

Defending and Building Your Faith Christian Apologetics – Worksheet 08

Week 8 – Relativism

This week we will continue our apologetic studies with an apologetic study on a worldly philosophy that permeates our culture today, relativism. As we examine relativism we will see why logic was covered in the previous lesson, Apologetics Basics, and how important logic is when dealing with any type of relativism. Our topics for this lesson include:

- Relativism Defined
- Refuting Relativism
- Truth Defined

Relativism Defined

Relativism is the philosophical position that all points of view are _____ valid and that all _____ is relative to the individual. This means that all moral positions, all religious systems, all art forms, all political movements, etc., are truths that are relative to the individual. Under the umbrella of relativism whole groups of perspectives are categorized. In brief, some are: ^{SMJ1}

- _____ **relativism (truth)** - Cognitive relativism affirms that all truth is relative. This would mean that no system of truth is more valid than another one and that there is no objective standard of truth. It would, naturally, deny that there is a God of absolute truth. ^{SMJ1}
- _____ / _____ **relativism** - all morals are relative to the social group within which they are constructed. ^{SMJ1}
- _____ **relativism** - that ethics (right and wrong) are dependent upon the situation. ^{SMJ1}

Unfortunately, the philosophy of relativism is pervasive in our culture today. With the rejection of God, and Christianity in particular, absolute truth is being abandoned. Our pluralistic society wants to avoid the idea that there really is a _____ and _____. This is evidenced in our deteriorating judicial system, in our entertainment media which continues to assault morality and decency, in our schools which teach evolution and "social tolerance", and much more. In addition, the plague of moral relativism is encouraging everyone to accept homosexuality, pornography, fornication, and a host of other behaviors that were once considered wrong, but are now being accepted and even promoted in society. This moral degradation is becoming so pervasive that if you speak out against moral relativism and its "anything goes" philosophy, you're labeled as an intolerant bigot. **Of course, this is incredibly hypocritical of those who profess that all points of view are true, yet reject those who profess absolutes in morality.** It seems that what is really meant by the moral relativists is that all points of view are true except for the views that teach moral absolutes, or an absolute God, or absolute right and wrong. ^{SMJ1}

Some typical expressions that reveal an underlying presupposition of relativism are comments such as "That is your truth, not mine," or "It is true for you, but not

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for me," and "There are no absolute truths." Of course, these statements are _____, which *is demonstrated* later. Relativism is invading our society, our economy, our schools, and our homes. Society cannot flourish nor survive in an environment where everyone does what is right in his own eyes, where the situation determines actions and if the situation changes, lying or cheating is acceptable -- as long as you're not caught. Without a common foundation of truth and absolutes, our culture will become weak and fragmented. ^{SMJ1}

The following Scripture came to mind as I read "everyone does what is right in his own eyes" above.

In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes. (Judges 17:6)

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise. (Proverbs 12:15)

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts. (Proverbs 21:2)

It must be admitted, however, that there is validity to some aspects of relativism. For example, what one society considers right (driving on the left side of the road) another considers wrong. These are _____ to which a "right and wrong" are attached, but they are purely relativistic and not universal because they are _____ based and are not dealing with moral or truth absolutes. They are social norms. Child rearing principles vary in different societies as do burial practices and wedding ceremonies. These "right and wrong ways" are not cosmically set in stone nor are they derived from some absolute rule of conduct by some unknown god. They are relative and rightly so. But, their relativism is properly asserted as such. It doesn't matter what side of the road we drive in as long as we all do it the same way. ^{SMJ1}

Likewise, there are experiences that are valid only for individuals. *One person* might be irritated by a certain sound, where another person will not. In this sense, what is true for me is not necessarily true for someone else. It is not an absolute truth that the identical sound causes irritation to all people. This is one way of showing that certain aspects of relativism are true. But, is it valid to say that because there is a type of personal relativism that we can then apply that principle to all areas of experience and knowledge and say that they too are also relative? No, it is not a valid deduction. First of all, to do so would be an _____ assessment which contradicts relativism. ^{SMJ1}

The relativism of which side of the road to drive on is a separate category of truth than what relativism as a _____ deals with. Which side of the street to drive on is a _____, not a moral, and certainly not a logical absolute. Moral and logical absolutes are categorically _____ than social customs. Therefore, to extrapolate a broad concept that all truth is relative from a social norm of which side of the street to drive a car on is a _____ deduction since the categories in question are substantially different. ^{SMJ1}

