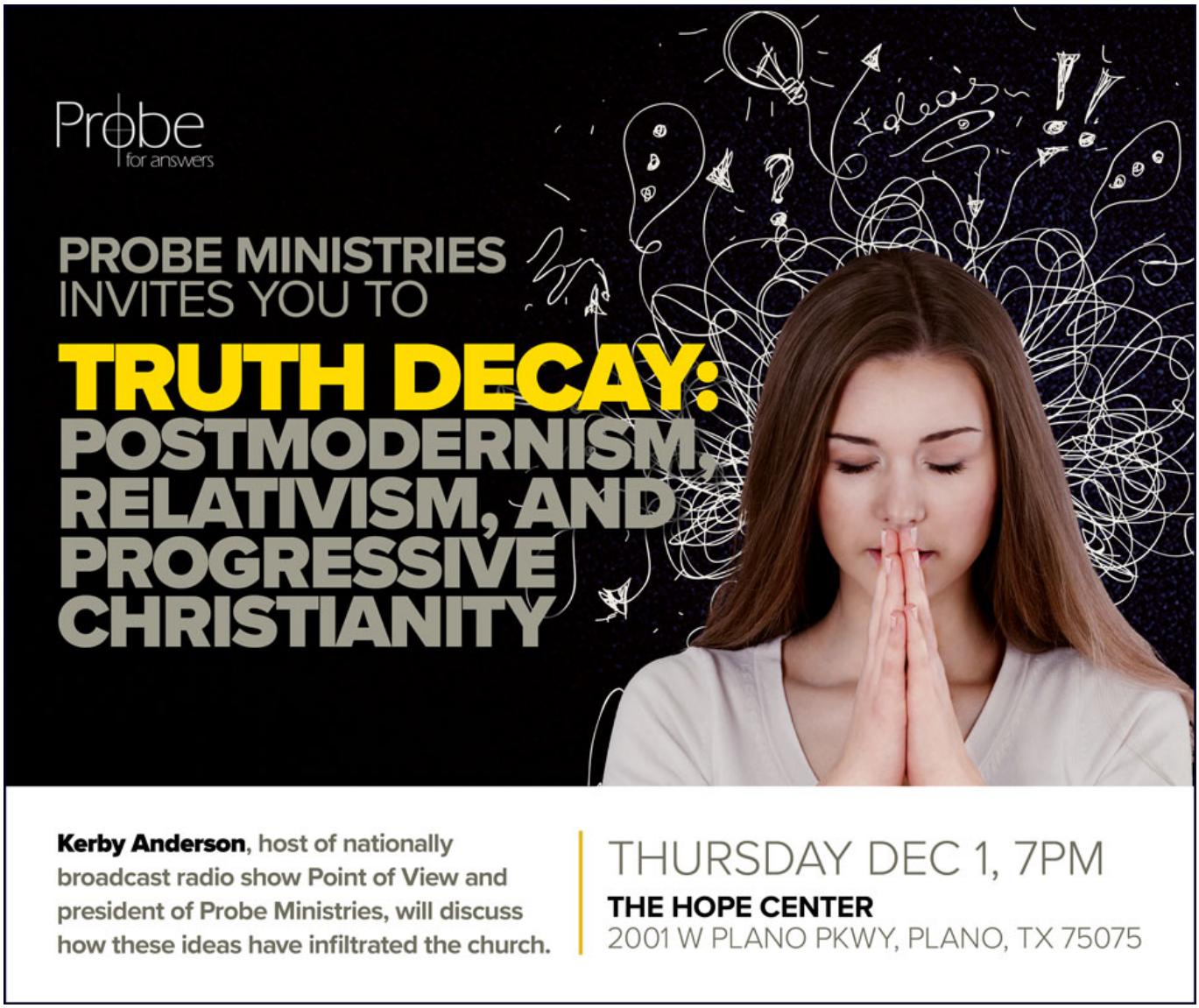
Probe Live: Truth Decay



Join us for the next Probe Live event

Thursday, December 1, 2022
7:00 p.m.
The Hope Center, Plano TX

We encounter postmodern thinking when we share the gospel and then hear, “That’s your truth, but it’s not my truth.” Moral relativism surfaces when someone says, “That may be your morality, but it’s not my morality,” or “Who are you to say

abortion or homosexuality is wrong?" And progressive Christians deny absolute moral truth and therefore question the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

Probe Ministries President Kerby Anderson will provide an overview of these faulty ways of thinking and answer questions from the audience.

We will record this message but not live stream it.

"Are You Relativistic Toward Moderate Muslims?"

This article is no longer available. We regret any disappointment or inconvenience this may cause.

Probe Ministries Administrator

Truth Decay

We live in a world that has dramatically changed its view of truth. What is the impact of the worldview of postmodernism and the ethical system of relativism in our society and inside the church?

Three Views of Truth

We live in a world that has dramatically changed its view of

truth, and thus have inherited an ethical system that denies the existence of truth. The worldview of the twenty-first century is postmodernism, and the dominant ethical system of the last two centuries has been relativism.



To understand this changed view of truth, we need to consider the story of three baseball umpires.{1} One said, "There's balls and there's strikes, and I call 'em the way they are." Another said, "There's balls and there's strikes, and I call 'em the way I see 'em." And the third umpire said, "There's balls and there's strikes, and they ain't nothing until I call them."

