

Relativism and the Nature of Truth

by
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Truth exists

Any other premise is self-invalidating. Take, for instance, the thought: Truth does NOT exist. Is that a truth? If so, a truth exists and the statement is refuted.

We might argue the premise happens to be an exception to this rule: Self-contradictory premises are not always false. This doesn't help much, since we have a further question to face. Is it true exceptions to rules exist? If so, we have established the existence of a truth. If we deny exceptions to rules exist, we are in turn admitting another truth that there is no exception to the rule that self-contradictory premises are false.

A labyrinth of contradictions greets us the instant we adopt any other premise than, TRUTH EXISTS. Trying to make sense out of anything else is like chewing gristle. The more we chew, the tougher it gets. We just can't swallow it.

Rarely do people blatantly say, "truth does not exist." But we frequently encounter the same premise of Relativism stated in another form: "Truth is relative to the individual."

The relativist insists that when a person claims to have perceived a truth, he is really observing a process going on in his own mind, not objective realities. But this amounts to the same thing as the premise that "truth does not exist," and is just as easily refuted.

Example: If truth is "relative to the individual." then what about the truth that truth is relative to the individual? Is that an absolute truth or a relative one? If it is absolute, then there exists a truth that is not relative to any individual. If it is relative, then the premise has no absolute validity and we can ignore it.

Thus, anyone who uses the stock phrase, "that is true for you," is simply spewing nonsense syllables into the air.

Some relativists assert that reality itself is just a state of mind. That is, reality is altered or controlled by our state of consciousness.

Relativists are sometimes unaware this is the basic premise behind occult mind-science, which has been known to cause severe mental and personality disturbances in some people. Nevertheless, this kind of thinking thoroughly permeates our culture.

The whole educational system, right from grammar school through college, is rife with it. "Values clarification." the "open classroom." "New Math" and certain social studies programs are samples of ideas invented and pushed by relativists.

In entertainment, it forms the basis for many popular TV programs and movies, including some cartoon series for children. These show heroes altering reality by mind power and just believing things into existence.

Under no circumstances can anyone logically sustain the notion that truth is relative. This premise contradicts itself and needs no further refutation. Like the proverbial snake that bites itself and dies, so relativism kills itself.

Another way exists to kill it, if we want to apply it. Before a person begins to reason about any philosophy whatever, he must accept logic as the valid criteria for the evaluation of truth.

He must accept this absolutely. Failure to do so deprives him of the right to reason about anything, regardless of what the philosophy might be, including relativism. If anyone wishes to question valid of logic as a criteria for truth, he must do so without the assistance of logic.

For example, a religious anti intellectual was attempting to persuade a friend that reason is a poor standard for evaluating truth. The friend replied, "I would be glad to hear an explanation of the rational behind that view, if you agree to use no form of reason whatsoever in your explanation, since it is the validity of reason that you are attempting to refute." This left the anti-intellectual completely confounded.

At this point, the relativist crashes into the wall of reality. Is it absolutely true that reason is valid? If so, then absolute truth exists. If the relativist balks at this, he denies himself the right to use reason as a means of validating his denial of absolutes.

The only way a relativist can be consistent with himself is to keep his mouth shut and avoid thinking. Or, if he does think, he must be careful not to consider any of his conclusions as having absolute validity beyond his own

personal perceptions. On what basis then would he want to promote them to others?

In fact, he is deprived of the right to even consider it absolutely true that his conclusions are not absolutely true! Relativism is a fine philosophy as long one is careful not to think, act, or speak.

Relativism and schizophrenia

Relativism is so far from reality that anyone attempting to follow the premises to their logical conclusions would be a danger to himself and others, and might need to be restrained. After all, a driver who imagines an automobile bearing down on him is not really there unless he believes it is so, should not have a driver's license. I would hate to be a passenger in a vehicle driven by a consistent relativist.

Even worse, he might imagine himself a bird on no other grounds than thinking makes it so. This in itself is harmless until he tries to fly off a building. If he is not restrained, his philosophy could be short-lived. He might have to be incarcerated for his own safety.

At the risk of appearing, facetious, I must ask: What else is a mentally ill person other than a consistent relativist? The only reason most relativists are not incarcerated for their own safety is because they make no attempt to live consistently with their philosophy.

Schizophrenia is defined as a separation from reality. The schizophrenic is characterized by a dogged refusal to recognize any discrepancy between his state of mind and reality. In practical terms, this means not only that psychologists are disqualified from being relativists, by they must also classify relativism as a form of schizophrenia.

A clear frame of reference as to the nature of absolute reality must exist in the mind of the psychologist before he can declare anyone to be "mentally ill." But if the psychologist is a relativist, what then is his frame of reference? If he has none, then what right does he have to make any such a declaration? If Relativism is correct, the patient has just as much right to declare the psychologist insane.

If this conclusion is irrational, I would like to see the exact point at which the irrationality occurs. By if my reasoning is sound, then either Relativism is a mental aberration, or schizophrenia is a philosophy.

