

“How Should I Respond to ‘It’s All Right to Do Anything as Long as It Doesn’t Hurt Anybody’?”

I have a question about some of the new age mentality that I have encountered in the more recent months. As apologetics is a bit of a hobby for me, I love learning what other people think and believe. It seems that as I ask around more and more, people are always saying the same thing. In more words they always seem to say “I can do whatever I want as long as it doesn’t hurt anybody.” I know that this is by no means a new or uncommon answer, but it seems to be growing to me. Usually I address this with a series of questions which will cause them to backtrack and correct themselves, something like this: It is not all right to hurt people? Do you count as a person? Are you allowed to hurt yourself? Is emotional harm all right? How did you determine that it was not all right to hurt people? Who enforces this rule? Are you making a connection between church and state? How did the world come into existence? And so on. My philosophy is that sooner or later they will be forced to acknowledge that their view is full of holes, yet it appears to me that this way doesn’t work. I actually should have realized this sooner, because I now realize that those people really do not know what they believe, and that their choices are based on emotions. Thus, I am asking you how you would suggest responding to the view that “It is all right to do anything as long as it doesn’t hurt anybody”?

I’m afraid you’ve hit the wall of the skeptical postmodern mentality. When a person doesn’t believe anyone can know what is true about anything, and adopts the “true for me” mentality, the results are an amazing batch of contradictory

ideas and no reason to try to make them consistent. People toss together beliefs according to what seems right at the moment, changing beliefs like changing outfits; ideas are subject to fashion just as clothes are. After trying to reason with people who think as you have described, you want to bang someone's head against the wall – theirs or your own (I don't suggest either!).

Because on the level of ideas contradictory beliefs can be held with such amazing ease, one typically cannot convince a person on that level. I say "typically" because some can be convinced at least that their ideas are inconsistent and that that is a problem. You just have to try drawing the person into a conversation and see what happens. For many it takes real life situations to drive home the point.

I recommend you find a copy of Francis Schaeffer's *The God Who Is There* and focus especially on the last section: "Speaking Historic Christianity Into the Twentieth-Century Climate." He deals with this issue there. One of his main points is that any religion or philosophy which isn't Christian must result in some kind of inconsistency in a person's life because we were made by God to live in God's universe. False beliefs put us at odds with the universe and with ourselves. So, for instance, a person who says there is no difference between good and evil will be quite upset if you pour boiling water on him. He might even say you were wrong! Of course, I don't recommend actually pulling off such stunts to prove a point! What one can do, however, is gently (I Pe. 3:15) question a person about an inconsistency between what the person says she believes and how she acts. It's like turning a light on and letting the other person see the problem for herself.

One thing we apologists easily forget is tact. One person defined it as "the ability to make a point without sticking someone with it." Work toward encouragement and very subtle enlightenment rather than conquering in your manner. Be committed to truth, but also be committed to people and to

showing the attractiveness of truth to them rather than whipping them with it.

If you have any questions after reading Schaeffer's book (or at least the above-mentioned segment of it) write to me directly.

Rick Wade

See Also:

[As Long As It Doesn't Hurt Anyone Else](#) by Rick Wade