Their three different views of balls and strikes correspond with three different views of truth. The first is what we might call *premodernism*. This is a God-centered view of the universe that believes in divine revelation. Most of the ancient world had this view of true and believed that truth is absolute ("I call 'em the way they are"). By the time of the Enlightenment, Western culture was moving into a time of *modernism*. This view was influenced by the scientific revolution, and began to reject a belief in God. In this period, truth is relative ("I call 'em the way I see 'em"). Today we live in what many call *postmodernism*. In this view, there is a complete loss of hope for truth. Truth is not discovered; truth is created ("they ain't nothing until I call them").

Postmodernism is built upon the belief that truth doesn't exist except as the individual wants it to exist. Truth isn't objective or absolute. Truth is personal and relative. Postmodernism isn't really a set of doctrines or truth claims. It is a completely new way of dealing with the world of ideas. It has had a profound influence in nearly every academic area: literature, history, politics, education, law, sociology, linguistics, even the sciences.

Postmodernism, however, is based upon a set of self-defeating

propositions. What is a self-defeating proposition? If I said that my brother is an only child, you would say that my statement is self-refuting. An only child would not have a brother. Likewise, postmodernism is self-refuting.

Postmodernists assert that all worldviews have an equal claim to the truth. In other words, they deny absolute truth. But the denial of absolute truth is self-defeating. The claim that all worldviews are relative is true for everyone, everywhere, at all times. But that claim itself is an absolute truth.

It's like the student who said there was no absolute truth. When asked if his statement was an absolute truth. He said, "Absolutely." So he essentially said that he absolutely believed there was no absolute truth, except the absolute truth that there is no absolute truth!

Postmodernism

Postmodernism may seem tolerant, but in many ways it is not. For example, postmodernists tend to be skeptical of people (e.g., Christians) who claim to know truth. Now that doesn't mean that it is hostile to religion or spirituality. Postmodernists have no problem with religion unless it makes certain claims about its religion.

Postmodernists tolerate religion as long is it makes no claim to universal truth and has no authority. But they are very critical of those who believe there is one truth or an absolute truth. They are also critical of Christian missionaries because they believe they are "destroyers of culture." This is reminiscent of the TV show "Star Trek" that had "The Prime Directive" which prohibited those on the star ship from interfering with any culture. The assumption was that each culture must decide what is true for itself.

Related to this idea of cultural relativism is the belief in religious pluralism. This is the belief that every religion is

true. While it is proper to show respect for people of different religious faiths, it is incorrect to assume that all religions are true.

Various religions and religious groups make competing truth claims, so they cannot all be true. For example, God is either personal or God is impersonal. If God is personal then Judaism, Christianity, and Islam could be true. But the eastern religions (Hinduism and Buddhism) are false. Either Jesus is the Messiah or He is not. If He is the Messiah then Christianity is true, and Judaism is false.

Religious pluralism essentially violates the "Law of Non-contradiction." This law states that A and the opposite of A cannot both be true (at the same time in the same way). You cannot have square circles. And you cannot have competing and contradictory religious truth claims all be true at the same time.

Jesus made this very clear in John 14:6 when He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." Jesus taught that salvation was through Him and no one else. This contradicts other religions.

Postmodernism has also changed the highest value in society. We used to live in a society that believed in "Truth" (with a capital T). This has now been replaced by a new word with a capital T. And that is the word "Tolerance." We are told to tolerate every view and value. Essentially, all moral questions can be summed up with the phrase: Who are you to say?

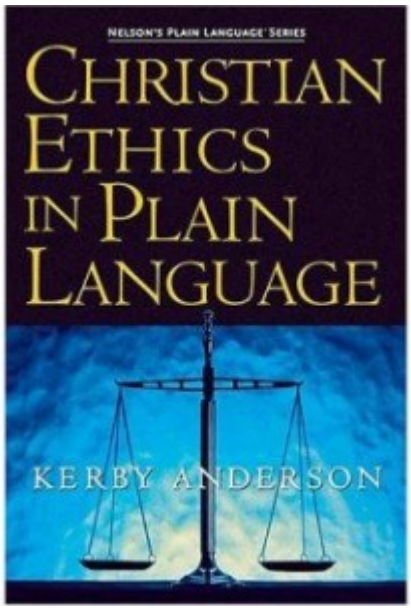
Moral Relativism

The worldview of postmodernism provides the foundation for moral relativism. Although a view of ethics as relative began in the era of modernism, it has reached full bloom in the era of postmodernism. If there is no absolute truth, then there is

no absolute standard for ethical behavior. And if truth is merely personal preference, then certainly ethics is personal and situational.

Moral relativism is the belief that morality is relative to the person. In other words, there is no set of rules that universally applies to everyone. In a sense, moral relativism can be summed up with the phrase: "It all depends." Is murder always wrong? Relativists would say, "It depends on the circumstances." Is adultery wrong? They would say, "It just depends on whether you are caught."

Moral relativism is also self-defeating. People who say they believe in relativism cannot live consistently within their ethical system. Moral relativists make moral judgments all the time. They speak out against racism, exploitation, genocide, and much more. Christians have a consistent foundation to speak out against these social evils based upon God's revelation. Moral relativists do not.



There are two other problems with moral relativism. First, one cannot critique morality from the outside. In my book *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, I point out the problem with cultural relativism.{2} If ethics are relative to each culture, then anyone outside the culture loses the right to critique it. Essentially that was the argument of the Nazi leaders during the Nuremberg Trials. What right do you have to criticize what we did within Nazi Germany? We had our own system of morality. Fortunately, the judges and Western society rejected such a notion.