When we say truth is absolute, we mean truth is independent of human perception for its existence. By *truth* we mean of course, *that which exists*

whether we perceive it or not. Having established therefore objective reality, we can draw a number of other conclusions about truth in general.

First, since truth is absolute, it must also be universal. Since truth is independent from human perception, then it doesn't matter whether we are talking about the perceptions of only one individual or of millions. It is independent in either case since the ground of truth is reality itself and not our perceptions of it. For example, it was once universally believed that the earth was flat. But this was a unanimous misperception. The world is as a round then as it is today.

The nature of truth, not a human ability, is the only issue. At all times in discussions like this, we must make that distinction. Obviously people do not perceive events the same way. This doesn't change the nature of the event. When we are talking about perception, then we can discuss who perceives the event most accurately. But this is different from a discussion of the event itself.

Since truth is universal, it is applicable to every individual in the world. By applicable, I do not mean they have the same importance or relevance. I simply mean a fact is a fact, regardless of who perceives it.

Finally, all truth is eternal. Example: It will be true forever that at this time you were reading this article. This fact will be true tomorrow as well as a billion years from now.

Sometimes relativists use examples from science to attempt to refute this. They refer to various theories held as fact for centuries, but which have since been proven wrong. Galileo disproved Copernican astronomy. Einsteinian Relativity has overthrown Newtonian physics.

This is another failure to distinguish between reality and perception of reality. No scientist today would ever say that in Copernicus' day the sun revolved around the earth. That's why any such examples can be thrown out of court as evidence.

The same is true with relativistic attempts to point out the differences in divergent cultures. It makes no real difference whether it is one individual misperceiving reality or a whole society. Error is error.

If, for example, God exists, then atheistic societies are in error. If God does not exist, then theistic societies are in error. Since God's existence is not dependent upon human perception or belief, one is right and one is wrong.

One would think that this is too childish to bother to mention. But for the relativist, it is too deep.

Truth therefore is absolute, universal and eternal. By this we mean truth is independent of anyone's perception for its existence. While modern relativists protest against this conclusion, they have never been able to show how it can be logically refuted. But then, logic is not their forte. Nor is it of value.

Truth and morality

Having established the nature of truth, we can now turn our attention to a related and very important matter: Morality.

Can a logical connection be shown between the nature of truth as absolute and the premise that morality is also absolute? Yes.

We need only point out that telling the truth is a matter of morality. Otherwise we would have to say that lying has nothing to do with truth. If a knothead somewhere disputes this, we can ask him if what he is saying absolutely true, or if he is only speaking relatively.

If there exists an inseparable link between truth and morality, and the above example on lying shows there is, then whatever is true of truth must also be true of morality. Moral relativism dies on the same knife as did philosophical relativism. Absolute, universal and eternal moral laws therefore must exist if absolute truth exists.

This means some things are always wrong regardless of whether anyone likes it or not. Universal moral law must exist and are applicable to every society regardless of whether or not their culture recognizes them.

Finally, moral truths must be eternal. This means the absolute and universal nature of morality can never change. It does no good to say, "the times have changed." Time may change but truth and morality logically cannot.

Again, we are not talking about human perception. Ideas as to what is right and wrong vary considerably between individuals and nations. This in itself is not evidence that morality is relative to individuals or cultures. It only means some individuals or cultures are more right morally than others, since both truth and morality must logically be absolutes.

A clarification: Just because we have shown truth and morality are absolutes, does not necessarily mean anyone in the world knows what they are.

Observable and verifiable facts exist or we could not draw conclusion about anything, or even think about morality, nor apply any of its precepts.

I am not attempting to show what the truth is about anything nor what is right or wrong in any context. I am only showing the inherent irrationality of all forms of relativism, whether philosophical or moral.

Further, I am not denigrating the value of human perceptions. I'm only showing that truth and morality are not dependent on human perceptions for their existence or validity. We must maintain a certain faith in the correctness of our perceptions of reality or else we could not think with enough certainty to even be able to speak of reality.

We can allow for mistaken perceptions while asserting the general validity of perceptions. The magician makes his living on mistaken perceptions but he does not live in a world of magic himself.

In conclusion, we have shown why those who value logic must abandon Relativism regardless of its disguises. It has no rational defense. Those who defend it, declare they place no value on reason.

Having shown truth to be absolute, universal and eternal, we can now turn to collecting some of these observable facts about the reality around us and come to some unshakable conclusions about what the truth may be.

Relativism in the Church

Relativism is an all-pervasive philosophy in our times. It dominates the educational system, permeates television programming, influences decisions of the higher courts and is rapidly forming the fabric of modern culture.

Christians must be exceptionally carefully not to let it infiltrate the Church. It wears many disguises. One comes in the form of the "balance of truth" idea. Christian leaders anxious to reconcile believers with differences currently use it. But it plays right into the hands of our enemies.

