

THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

The Newsletter of the Philosophical Discussion Group

*Please join us for our discussion on Truth (or anything else for that matter).
We will meet in Gamble 213 on Wednesday, September 21st at 5:00 pm.*

The Veracity of Relative Truth

By Travis MacMillan

A society or individual's belief concerning the nature of truth has a tremendous influence on how they view life and live it.

If one holds truth to be relative, there is no universal moral standard for right or wrong. Who am I to tell you what to do or vice versa? I do what *I feel* is right. As far as belief in God is concerned, all religions are just different paths to the same destination, none more valid than the other. With no transcendent source for truth, man is the measure of everything being held accountable to no one. In regards to laws, its only wrong if you get caught.

The foundation of absolute truth, on the other hand, gives one a Reference Point from which to live one's life. Right and wrong do not waver upon the feelings of others. There is truth and falsehood, in religious paths and everything else. With a moral law being set in place by a moral law Author, one is accountable to more than the shifting laws of the land.

In a belief system where one person's "truth" is as valid as the next person's, logic is lost. If there are no absolute truths to hold reality together, a void of non-reason fills its place and any value life has withers and dies. Any search for meaning in life is a pointless and futile quest without the existence of authentic truth.

Under careful scrutiny the flaws of relative truth reveal themselves as would the flaws of blueprints for a square circle under examination. There are different misunderstandings and contradictions concerning truth's nature being relative. Once they are cleared up reason is left unclouded to point to truth being intrinsically absolute.

Many proponents of relative truth mistake preference/opinion for truth. If you say so and so is a lousy hack artist, this is a matter of taste. A certain person may

look very physically attractive to you and not to someone else. Beauty, not truth, is in the eye of the beholder. To illustrate this difference between truth and taste, let us use swimming for an analogy. Suppose a potential swimmer may think the pool water is too cold to swim in (relative) while others may not. Regardless of their liking of the water's temperature once the temperature drops to a certain point the water will freeze (absolute) and swimming is no longer possible despite one's personal preference.

Some would say absolute truth is the gauge by which the Western perspective perceives truth, while Eastern logic looks on reality with a relativistic point of view. Western truth by this understanding is then "either/or" with the Eastern being "both/and". The "either/or" logic stands on the law of non-contradiction where if a statement is true, its opposite must therefore be false. On the contrary, the "both/and" logic sees no disharmony with a statement and its antithesis both being true. So from an Eastern point of view, one uses **either** a "both/and" logic **or** nothing else. The law of non-contradiction exposes the fallacy of this logic. In addition to this departure from reason, if the "both/and" way of perceiving reality is so inclusive, why not allow the use of "either/or" alongside with "both/and logic?" Because if the "either/or" method of seeing truth is applied next to the all inclusive "both/and" method, the "either/or" negates the "both/and".

As you can see the claims of relative truth do not hold up to close scrutiny. One may pronounce, "There is no such thing as relative truth." Are you sure? Absolutely sure? The claim that there is no such thing as absolute truth or the other side of the coin that all truth is relative is in itself an absolute claim. Such contradictory claims make it impossible for relative truth to be valid.

Truth is by its nature exclusive. Truth excludes what is not true, i.e. a lie. An atheist who believes in no god cannot share an equal portion of the truth alongside with

his Hindu friend who believes in a whole pantheon of gods. Imagine if a used car salesman tells me the car he is showing me has 70,000 miles but he had earlier turned back the odometer 100,000 miles. The exclusiveness of truth forbids his statement to be anything but a lie. Even a prospective car buyer who believes that all truth is relative does not hold consistently enough to their worldview to say, "Well, 70,000 miles is true to him and 170,000 is true to the previous owner." If a skeptic denies the exclusiveness of truth he in turn confirms it by asserting he is right and I am wrong.

If one holds to the belief that all truth is relative it creates quite a moral quandary. Cannibalism is a cultural choice in cuisine and not inherently wrong. Rape is forcible propagation of the species. You have no ground to stand on to condemn the horrendous genocide of Hitler's final solution. In fact, ol' Adolf is as morally neutral as Mahatma Gandhi or Mother Teresa. In relative truth, evil as well as good dissolves.

With truth's nature being absolute, it needs a transcendent source. In our society where the Ten Commandments and the words "under God" in our pledge are under siege, the idea that God Almighty is the source of all truth will not be received with open arms by the "educated and enlightened". "What is truth?" they say echoing the words of Pontius Pilate as he stood before Jesus, who said "I came into this world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me." Truth is real and is worth finding. Within it are the answers to origin, meaning, morality, and destiny.