Second, one cannot critique morality from the inside. Cultural

relativism leaves no place for social reformers. The abolition movement, the suffrage movement, and the civil rights movement are all examples of social movements that ran counter to the social circumstances of the culture. Reformers like William Wilberforce or Martin Luther King Jr. stood up in the midst of society and pointed out immoral practices and called society to a moral solution. Abolishing slavery and fighting for civil rights were good things even if they were opposed by many people within society.

Not only is moral relativism self-defeating; it is dangerous. Moral relativism leads to moral anarchy. It is based upon the assumption that every person should be allowed to live according to his or her own moral standards. Consider how dangerous that would be in a society with such vastly different moral standards.

Some people think stealing is perfectly moral, at least in certain circumstances. Some people think murder can be justified. Society simply cannot allow everyone to do what they think is right in their own eyes.

Obviously, society allows a certain amount of moral anarchy when there is no threat to life, liberty, or property. Each year when I go to the state fair, I see lots of anarchy when I watch the people using the bumper cars. In that situation, we allow people to “do their own thing.” But if those same people started acting like that on the highway, we simply could not allow them to “do their own thing.” There is a threat to life, liberty, and property.

Moral relativism may sound nice and tolerant and liberating. But if ever implemented at a societal level, it would be dangerous. We simply cannot allow total moral anarchy without reverting to barbarism. That is the consequence of living in a world that has changed its view of truth and established an ethical system that denies the existence of truth.

Impact of Truth Decay

What has been the impact of a loss of truth in society? There are many ways to measure this, and many ministries and organizations have done just that.

Each year the Nehemiah Institute gives the PEERS test to thousands of teenagers and adults. They have administered this test since 1988. The PEERS test measures understanding in five categories: Politics, Economics, Education, Religion, and Social Issues.{3} It consists of a series of statements carefully structured to identify a person's worldview in those five categories.

Based upon the answers, the respondent is then classified under one of four major worldview categories: Christian Theism, Moderate Christian, Secular Humanism, or Socialism. In the mid-1980s, it was common for Christian youth to score in the Moderate Christian worldview category. Not anymore.

Currently, Christian students at public schools score in the lower half of secular humanism, headed toward a socialistic worldview. And seventy-five percent of students in Christian schools score as secular humanists.

Take this question from the PEERS test as an example: "Moral values are subjective and personal. They are the right of each individual. Individuals should be allowed to conduct life as they choose as long as it does not interfere with the lives of others." The Nehemiah Institute found that seventy-five percent of youth agreed with this statement.

Let's also consider the work of George Barna. He conducted a national survey of adults and concluded that only four percent of adults have a biblical worldview as the basis of their decision-making. The survey also discovered that nine percent of born again Christians have such a perspective on life.{4} And when you look at the questions, you can see that what is

defined as a biblical worldview is really just basic Christian doctrine.

George Barna has also found that a minority of born again adults (forty-four percent) and an even smaller proportion of born again teenagers (nine percent) are certain of the existence of absolute moral truth.{5}

By a three-to-one margin, adults say truth is always relative to the person and their situation. This perspective is even more lopsided among teenagers who overwhelmingly believe moral truth depends on the circumstances.{6}

Back in 1994, the Barna Research Group conducted a survey of churched youth for Josh McDowell. Now remember, we are talking about young people who regularly attend church. They found that of these churched youth, fifty-seven percent could not say that an objective standard of truth exists. They also found that eighty-five percent of these same churched youth reason that "just because it's wrong for you doesn't mean its wrong for me."

George Barna says that the younger generation tends to be composed of non-linear thinkers. In other words, they often cut and paste their beliefs and values from a variety of sources, even if they are contradictory.

More to the point, they hold these contradictory ideas because they do not have a firm belief in absolute truth. If truth is personal and not objective, then there is no right decision and each person should do what is right for him or her.

Biblical Perspective

What is a biblical perspective on postmodernism? One of the problems with the postmodern worldview is that it affects the way we read the Bible.

Because of the popularity of postmodernism, people are reading literature (including the Bible) differently than before. Literary interpretation uses what is called “postmodern deconstruction.” Not only is this used in English classes on high school and college campuses, it is being applied to biblical interpretation.

Many Christians no longer interpret the Bible by what it says. Instead, they interpret the Bible by asking what the passage means to them. While biblical application is important, we must first begin by understanding the intent of the author. Once that principle goes out the window, proper biblical interpretation is in jeopardy.

So what should we do? First we must be prepared for the intellectual and philosophical battle we face in the twenty-first century. Colossians 2:8 says, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

We must also be studying the Scriptures on a daily basis. Paul says the Bereans were “noble-minded” because “they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Studies of born again Christians say that they are not reading their Bibles on a regular basis. An important antidote to postmodernism and relativism is daily Scripture study so that we make sure that we are not being conformed to the culture (Romans 12:2).

We should also develop discernment, especially when we are considering the worldviews that are promoted in the media. Philippians 4:8 says, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on

these things."

The average student in America watches 22,000 hours of television before graduation. That same student also listens to 11,000 hours of music during their teenage years. Add to this time spent on a computer, on the Internet, and absorbing the culture through books and magazines.

Postmodernism is having a profound impact on our society. This erosion of truth is affecting the way we view the world. And the rejection of absolutes leads naturally to a rejection of absolute moral standards and the promotion of moral relativism.

Christians must wisely discern these trends and apply proper biblical instruction to combat these views.

Notes

1. Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 31.
2. Kerby Anderson, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 11-15.
3. www.nehemiahinstitute.com/peers.php.
4. "A Biblical Worldview Has a Radical Effect on a Person's Life," *The Barna Update* (Ventura, CA), 1 Dec. 2003.
5. "The Year's Most Intriguing Findings, From Barna Research Studies," *The Barna Update* (Ventura, CA), 12 Dec. 2000.
6. "Americans Are Most Likely to Base Truth on Feelings," *The Barna Update* (Ventura, CA), 12 Feb. 2002.

