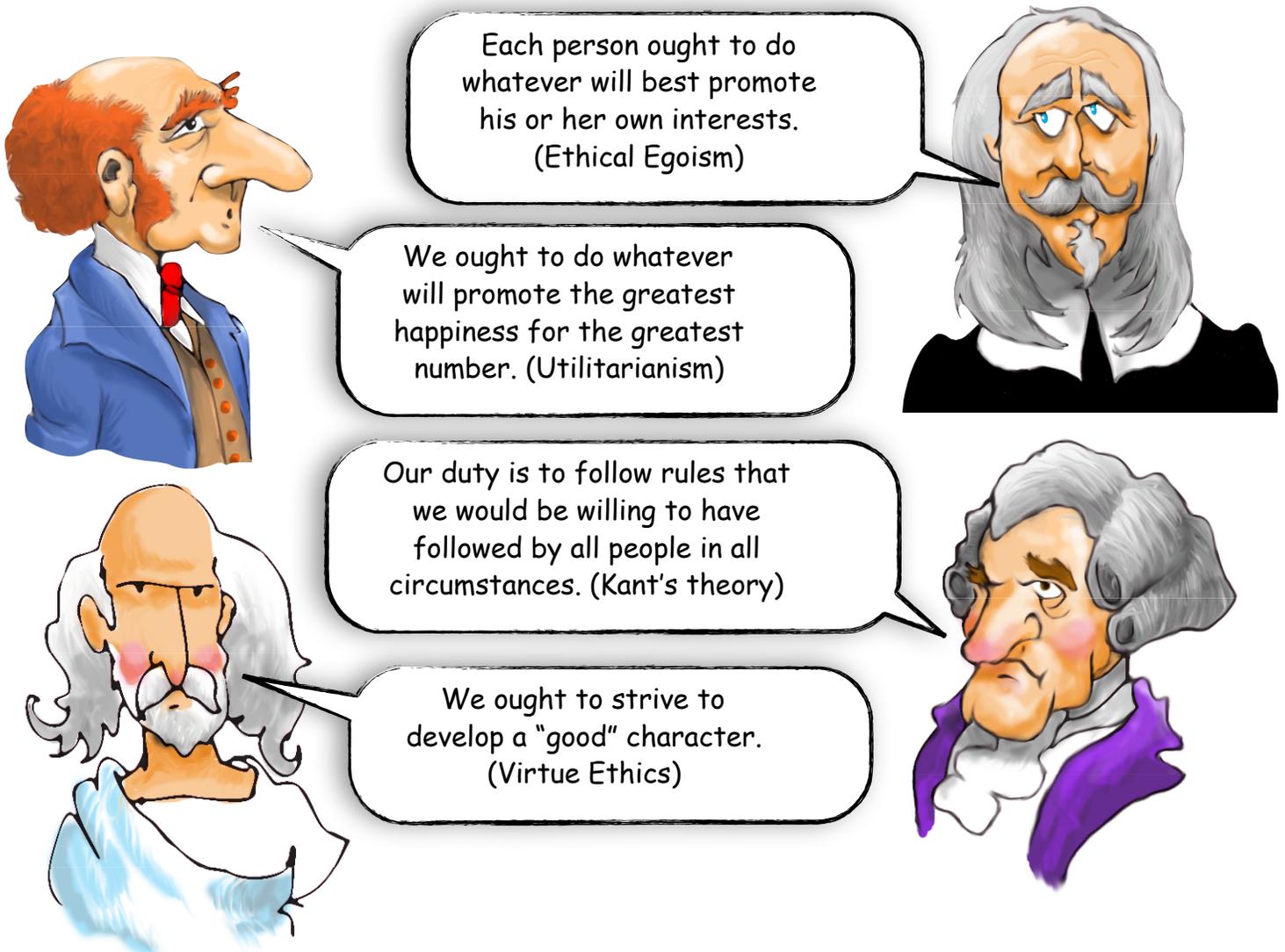
**THINK OF ACCEPTING
ETHICAL SUBJECTIVISM
AS AN EXCUSE...**

We don't usually allow people to do things simply because they "feel" they're right.

**WE WANT
REASONS.**



**WHAT WE HAVE DONE INSTEAD IS TO DEVELOP THEORIES OF
RIGHTNESS AND OBLIGATION BASED ON THE NOTION OF REASON:**



$$E=MC^2$$



THEORY

- A theory is a model, based on and representing reality
- If it works as a model, it can be used to guide and/or predict reality.

THE ETHICAL THEORIES WE WILL STUDY

- Consequential theories
- Non-Consequential theories
- Social Contract theory
- Virtue/Character ethics

CUSTOMS DO NOT CONCERN THEMSELVES WITH RIGHT OR WRONG OR REASON.... A CRIME PERSEVERED IN A THOUSAND CENTURIES CEASES TO BE A CRIME AND BECOMES A VIRTUE. THIS IS THE LAW OF CUSTOM, AND CUSTOM SUPERSEDES ALL OTHER FORMS OF LAW.

Mark Twain