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Furthermore, if all the things are relative, then there cannot be anything that is absolutely true between individuals, including the idea that relativism is true. In other words, if all people deny absolute truth and establish relative truth only from their _____, then everything is relative to the individual. How then can there be a common ground from which to judge right and wrong or truth? You could not. ^{SMJ1}

Of course, the issue that is important here is whether or not there are absolute truths. Also, can there be different kinds of absolute truths if indeed there are absolute truths? We might ask if it is always wrong to lie? Or, does $1 + 1$ always equal 2? Is it always true that something cannot be both in existence and not in existence at the same time? Is it always true that something cannot bring itself into existence if it first does not exist? If any of these questions can be answered in the affirmative then relativism is refuted -- at least to some degree. ^{SMJ1}

More questions arise. If all moral views are equally valid, then do we have the right to punish anyone? Can we ever say that something is wrong? In order to say that something is wrong we must first have a standard by which we weigh right and wrong in order to make a judgment. If that standard of right and wrong is based on relativism, then it is not a standard at all. In relativism, standards of right and wrong are derived from social norms. Since society changes, the norms would change and so would _____ and _____. If right and wrong change, then how can anyone be rightly _____ for something he did if that wrong might become right in the future? ^{SMJ1}

Finally, is it fair to apply logical analysis to relativistic principles? Many relativists say no. But, I do not see why not. If a relativist were to convince me that logic isn't necessary in examining relativism, he'd have to convince me using logic, which would be self defeating. If a relativist uses relativism -- the subjective view of his own opinions -- to validate his position, he is using _____; namely, he is using relativism to establish relativism. So, either way, he has lost the argument.

To conclude, if relativism is true and all points of view are true, then is my view that relativism is false, true? ^{SMJ1}

Does truth contradict itself? No it doesn't. So, if I believe that relativism is false, then it is false. ^{SMJ1}

Refuting Relativism

Again, relativism is the philosophical position that all points of view are equally valid and that all truth is relative to the individual. But, if we look further, we see that this proposition is not logical. In fact, it is self refuting. The following outline addresses the basic issues concerning relativism and what those who hold the relativism claim. ^{SMJ1}

If you can follow the logic presented in this outline, then you should be able to more easily address and refute the errors of the relativist's position. This outline can serve as a training ground in logic and the application of logic to the issue of truth. This is a fundamental part of apologetics; that is, the discussion of what is

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true is of paramount importance. If you cannot get past simple relativism, then your ability to defend the absolute truth of the Bible will be greatly diminished. Therefore, *it is* strongly recommend that you master, to the best of your ability, the issues described here. ^{SMJ1}

- All truth is _____
 - If all truth is relative, then the statement "All truth is relative" would be absolutely true. If it is absolutely true, then not all things are relative and the statement that "All truth is relative" is false.
- There are no _____ truths
 - The statement "There are no absolute truths" is an absolute statement which is supposed to be true. Therefore, it is an absolute truth and "There are no absolute truths" is false.
 - If there are no absolute truths, then you cannot believe anything absolutely at all, including that there are no absolute truths. Therefore, nothing could be really true for you - including relativism.
- What is true for you is not true for me
 - If what is true for me is that relativism is false, then is it true that relativism is false?
 - If you say no, then what is true for me is not true and relativism is false.
 - If you say yes, then relativism is false.
 - If you say that it is true only for me that relativism is false, then
 - I believe something other than relativism; namely, that relativism is false. If that is true, then how can relativism be true?
 - am I believing a premise that is true or false or neither?
 - If it is true for me that relativism is false, then relativism (within me) holds the position that relativism is false. This is self-contradictory.
 - If it is false for me that relativism is false, then relativism isn't true because what is true for me is not said to be true for me.
 - If you say it is neither true nor false, then relativism isn't true since it states that all views are equally valid and by not being, at least true, relativism is shown to be wrong.
 - If I believe that relativism is false, and if it is true only for me that it is false, then you must admit that it is absolutely true that I believe that relativism false.
 - If you admit that it is absolutely true that I believe relativism is false, then relativism is defeated since you admit there is something absolutely true.
 - If I believe in something other than relativism that is true, then there is something other than relativism that is true - even if it is only for me.