Sugggested Reading:

Francis Beckwith and Gregory Koukl, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998).

Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000).

Dennis McCallum, *The Death of Truth* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1996).

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"What's the Difference Between Moral Relativism and Pluralism?"

Moral relativism and pluralism: I said they are, in effect, the same. The Unitarian academics smiled and suggested that I am unlearned on the topic. What say you?

The two terms are not necessarily linked. One could be a moral relativist and an atheist, which isn't quite the same as a religious pluralist. Theologian John Hick is an example of a religious pluralist who accepts all major world religions as viable paths to what he calls the "Other." However, he would reject the label of moral relativist, claiming that these belief systems cause followers to seek a good beyond themselves and that this lends to their behavior a certain ethical dimension not found in unbelievers.

The problem with John Hick's system is in its rejection of what these religious systems claim to believe about salvation and humanity's destiny in order to blend them into his pluralistic system. Harold Netland has written a helpful book for thinking through the problems of religious pluralism called *Dissonant Voices*.

For Him,

Don Closson

Probe Ministries

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What Do I Say Now?

"True for You, But Not For Me"

Since the church began, objections have been raised to the faith. They have varied according to the beliefs and mindset of the day. To be effective in taking a stand for the truth, Christians have had to know the current questions and objections. Maybe youve heard some of the more common objections today such as "Jesus never claimed to be God," or, "What gives *you* the right to say other peoples morals are wrong?" Or how about, "That might be true for you, but its not true for me." Sometimes these objections are well thought out, but often they sound more like slogans, catch-phrases the non-believer has heard but to which he or she probably hasnt given much thought.

If objections such as these have brought an abrupt end to any of your conversations because you werent sure how to respond, a book published last year might be just what you need. The title is *"True For You, But Not For Me": Deflating the Slogans That Leave Christians Speechless,* and it was written by Paul Copan, an associate with Ravi Zacharias International Ministries. Copans goal in this book is to provide responses for Christians who find themselves stumped by the objections of critics. To that end he deals with objections in such areas as knowledge of truth, morality, the uniqueness of Christ, and the hope of those whove never heard the Gospel.

In this article, Ill pull out a few of these objections and give brief answers, some from Copan, and some of my own.

Before doing that, however, I need to make an important point. If non-believers are doing nothing more than sloganeering by hurling objections that they really dont understand, rattling off memorized answers that *we* dont understand, Christians can be guilty of the same behavior of our opponents. Even though the objections might sound recorded, our answers neednt. Thus, I strongly suggest that you get a copy of Copans book or obtain some other books on apologetics which will fill in the gaps left by our discussion.

Relativism

Lets begin with a brief look at the issue of relativism and what it means for discussions about Christianity.

Relativism shows itself primarily in matters of truth and morality. When we say that truth is relative, we mean that it differs according to the times, or to particular circumstances, or to differing tastes and interests. It is the denial that objective truth exists; that is, truth that applies to all people and for all time. Now, most people will probably agree that there is truth in matters of scientific fact, but with respect to religion and morality, each person is said to have his or her own truth. Such things are matters of opinion at best, and are true only relative to particular individuals.

The implications of this are enormous. Evangelism, or the effort to persuade people to believe that the Gospel is true, is prohibited.{1} The claim to have *the* truth about a persons relationship with God is considered arrogant or elitist. Tolerance becomes the "cardinal virtue."{2} The rule seems to be this: Follow your own heart, and dont interfere with anyone following his or hers.

These are problems which relativism produces in dealing with others. But what about our own Christianity? If truth isnt fixed, maybe I should just drop all this Christian business

when it becomes inconvenient.

Relativism with Respect to Knowledge

Lets consider the objection represented in the title of Copans book: that is, “Well, that may be true for *you*, but its not for *me.*” Here the non-believer is essentially saying that its okay for you to adopt Christianity if you choose– that it can be *your* truth. But as far as hes concerned, he has not chosen to believe it– for whatever reasons– so it isnt true for him.

This objection would make better sense if the critic said, “Christianity is *meaningful* for you, but it isnt for me.” Or, “Christianity might *work* for you, but it doesnt for me.” These are reasonable objections and invite serious discussion about the meaning of Christ for every individual and how Christianity “works” in our lives. But the objection voiced is that Christianity is *true* for some people, but not for others. How can that be? Truth is that which is real or statements about what is really the case. “True for you, but not for me” can only be a valid idea if truth is relative to persons, times, circumstances, or places.

The Christian should question the person about this. Does he believe that truth is relative? If so, then hes actually undercutting his own claims. You see, the statement, “It may be true for you, but its not for me,” becomes relative as well. No statement the person makes can be considered a fixed truth that everyone– even the relativist– should believe. So, our first response might be to point out that, based upon his own relativistic views, anything *he* says is relative; its truth-status might change tomorrow. So theres no reason for anyone to take it seriously.{3}

On a deeper level we can point out that if theres no objective, fixed truth, all meaningful conversation will grind to a halt. If nothing a person says can be taken as true or false in the normal sense, the listener wont know if the

speaker really means what he says. What would be the value, for example, of reading the cautions on a bottle of pills if the meaning and truth of the words arent set? Trying to communicate ideas when truth and meaning fluctuate like the stock market is like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall. Theres no way to get hold of any idea with which to agree or disagree.