The empty tomb of Jesus is unique amongst those in history who have purportedly proclaimed the truth. No philosopher nor religion's founder has authenticated their claim to truth as Jesus did through His prophesized resurrection. Not the Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, Laozi, nor Krishna have this caliber of seal on their teachings. This combined with multitudes of Old Testament prophecies

fulfilled by Jesus give His assertion to be the Truth a weight like none other. May all who seek truth find it and its Source.

The Dogma of Diversity

By Chris Dunn

When I began my college education, I was what might be called closed minded. I believed that my view on reality was the only correct view. Much to their disdain, I was not afraid to let people know that I thought this. The particular dogma to which I subscribed is of little importance; rather the frame of mind in which I subscribed is significant. I remember my English 1102 class. I interpreted every story in a way that reflected my belief. As soon as I began, I would hear a chuckle or a groan from somewhere in the room. Yet, I pressed on unphased. I knew that I was right and no amount of scoffing could convince me otherwise. My English class, along with all such discussion based classes, is set up in such a way as to present a myriad of diverse viewpoints where each member of the class gets to put in their view. No right view appears; rather there are many perspectives on a topic, each of which is different, but none of which is affirmed better than another.

My dogmatic assertion that my view was correct and that other views were wrong if they did not coincide with mine contradicted the very basis of the class. Unbeknownst to me (I being from a backwards town of hillbillies), there is no such thing as a correct view on the world. Rather, we should tolerate and celebrate the diversity of ideas and cultures.

After several years of study, I began to doubt my aforeheld dogmas. I found that indeed there were other ways of seeing the world and that diversity was indeed a good thing. However, I still maintained that there was a correct way of seeing the world, whether or not I necessarily possessed it. But wait, my view that there was a correct view still contradicted the idea that all views have equal merit. For if I posit that my view (that there is a correct view) is correct, then I am positing the existence of correct (mine) and incorrect (those that contradict mine) views. In this case the incorrect view would be that there is no correct view which is affirmed by the virtue of absolute diversity. Something was fishy about this. At this point in my studies, I had had two views that contradicted the virtue of absolute tolerance. But, if no view is correct, as posited by absolute tolerance, then should

not my view that there exist incorrect views also be tolerated. If all views should be tolerated, then intolerant views should also be tolerated. However, if intolerant views are tolerable, the virtue of absolute tolerance is no longer absolutely tolerable because it tolerates intolerance which in the end is intolerable.

Now, it is actually a trifling matter whether the virtue of absolute tolerance is reasonable when it tolerates intolerance because no proponent of absolute tolerance that I have ever met has ever tolerated intolerance. In fact, tolerance is the only moral law for one who subscribes to this virtue. Thus, the virtue of absolute tolerance is unreasonable. But, what can one expect? If one is to maintain absolute relativism, then one must also throw reason out as a basis of knowledge because reason is merely a particular perspective on the world. To maintain a position of absolute tolerance, one must also throw out science, as science is also relegated to just a particular perspective on the world. Normally, science and reason are posited as universal because any culture can do repeated observations or use logic and get the same results. However, to posit the universality of reason and science as proofs that they give nonrelative knowledge is also a particular perspective. If someone else wishes to believe that universality is not evidence for anything, then that is one's perspective and it is just as right as any other. Thus, the virtue of absolute diversity is irrational and does not allow for any knowledge. If any universal principle is to be adhered to, one must admit that all perspectives are not equal. But on what basis is one viewpoint more correct than another?

I can put up with a position that makes no sense, but what irks me is the manner in which it is presented. If anyone maintains a position of absolute knowledge or intolerance, they are labeled as an unacademic heretic. The virtue of absolute diversity is therefore a dogma, in that it asserts an absolute, unquestionable position held by the establishment. Judging my initial hard-headed intolerance by the dogma of diversity, I was actually just as intolerant as one who maintains the dogma. My point is simply that it is a reasonable necessity of being human to take an absolute position. The only reasonable position to maintain is the second one which I arrived at, that there is a correct way of seeing the world, whether or not one necessarily possesses it. In other words, the truth is. There is an absolute called truth and it is that which is. When it comes to a standpoint of truth, if everything is tolerated, then nothing is tolerated. For a

position of absolute tolerance undermines the validity of any position other than that of absolute tolerance. Thus absolute tolerance is actually just as intolerant as any position which is honest about its own intolerance. Now, whether truth can be known is another matter entirely. In the meantime, let us have a look see at a wide diversity of positions and open our minds to the possibility that we do not know, but be weary of the nonsense of the dogma of diversity which is the fool's way of pushing you down the slippery slopes which lead only to the inescapable void of absurdity.

If you have any questions, criticisms, or comments, please contact either Chris Dunn or Dr. Nordenhaug. Anyone interested in writing a brief article for *The Philosopher's Stone*, please contact either of us (it doesn't have to be good, however it does have to be thoughtful).

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