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- If there is something other than relativism that is true, then relativism is false.
- No one can _____ anything for sure
 - If that is true, then we can know that we cannot know anything for sure? This is _____.
- That is your _____, not mine
 - Is my reality really real?
 - If my reality is different than yours, how can my reality contradict your reality? If yours and mine are equally real, how can two opposite realities that exclude each other really exist at the same time?
 - If two realities exist that contradict each other, and both are true, then are you saying that truth is self-contradictory?
- We all _____ what we want
 - How do you know that statement is true?
 - If we all perceive what we want, then what are you wanting to perceive?
 - If you say you want to perceive truth, how do you know if you are not deceived?
 - Simply desiring truth is no proof you have it.
 - If we all perceive what we want, then I perceive that you are wrong. Is my perception correct?
 - If it is not correct, then relativism is false.
 - If it is correct, then relativism is false.
- You may not use logic to _____ relativism
 - Why not?
 - Can you give me a logical reason why logic cannot be used? If you do, then you are validating logic as being true.
 - If you use relativism to refute logic, then on what basis is relativism (that nothing is absolutely true) able to refute logic which is based upon truth.
 - If you use relativism to refute logic, then relativism has lost its relative status since it is used to absolutely refute the truth of something else.
- We only _____ different aspects of the same reality.
 - If our perceptions are contradictory, can either perception be trusted? Or, are you saying that truth contradicts itself.
 - If you say that truth contradicts itself, then how can anything be true?
 - Is truth self contradictory?
 - If it were, then it wouldn't be true because it would be self refuting. If something is self refuting, then it isn't true.
 - If it is true that we are perceiving different aspects of the same reality, then am I believing something that is false since I believe that your reality is not true? How then could they be the same reality?

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- If you are saying that it is merely my perception that is not true, then relativism is refuted.
 - If I believe something that is false, then relativism is not true since it holds that all views are equally valid.
- If my reality is that your reality is false, then both cannot be true. If both are not true, then one of us (or both) is in error.
 - If one or both of us is in error, then relativism is not true.
- Relativism itself is excluded from the _____ that it is absolute and self-refuting.
 - On what basis do you simply exclude relativism from the critique of logic?
 - Is this an arbitrary act? If so, does it justify your position?
 - If it is an arbitrary act of exclusion, then I arbitrarily say you can't do that. Since relativism is supposed to be true, my arbitrary denial of your exclusion is correct and you are wrong.
 - If it is not arbitrary, what criteria did you use to exclude it? If you cannot provide any criteria, then you have no reason for your exclusion.
 - To exclude itself from the start is an admission of the logical problems inherent in its system of thought.

The outline above was taken from reference material SMJ1.

Matt Slick interviewed a person in the New Age religion several years ago. The following text is a summary of that interview.

New Age is a multifaceted religious system where man is _____. Part of this deification is manifested in the idea that we can create our own realities. This is identical to the relativism where each person can determine what is true for himself. So, I asked this person if I could apply relativism to daily life and see if it worked. He was intrigued and agreed.

SMJ1

I then stated to him that I now suddenly decided to be relativistic and believe that all green traffic lights were really red and that all red traffic lights were really green. Furthermore, I told him that once I saw a red light that it was appropriate for me to accelerate through it. Since it was true for me that the red light really was green and the green light was really red, then it was true. I then asked him if he would like to take a ride with me through the city to grab a bit to eat. He chuckled and declined. I asked him what the problem was. After all, if we are able to create our own realities and to perceive truth differently, why can't I create the reality that red traffic lights are really green and green traffic lights are really red? He responded that my believing it did not make it so. I agreed with him. Then I told him that it was rather obvious that his philosophy did not work in the real-world and that in addition he did not live according to his relativistic philosophy. In reality, he was living in the real world with absolutes guiding his thoughts, his actions, behaviors....and driving habits.

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I further pointed out that his relativism only worked in his own mind and as long as it had no run-in with the blunt force of reality, he could keep his relativism safe and sound. But as soon as tried to apply it in the real world, he would quickly find it did not work. ^{SMJ1}

Truth Defined

"What is truth?" is a very simple question. Answering it isn't so simple. But, basically, **truth is that which conforms to reality or fact**. Though this is a simple and very useful definition, it is open to _____. What is reality? What is fact? How does perception effect truth? We could offer answers for each of these questions, but then we could again ask similar questions of those answers. ^{SMJ1}

Consider the paradox of throwing a ball against a wall. It must get half way there, and then half way of the remaining distance, and then half of that distance, and so on. But, an infinite number of halves in this scenario never constitutes a whole. Therefore, it would seem that the ball would never reach the wall if we applied the conceptual truths of halves and halves of halves. The ball-against-the-wall scenario simply illustrates that defining and redefining things as we try to approach a goal actually _____ us from getting to that goal. ^{SMJ1}