The non-believer might object that not all matters are relative, only matters of religion and morality. However, the burden is on the *relativist* to prove that matters of religion and morality *are* relative, for it isnt obvious that this is so. Why should these matters be treated differently with respect to truth than others? The fact that one cant debate morality on the basis of evidences as one would, say, a scientific issue doesnt mean that the truth about it cant be known. More important, however, is the fact that Christianity in particular is tied very tightly to historical events which *are* matters of fact.

Christianity cant be true for one person but not for another. Either it is true— and all should believe— or it isnt— and it should be discarded.

Moral Relativism

Lets turn our attention to objections regarding morality. One objection we hear is similar to one weve already discussed about truth. Non-believers will say, “Your values might be right for you, but they arent for me.”{4}

First, we need to understand the historic Christian view of morality. According to Scripture, morals are grounded in God. As God is unchanging, so also is His morality. As Paul Copan notes, such morals are discovered, not invented.{5} They are objective; they do not come from within you or me, but are true completely apart from us.

Having abandoned God as the standard for morality and replaced Him with ourselves, some say there is no objective morality. When told that a certain individual believed that morality is a sham, Samuel Johnson responded, “Why sir, if he really believes there is no distinction between virtue and vice, let us count our spoons before he leaves.”{6} Johnsons quip doesnt prove that morals are objective, but it indicates how well have to live if they arent. If matters of morality are relative, how can we trust anything another person says about moral issues? For example, if a person says that you can trust him to hold your money for you because he is honest, how do you know whether what he means by “honest” is what *you* mean by it? And how can you be sure he wont decide once he has your money that honesty isnt such a good policy after all? Such a situation would be *“existentially* (or practically) unworkable.”{7}

Paul Copan argues that we know intuitively that some things are wrong for everyone. Ask the non-believer if torture, slave labor, and rape are okay for some people. Ask him if there is a moral distinction between the labors of the late Mother Teresa and Adolph Hitler. Or press him even further and ask how he would respond if he were arrested and beaten for no reason, or if someone pounded his car with a sledgehammer.{8} Would he feel better knowing that the perpetrators found personal fulfillment in such activities? Or would he cry “Unfair!”?

Some non-believers are willing to concede that within a given society there must be moral standards in order for people to live together in peace. However, theyll say, differences between *cultures* are legitimate. Thus, theyll complain, “Who are *you* to say another cultures values are wrong?”{9} One culture has no right to force its morality on another.

But is it true that moral standards are culturally relative? Or perhaps the better question should be, Is it really likely that the non-believer believes this himself? You might recall

the Womens Conference in Beijing several years ago. Representatives from all over the world gathered to plan strategies for gaining rights for women who were being oppressed. Could a cultural relativist support such a conference? Its hard to see how. Cultural relativism leaves a society with its hands tied in the face of atrocities committed by people of other cultures. But as we have noted before, we know intuitively that some things are wrong, not just for me or my culture but for all peoples and all cultures. To take a firm stand against the immoral acts of individuals or cultures one needs the foundation of moral absolutes.

Religious Pluralism

Christians today, especially on college campuses, are free to believe as they please and practice their Christianity as they wish . . . as long as they arent foolish enough to actually say out loud that they believe that Jesus is the only way to God. Nothing brings on the wrath of non-believers and invites insults and name- calling like claims for the exclusivity of Christ.

Religious pluralism is in vogue today. Many people believe either that religions are truly different but equally valid since no one really knows the truth about ultimate realities. Others believe that the adherents of at least all the major religions are really worshipping the same "Higher Being;" they just call him (or it) by different names. Religions are superficially different, they believe, but essentially the same.

Lets look at a couple of objections stemming from a pluralistic mindset.

One objection is that "Christianity is arrogant and imperialistic"{10} for presenting itself as the only way. Of course, Christians can act in an arrogant and imperialistic

manner, and in such cases they deserve to be called down. But this objection often arises simply as a response to the claim of exclusivity regardless of the Christians manner. The only way this claim could be arrogant, however, is if there are indeed competing religions or philosophies which are equally valid. So, to make a valid point, the critic needs to prove that Christianity isnt what it claims to be.

As Copan notes, it can just as easily be the *critic* who is arrogant. Pluralists who reinterpret religious beliefs to suit their pluralism are in effect telling Christians, Muslims, Hindus, etc., what it is they *really* believe. Like the king of Benares who knows that the blind men are really touching an elephant when they *think* they are touching a wall or a rope or something else, the pluralist believes he or she knows what all the adherents of the major world religions dont. The pluralist must have a view of truth that others dont. *That* is arrogance.{11}

Youve probably heard this objection to the exclusive claims of Christ: “If you grew up in India, youd be a Hindu.”{12} The assertion is that we only believe what we do because thats the way we were brought up. This argument commits what is called the genetic fallacy. It tries to explain away a belief or idea based upon its source. But as Copan says, “What if we tell a Marxist or a conservative Republican that if he had been raised in Nazi Germany, he would have belonged to the Hitler Youth? He will probably agree but ask what your point is.”{13} The same argument, in fact, could be turned back on the pluralist to explain *his* belief in pluralism! Copan quotes Alvin Plantinga who says, “Pluralism isnt and hasnt been widely popular in the world at large; if the pluralist had been born in Madagascar, or medieval France, he probably wouldnt have been a pluralist. Does it follow that he shouldnt be a pluralist. . . ?”{14} The pluralist, in todays relativistic climate, is just as apt to be going along with the beliefs of *his* culture. So why should we believe *him*?