Truth cannot be balanced

We may compare opposing concepts, but we cannot *balance* truths. That's inherently irrational. The fundamental principle behind all logic is that whatever is true cannot be false at the same time. In philosophy this is called "A is notion-A," and simply means that a thing cannot be itself and not itself at the same time. Without this simple principle, logical thought is impossible. Consequently, any given truth can't be itself and its opposite simultaneously. Truth therefore cannot be "balanced."

A church group was discussing whether salvation is by grace alone or if man assisted through some merit of his own. Although the "merit" view needed polite but firm correction, this is not what happened. Instead, the pastor concluded, "I see a balance of truth here," and then proceeded with a discourse on how Scripture contains room for a wide variety of opinions.

"After all," he said, "the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle." Some nodded in agreement at this apparently reasonable conclusion without realizing that the pastor just undermined everything Christianity stands for.

Suggesting the Bible is too obscure for resolving essential issues was bad enough. He also implied that truth is largely a question of personal perspective. His attempt to conciliate the congregation propelled him toward the trap of Relativism...the denial of absolute and objective truth. He failed to see that the consequences of this were worse than the dispute he was trying to quell.

Can there be different facets to the same truth? Surely. The Deity of Christ, for example. It involves the Virgin Birth, the relationship between Christ's two natures, His preexistence and so forth. Yet this truth can never be "balanced." since it would involve an absurdity such as: "Christ is God vs.

Christ is not God, and the truth lies somewhere in the middle." Some issues are simply not negotiable and one of them is the absolute nature of truth.

The early Christians understood that absolute truth is worth fighting for. In Acts 15, this resulted in a dispute with the Judaizers. Some acknowledged salvation by grace alone. Others claimed it is grace plus law.

How fortunate that this dispute didn't take place in the twentieth century! Invariably someone would have declared: "Well, I can see Paul's viewpoint. But the circumcision party has some good thoughts, too. I think we need to realize that the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle. After all, let's not go to extremes. We may never know for sure anyway. In the name of brotherly love, let's all agree to disagree and go home in peace."

Imagine the result if the Reformers had held to relativism. Picture Martin Luther saying, "I believe in justification by faith. I know some good folks don't agree. If they're sincere and love the Lord, it doesn't really matter what they believe. After all, we must be careful not to create divisions." Luther, Calvin, Knox and their contemporaries had a notion that sounds extreme to the twentieth century Christian. They felt absolute truth was worth creating divisions over, yes, even dying for. They seemed to feel that if we are sick of doctrinal disputes, then we're sick of truth. And if we're sick of truth, then we are very sick indeed.

How did Relativism Get Started?

In the 1800's, a philosopher named Hegel proposed another way to reason than the usual "*A is not non-A*." He suggested we add a third step called "*synthesis*." This means we could take two mutually exclusive propositions, such as *Christ is God* vs. *Christ is not God*, put them opposite one another, and then pick some "good" out of each. This would lead to a compromise, the "*synthesis*," which would then become a new proposition *A*. The process could continue from there.

Hegel called the first premise, such as *Christ is God*, the *Thesis*. The second premise, *Christ is not God*, he would call the *anti-thesis*. The *synthesis* is the blend of the two.

This so-called logic is known today as the Dialectic. Though it sounds rather democratic and reasonable, it has a fatal defect. Who decides what is to be taken from the two propositions to form the "synthesis"? Hegel answered, "The individual!" And who determines what is the "good"? The individual!

Do we see where Hegel led modern man? Truth no longer resided in objective reality, but in "the individual." Reality became whatever the

individual felt it was. So what makes this flaw so fatal? No objective reason exists to determine that it is "the individual" who has the right to make these decisions. Why should it be an individual who does this and not a group, a society, a flip of the coin, God, or the neighbor's dog? If we ask Hegel, the answer is identical: It is the individual who decides that it should be the individual. Result: Irrational circular reasoning.

Clearly, the Dialectic is not a form of logic at all. It is anti-logic. It is intellectual suicide.

Does modern man stop at this irrationality? Hardly! Look at this list of current movements based on the Dialectic: Relativism, Communism, Socialism, Secular Humanism, Existentialism and Psychiatry. Pragmatic Relativism, the brainchild of American relativist John Dewey, is the one of most influential philosophies in American Education today.

Now we see the trap Christians fall into when they subjectivism truth. The pastor who used the "balance of truth" approach was inadvertently teaching Christians to think dialectically. Some might assume the word "dialectic" refers to a new phone company or perhaps the latest soft drink. "Relativism" might be mistaken for family troubles. Despite unfamiliarity with the terms, the influence is there.

Do we all have a right to our own opinion or viewpoint, or doctrines? Not if the Christian view of truth is correct. No one has a right to any opinion on anything until they have first examined the evidence and evaluated it. This is just as true for Christian teaching as any other facet of reality.

Smalling's articles and essays are available at www.smallings.com