This is what philosophy does sometimes as it seeks to examine truth. It sometimes _____ issues so much, that nothing can be known for sure. This is what a lot of people do. They try and cloud the issue of truth so much so that truth seems as though it cannot be known. But, don't let them do that. Don't let them cloud the issue. Stick to _____ and be _____ in your analysis of those facts. This way you can discover truth. Also, heed the scriptural warning: ^{SMJ1}

*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.
(Colossians 2:8)*

Perhaps we could look further at truth by determining what *truth* is not. Truth is not error. Truth is not self-contradictory. Truth is not deception. Of course, it could be true that someone is being deceptive, but the deception itself isn't truth. Again, truth is that which corresponds to _____. ^{SMJ1}

In relativism, all points of view are equally valid and all truth is relative to the individual. If this were true, then it would seem that this is the only truth relativism would have to offer. But, the problem is that in reality, relativism isn't true for the following basic reason. If what is true for me is that relativism is false, then is it true that relativism is false? 1) If you say no, then what is true for me is not true and relativism is false. 2) If you say yes, then relativism is false. Relativism seems to _____ the very nature of truth; namely, that it [*truth*] is not self contradictory. ^{SMJ1}

If there is such a thing as truth, then we should be able to find it. If truth cannot be known, then it probably doesn't exist. But, it does exist. For example, we know that it is true that you are reading this. It is a reality that you are reading this. Therefore, we assert that truth is that which corresponds to reality. ^{SMJ1}

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Is there such a thing as something that is always true all the time? Yes, there is. For example, "Something cannot bring itself into existence." This is an _____ true statement. In order for something to bring itself into existence, it would have to exist in order to be able to perform an action. But if it already existed, then it isn't possible to bring itself into existence since it already exists. Likewise, if it does not exist then it has no ability to perform any creative action since it doesn't exist in the first place. Therefore, "Something cannot bring itself into existence" is an _____ truth. ^{SMJ1}

The preceding example is a truth found in logic. But, there are truths that are not logical by nature. It is true that I love my wife. This isn't logically provable via theorems and formulas and logic paradigms, but it is, nevertheless, true. Therefore, we can say that truth conforms to and affirms _____ and/or _____.^{SMJ1}

If we are to ever hope to determine if there is such a thing as truth apart from cultural and personal preferences, we must acknowledge that we are then aiming to discover something _____ than ourselves, something that transcends culture and individual inclinations. To do this is to look beyond ourselves and outside of ourselves. In essence, it means that we are looking for _____ or something that exists apart from us in a transcendent, non-variable way. God would be truth, the absolute and true essence of being and reality who is the author of all truth. If you are interested in truth beyond yourself, then you must look to God. This is especially true for Christians. ^{SMJ1}

Week 8 Conclusion and Challenge

For the Christian, the ultimate expression of truth is found in the Bible, in Jesus who said, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life...**" (John 14:6). Of course, most philosophers and skeptics will dismiss His claim, but for the Christian, He is the mainstay of hope, security, and guidance. Jesus, who walked on water, claimed to be divine, and rose from the dead, said that He was the _____ and the originator of truth. If Jesus is wrong, then we should ignore Him. But, if He is right, then it is true that we should listen to Him. Therefore, **a person learns the greatest truth when He believes who Jesus really is and what He has actually done for us in delivering us from the judgment to come.** ^{SMJ1}

In Christianity, truth becomes the same as a person. In this sense, Jesus is the truth. Additionally, Jesus is the Word. This is why **Christian apologetics must ultimately point to the person of Christ and rely on Biblical authority.** If we do not believe that Jesus is the truth and that the Bible is absolutely true, then we will do what is right in our own eyes. To do so is not only logical suicide, but also spiritual suicide that will lead a person straight to hell for all eternity.

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

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Week 8 Challenge

I challenge you to memorize the two following Bible verses (as shown below) by next Sunday. At the beginning of class next week I'll ask for someone to say them from memory. The first one to raise their hand and say them from memory will earn a prize. I hope to see you all next week. Until then, I pray you have a blessed week.

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts. (Proverbs 21:2)

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

Week 8 Review Questions

What is relativism?

How is relativism affecting our culture?

Why do we need moral absolutes?

What is truth?

Why is it that truth should ultimately point to Jesus?

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