The Uniqueness of Christ

The idea that Jesus is the only way to God has always been a stumbling block for non-Christians. Lets consider two specific objections stemming from this claim.

Even people who have made no commitment to Christ as Lord hold Him in very high regard. Jesus is usually at or near the top of lists of the greatest people who ever lived. But as odd as it seems, people find a way to categorize Jesus so that they can regard Him as one of the greatest humans ever to have lived while rejecting His central teachings! Thus, one way to deflect the Christian message isnt so much an outright rejection of the faith as it is a reduction of it. Thus, a slogan often heard is "Jesus is just like any other great religious leader."{15}

One has to wonder, however, how a man can be considered only a great religious teacher (or to have a high level of "God-consciousness", as some say) who made the kinds of claims Jesus did, or who did the works that He did. Consider the claims He made for Himself: that He could forgive sins, that He would judge the world, that He and the Father are one. None of the other great religious teachers made such claims. Furthermore, none of the others rose from the dead to give credence to what He taught.

A favorite objection to arguments for the deity of Christ is that Jesus never said, "I am God".{16} But does the fact that there is no record of Him saying those exact words mean that He didnt see Himself as such?

What reasons do we have for believing Jesus was divine? Here are a few.{17} He claimed to have a unique relationship to the Father (John 20:17). He accepted the title "The Christ, the Son of the Blessed One" (Mark 14:61-62). He identified Himself with the Son of Man in Daniels prophecies who was understood to be the Messiah, the special one sent from God (Matt. 26:64,

Dan. 7:13). He spoke on His own authority as though Gods commands were His own (Mark 1:27). He claimed to forgive sins which is something only God can do (Mark 2:1-12). He called for devotion to *Himself*, not just to God (Matt. 10:34-39). He identified Himself with the "I Am" of the Old Testament (John 8:57-59). As Copan notes, "Jesus didnt need to explicitly assert his divinity because his words and deeds and self-understanding assumed his divine status."{18}

If this is so, why didnt Jesus plainly say, "I am God"? There are several possible reasons. First, He came to minister to the Jews first. Being so strongly monotheistic, they would have killed Jesus the first time He referred to Himself as God. Second, "God" is a term mostly reserved for the Father. It serves to highlight His authority even over the second Person of the Trinity. Third, Jesus humanity was just as important as His deity. To refer to Himself as God would have caused His deity to overshadow His humanity. Remember that the Incarnation was a new and strange thing. It was something that most people had to be eased into. Conclusion

Although Christians cant be expected to have satisfactory answers to all the possible objections people can throw our way, with a little study we can learn some sound responses to some of the clichéd objections of our day. Phrases little understood and tossed out in a knee-jerk fashion can still have a profound influence upon us. We need to recognize them and defuse them.

If you still think youd like more ammunition, get a copy of Paul Copans book. Youll be glad you did.

Notes

Paul Copan, *"True For You, But Not For Me": Deflating the Slogans That Leave Christians Speechless* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1998), 21.

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2. Ibid., 24.

3. Ibid., 44.

4. Ibid., 46.

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8. Ibid., 48.

9.Ibid., 78.

10. Ibid., 80.

11. Ibid., 82.

12. Ibid., 83.

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The Morality of the West

Cheating in the Schools

According to a study by Rutgers University, over 70% of all university students admit they have cheated at least once. And there's probably a few more who wouldn't admit it. The most common form of cheating admitted to is plagiarism. Students have always copied from someone else's paper or stealthily brought forbidden notes into the classroom. But the incidence is rising. Nineteen percent admit they have faked a bibliography, and fourteen percent say they have handed in a computer program written by someone else. {1}

This report highlights the fact that many students today are either unable or unwilling to act in an ethical manner. William Kilpatrick, in his book *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong*, brings to light the millions of crimes committed yearly on or near school property. Children go to school scared and intimidated. Many teachers contemplate and actually do leave the profession because of all the discipline and behavior problems.{2} A professor of philosophy at Clark University says:

> *Students come to college today as moral stutterers. They haven't been taught much respect for what I call "plain moral facts," the need for honesty, integrity, responsibility. It doesn't take a blue-ribbon commission to see this. Students don't reason morally. They don't know what that means.{3}*

Also, Mr. Michael Josephson, founder and president of the Josephson Institute for the Advancement of Ethics, said "Far too many young people have abandoned traditional ethical values in favor of self- absorbed, win-at-any-cost attitudes that threaten to unravel the moral fabric of American society."{4} This "self-absorbed" attitude is based on a whole

new set of assumptions about how we should adopt our values and the right of individuals to construct their own values.

Where do these ideas come from? Are our young people only now discovering the difference between what their parents have preached to them and what they actually do? Is it simply due to the fact that society is changing? Or is this an ethical vacuum caused by a value system without a solid foundation?

Some have suggested that we have simply discovered more efficient ways of uncovering people's wrongdoing so it just seems that people are less moral in their dealings. In other words, we are just more aware of the imperfections that were always there. A more interesting question, however is whether the behavior is the result of values being communicated by society? Have the rules changed? and who makes these rules, God or men? The Christian and the theist turn toward the Creator of the Universe. The humanist or atheist turns toward himself. This distinction between theism and humanism is the fundamental division in moral theory.

It appears that we are rapidly approaching a Godless, valueless society in which "power ethics" or the "political rationalism" of humanism is replacing the Judeo-Christian ethical base of traditional morality. The roots of our present dilemma go all the way back to the secular humanism of the fifteenth- and sixteenth- century Renaissance, and the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The idea of the sufficiency of human reason grew stronger during these periods, continually challenging Judeo- Christian values in an increasingly sophisticated way. Humanity was placed at the center of the universe, rather than God.

