

— CHAPTER 2 —

The Absolute Truth About Relativism

Jesus replied, "For this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world – to testify to the truth...."
Pilate asked, "What is truth?"
 – John 18:37-38

"We have now sunk to a depth at which restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men."
 – George Orwell

First Things

Begin With the Basics.

- "What's that white thing?"
- The erosion of a common culture.
- What good does it do to proclaim that "Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life" if people reject the whole concept of objective Truth?
- We can no longer assume that people share our belief in the historical reliability or the doctrinal and moral authority of the Bible.



Our Spiritual, Moral and Intellectual Depression.

- George Orwell: "We have now sunk to a depth...."
- Truths that were once universally accepted because they were self-evident must now be patiently explained and methodically defended.

A Pervasive Mentality

Escape from Reason.

- Wisdom redefined: What was once regarded as wisdom is now merely opinion.
 - ▶ The underlying assumption: There is no universal standard of right and wrong.
- The new criterion: We define reality and morality according to what sounds or feels good.
- Judge Anthony Kennedy in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992): "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."
- The effects on education:
 - ▶ Facts, logic and reason are irrelevant.

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- Chuck Colson: *“How did we get into this mess?... We dug the hole that became a cultural Grand Canyon when we abandoned belief in a moral truth that is knowable... [E]verything is reduced to personal opinion. Debates about ideas degenerate into power struggles.... We’re left with no moral standard by which to measure the common good....”*
- The historical roots of relativism:
 - ▶ The sophists.
 - ▶ Protagoras: *“Man is the measure of all things.”*
 - ▶ The moral resistance: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle.



Variations on the Theme.

- Epistemological relativism
- Moral relativism.
- Religious relativism.
- Cultural relativism:
 - ▶ Note: The sociology of multiculturalism v. the philosophy of multiculturalism.
- Historical relativism.
- Aesthetic relativism.

The Tyranny of Relativism.

- Relativism is a hindrance to the search for truth.
- “Nothing is universally valid and true.”
- Standards are merely tactical power-plays.
- The premier “virtue”: tolerance.
- The irony: Those who promote tolerance and diversity tend to be the most intolerant of those who challenge the absolutism of tolerance and diversity.
- The true meaning of tolerance:
 - ▶ Some beliefs and practices are wrong, immoral or inferior – but we have no right to ban or suppress them.
 - ▶ Tolerance is not agreement or acceptance.
 - ▶ Tolerance is not an argument for relativism.
- The consequences of relativism:
 - ▶ Education is rendered meaningless.
 - ▶ The corrosive effects on language.
 - ▶ Social and cultural breakdown.
 - Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (2005): *“We are moving toward a dictatorship of relativism... which has as its highest goal one’s own ego and one’s own desires.”*
 - ▶ People lose any sense of the common good.

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Relativism and Logic.

- (1) The Law of Identity ('A' is 'A').
 - ▶ A thing is identical to itself and different from all other things.
- (2) The Law of Non-Contradiction ('A' is not 'non-A').
 - ▶ A thing cannot be 'A' and 'non-A' in the same sense, at the same time, or in the same relation.
- (3) The Law of the Excluded Middle.
 - ▶ A simple either/or proposition: A thing is either 'A' or 'non-A'.
- (4) The Self-Excepting Fallacy.
 - ▶ EX: "The truth is that nothing is objectively or absolutely true!"

Moral Relativism and Natural Law.

- No one is consistently relativistic.
 - ▶ Relativists usually function as if they believe that certain concepts and behaviors are objectively right and wrong.
 - ▶ People are only selectively relativistic when it advances their agenda.
- The principle of Natural (moral) Law.
 - ▶ A commonly-held standard of right and wrong that all people sense intuitively.
 - ▶ The moral imperative.
- Are Natural Law principles merely culturally-induced?
 - ▶ Our society and our life experiences *condition* our values and beliefs, but they do not *determine* who and what we are or what we believe.
 - ▶ Each individual is morally accountable and has a degree of free will.
- C. S. Lewis on Natural Law:
 - ▶ *"The moment you say that one set of moral ideas can be better than another, you are measuring them both by a standard, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other. But the standard that measures two things is something different from either. You are, in fact, comparing them with some Real Morality, admitting that there is such a thing as a real Right, independent of what people think."*
- The apostle Paul on Natural Law (Rom. 1:16ff).

In Summation:

"Philosophical relativism is illogical, immature, impractical, intellectually and morally bankrupt, and the greatest single impediment to an honest pursuit of truth, meaning, and purpose in life. It is, in effect, the foundational deception of our time."

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The Ultimate Virtue.

- I Cor. 13:13 – *“The greatest of these is love.”*
- Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (1978):
 - ▶ Love is more than sentiment.
 - ▶ *“Love is the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.”*
 - ▶ Love is proactive.
 - ▶ A wholistic definition that incorporates intentionality, action, and a specific goal.

The Matter of Motives.

- If relativistic philosophy is so illogical and unrealistic, why do many people embrace it?
 - ▶ A manifestation of our egoistic nature.
 - ▶ Blaise Pascal: *“People almost invariably arrive at their beliefs not on the basis of proof but on the basis of what they find attractive.”*
 - ▶ Friedrich Nietzsche: *“It is our preference that decides against Christianity, not arguments.”*
 - ▶ Sir Julian Huxley: *“The sense of spiritual relief....”*
 - ▶ Isaac Asimov: *“Emotionally I am an atheist....”*
 - ▶ Thomas Nage: *“I want atheism to be true....”*
 - ▶ Aldous Huxley: *“I had motives for not wanting the world to have meaning....”*
- The roadblock is usually a moral problem rather than an intellectual issue.
 - ▶ Dinesh D’Souza: *“My conclusion is that contrary to popular belief, atheism is not primarily an intellectual revolt, it is a moral revolt.”*
- Blaise Pascal (1623-62): Such skepticism is unreasonable, irresponsible, and utterly insane.
 - ▶ Since knowledge of the divine is the most important thing in life, any reasonable person should make it their number one priority.
 - ▶ Instead, many avoid not only the reality of God but the inevitability of death, and spend their time and energy pursuing thing in life that are meaningless: wealth, power, status, success, pleasure, etc.
 - ▶ Pascal in the *Pensees*: *“... I conclude that I ought to spend every day of my life seeking to know my fate.... [But] I cannot be troubled to do so.... I will go without foresight and let myself drift toward death, uncertain of the eternity of my future state.”*
- G. K. Chesterton: *“Hell is a monument to human freedom.”*

The Summa.

This is the condition of those without God: adrift in their own little life raft on the river of life, they are swept toward their own existential Niagara Falls with no sense of why they are here or their ultimate destiny. This is the fate of those lack the courage and the resolve to face reality. This is also the absolute truth about relativism.