The Moral Results of Reason Alone

Just as our Lord said that man cannot live by bread alone, so man cannot live by reason alone. If we exclude revelation as a source of direction in discovering who man is and rely solely

on our intellect, and our own ideas of how we came to be, then we will naturally slip into a pessimistic and ultimately depressing view of human nature.

The seventeenth-century philosopher John Locke said that all knowledge comes from sensation. In other words, the only reality is what we can see, hear, feel, smell, taste, or measure. Not much room for revelation here. Other philosophers have followed up on this idea and have concluded that man is shaped by evolutionary processes and the culture that surrounds us. The notion that man is born with some innate nature has been rejected. Men like Hegel, Darwin, and Marx believed that all living forms and social systems were nothing more than the result of progressive transformations over time. As the influence of the religious community began to wane in the nineteenth century, many began to search for a meaning to life totally apart from God. Man simply no longer believed he had a place in eternity. Therefore all he could do was hope to find his place in the movement of history.{5}

Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* catapulted the abandonment of God and revelation by attempting to show that God was not even necessary in the creation of living things. If God did not create us, then we certainly could not gain our sense of meaning and purpose from a book purportedly written by Him. Frederich Nietzsche purposed to highlight the ethical implications of Darwinism. Nietzsche's "superman" concept transformed man into the maker of his own destiny. Man was truly the measure of all things. If God is dead, as Nietzsche declared, and nature is all there is, then what is, is right. Human life was therefore stripped of any purpose or goal. The contemporary Harvard professor, E. O. Wilson has stated, "No species, ours included, possesses a purpose beyond the imperatives created by its genetic history." Elsewhere he declares that our dilemma is that "we have no particular place to go. The species lacks any goal external to its own biological nature." This will ultimately result in a sense of

hopelessness, pessimism, apathy, and absurdity. William Kilpatrick in his book *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong*, says "Suicides among young people have risen by 300 percent over the last thirty years."{6} Next to accidents it is now the second leading cause of death in teenagers. Many of the deaths due to accidents are the result of auto accidents in which alcohol has played a role which can also be traced back to a sense of hopelessness and despair. Young people who may have never heard of Nietzsche are nevertheless living their lives in accordance with his philosophy of living recklessly.

A group of scholars presented the case of biblical authority to a group of students at Princeton University. At the conclusion of their presentation, a student stood and said:

> *I am surprised that I found myself feeling that you two were right and all of us were wrong, at least insofar as this very basic point: why we stand where we stand makes all the difference in the world. So the weakness of your presentation was that you were arguing on the basis of logic and presuppositions and intellectual integrity with persons who are perfectly ready to dispense with all three.{7}*

Our young people are so far removed from a rational discussion of what is right and what is wrong that they are unable to even decide what criterion should be used to make the decision, let alone make the decision itself. This is the inevitable result of the philosophical trend to utilize human reason alone apart from the revelation in Scripture. As our creator, God alone has the authority and knowledge to inform us as to how we are to act. Left to ourselves, we will only be confused.

Why Are Biblical Values No Longer Taught in Schools?

Many students today are so confused that they not only don't

know what ethical system is valid, but they don't even know how to evaluate them. One might ask, why aren't the schools teaching the values our children need, values that will work for them rather than against them?

To understand the lack of values being taught in our educational institutions, we need to go back to the biblical critics who were writing in Germany in the nineteenth century. The product of an attempt to operate by human reason alone, this movement placed the claims of religion and particularly the Bible outside the realm of human reason. If the Bible was not reasonable, then the Scriptures lost their foundation in real history. The traditions of the faith were seen as merely that, tradition with no basis in reality. This meant that the events contained in the Bible were to be evaluated on whether they were reasonable within a universe where the supernatural was assumed to be nonexistent or at least not involved in the real world. These scholars, called higher critics, believed that all morality is totally relative to historical time and place. The laws of the Bible were now to be seen as being understood only within the times that the Bible was describing. A Sabbath was only useful to an agrarian and shepherding culture. The same would be true for adultery or taking the Lord's name in vain.

This approach essentially denies the unity and moral integrity of the entire Bible.{8} The end result is that in people's minds, their ethics became separated from their faith. This eventually resulted in deism, a view that says that God only provided the necessary input to get the universe started but left it completely on its own after creation. He never intervened in natural or human history again. God is still there, but there is no possibility of any communication between God and His creation. Well, if you can't communicate with God and He has no influence over your life, why bother with worrying whether God existed at all? The worldview of naturalism quickly follows which says that there is no God.

Nietzsche's "madman" said, "God is dead!"{9} God was now out of the picture. Nietzsche simply took the next step. He tried to force men and women to, "feel the breath of empty space." If you have been following the train of thought here you are probably beginning to see the connection between Nietzsche's ideas and the state of our youth today. Many young people feel that there is no grand purpose for their life. Life is empty and cheap. If you believe in some form of a grand purpose, it is really only a grand illusion. All that is left, therefore, is to live for the pleasure of the moment. Gain what pleasure you can in an absurd universe. This will ultimately lead to an attitude of despair. If God is dead, what's the use of conforming to any rules. If I die as a result of my actions, so what, life is absurd anyway.

Students today often seem to be lost in relativism and are unable to think about or look into their futures. They shrivel up within the confines of their immediate surroundings. There is no longer any hope in eternity or in real justice.

Many of today's young people wander about their school halls with no hope, no dreams, no optimism about their future. Rock groups such as *Nirvana* and *Nine Inch Nails* continually fill their heads with the meaninglessness of a universe in which God is dead and life is absurd. We should be filled with great sadness when we witness the destruction this kind of thinking results in such as the suicide of Nirvana's heart and soul, Curt Cobain. I believe we should also see such people as Jesus does, as lost sheep. They are a great mission field for which the truth and historical reality of the gospel can find fertile ground.

The Twentieth Century Results of a "God Is Dead" Universe

The Greek philosopher Plato understood that there must be some universal or absolute under which the individual things (the

particulars, the details) must fit. Something beyond the everyday must be there to give it all unity and meaning. Even the atheist and existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre, realized that a finite point is absurd if it has no infinite reference point.{10} Sartre chose to believe that this infinite reference point did not exist, therefore, the only thing worth doing is existing and making choices, regardless of what those choices may be. But how can we tell students, our children, that anything is right or wrong if there is no absolute reference point such as the Bible, to base this on?

Existentialism says that we need to make a "leap of faith"{11} and seek to find our meaning without reason. In other words, we just have to find what works for us. And as we go through life, what works will constantly be changing. If we actually try to think about it, if we try to rationalize a meaning, we will only get depressed. According to existentialism, the only way to be happy, is to not think, to be blindly optimistic.

Another perspective is power ethics or "political naturalism." Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) was a great voice in the revival of political naturalism in the sixteenth century. In his book *The Prince*, a ruler who wants to keep his post must learn how not to be good, and use that knowledge, or refrain from using it, as necessity requires.{12} In other words, do what you need to do to preserve your position and don't concern yourself with what is ethical. Just preserve your power. Machiavelli's ethical stance of whatever strengthens the state is right had a great influence on the thinking of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). Feuerbach's claim that God was merely a human invention had a lot to do with the writings of Karl Marx (1819-1883) who took these ideas as validation of his own views. His ideas provided a foundation upon which Lenin and Stalin were able to build a society around the power ethics of political rationalism. Feuerbach and Marx rejoiced in the fact that the loosing grasp of religion had made it possible to create a city of man in an entirely human

space.{13} In Russia there was a concerted attempt to root out Christianity and substitute an extremely intolerant and militant form of the religion of the Enlightenment.{14}

Adolph Hitler is another example. So profound was Nietzsche's philosophy upon Hitler, that it provided the framework for his tireless efforts to obliterate the Jews and the weak of this world.{15} Nietzsche had proclaimed the coming of the Master Race, and a Superman who would unify Germany and perhaps the world.{16} Hitler, in his book *Mein Kampf*, clearly announced his intent to take Nietzsche's logic and drive the atheistic worldview to its logical conclusion. In Nietzschean terms, atheism will inevitably lead to violence and hedonism.{17} Hitler personally presented a copy of Nietzsche's works to Benito Mussolini, and Mussolini submitted a thesis on Machiavelli for his doctor's degree.

When human reason is allowed to be unaccountable it becomes solely a function of power, it legitimatizes the construction of a totalitarian state and in the case of Hitler the end result was the Holocaust. The real legacy of unbridled humanism is terror.{18}

The Purification of Moral Relativism

We construct museums so that we may never forget the horror of the German Holocaust. Russia is trying to recover from a total collapse of a power structure that was based on political rationalism and historical materialism. They had to find out the hard way. The fundamental dogma of the Enlightenment, the natural goodness and/or reasonableness of man, is a myth at best. It was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn who related what he overheard two old peasants say during the blood baths of Stalin's regime, "It is because we have forgotten God. That is why all this is happening to us." Out of the rubble of a failed system rose a people desperate to reestablish an ethical base that will work for them rather than against them. An article in *USA Today* illustrates a new hope for values in

Russia. It reports that:

> *Officials say up to 55% of Russian teachers, many of whom were former atheists, have made personal commitments to Christ. Many are using the New Testament in schools. "For ages, (Russia) was a country of believers and morality was very close to the people," says assistant principal Olga Meinikova, 32, of school No. 788. "For a short period 74 years we lost it all. All Russian teachers should teach this course; Americans too. The Bible is part of normal education."{19}*

Teams of Americans are helping to train Russian teachers how to teach Judeo-Christian morals and values based on a system of biblical ethics. The military has also been retraining their staff in Judeo-Christian morality, ethics, and values. Russia reached the bottom of a Godless society and is making an effort to rebuild its ethical base.

We face a dilemma in Western culture. We can continue along the line of thinking that "reason" is our only hope and trust in the natural goodness and/or reasonableness of man. Another extreme is to throw out reason altogether and embrace the philosophy and religion of the new age. The biblical view is to return to the concept of the fallen nature of mankind and rebuild on the traditional base of historic Christianity, which puts reason under the authority of Scripture. This is the traditional basis for ethical teaching in Western culture. It applies to all our institutions of training, including churches and ministries. The ethics modeled by too many Christian leaders is at best a utilitarian form of ethics. At worst, it is a pragmatic form of ethics that serves the self-centered goals of the individual or institution.

In conclusion, ethics based on Enlightenment thinking is not the answer. Crane Brinton, in his book *A History of Western Morals* says, "the religion of the Enlightenment has a long and

unpredictable way to go before it can face the facts of life as effectively as does Christianity."{20} We appear to have an implosion of values in a society. Many are seeking to teach our children that there is no God and no afterlife, but if you live an ethical life it will pay off. It is a standard without a foundation, floating in mid air. Society must re-evaluate its commitment to Enlightenment ethics and thinking. Until it does, we will see a continuing loss of values and respect for humanity.

Notes

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