

1. Is Morality Relative?



Is it wrong to want to conquer the world and kill innocent people?

How are Christians to interact in a secular society? Daily we confront issues, and Christianity seems to be on the fringe. Gay rights are equated as civil rights; those who proclaim homosexuality is a sin are homophobic. Have Christian views become outdated? At one time, homosexuality was considered immoral. Now it is a badge of tolerance to accept the "Gay lifestyle", as an alternative lifestyle. Those who say homosexuality is a sin are intolerant. What is a Christian to do? The question at hand is a concept known a *moral relativity*.

What is Moral Relativity?: The view that when it comes to questions of morality, there are no absolutes and no objective right or wrong; moral rules are merely personal preferences and/or the result of one's cultural, sexual or ethnic orientation.¹

Moral: 1 a : of or relating to principles of right and wrong in behavior : ethical ²moral judgments³ b : expressing or teaching a conception of right behavior ²a moral poem³ c : conforming to a standard of right behavior².

The Problem: Christianity proclaims there are absolute moral norms that apply to all persons in all places at all times. Relativism denies there are moral norms. If relativity is true then Christianity is false. If there is no basis for right and wrong, then Christianity is a meaningless set of values. If relativity is false, then there must be an objective source of what is right or wrong. In addition, *Materialism*³ must also be false, therefore the existence of the spiritual realm cannot be dismissed.

What Moral Relativity isn't: A distinction must first be made to demonstrate what Moral relativity is not. People often mistake a *Preference claim* for a *Moral claim*.

- Preference Claim: I like Starbucks coffee.
- Moral Claim: Stealing is wrong

A Moral claim is what society *ought* to do. A preference claim is what somebody *likes* to do. Someone might believe it is morally wrong to steal, but choose to (Prefer) to steal. The distinction between a moral claim and a preference claim is often confused. A moral claim is applies to all people, while a preference claim applies to personal choices.

The abortion debate illustrates the problem.

Those who are Pro-Abortion view "The right of choice" as a moral claim.

Those who are Pro-Life view "The right to life" as a moral claim.

Pro-Life are told, "Don't have to have an abortion if you don't like it"...Preference claim.

Those who are Pro-Life say, "Don't get pregnant"....Preference claim.

The argument is between what moral claim has priority.

Arguments for Moral Relativism: There are two main arguments used by those who view moral relativism as a worldview.

1. **Disagreement:** The moral relativist feels since cultures and individuals disagree on moral issues therefore there can be no moral norms that are right and wrong.
2. **Tolerance:** The Moral relativist embraces the view that one should not judge other cultures or individuals, for to do so would be intolerant.

¹ Francis J. Beckwith, Why I am Not a Moral Relativist, Why I am a Christian, 2001, Baker Books Pg. 15

² Marriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 2002

³ Materialism is the worldview that all that exists is mater or reducible to it.

Disagreement:

1. Disagreement does not prove relativism:

We do not see all things the same way. There are small and great disagreements. Different groups come to different conclusions based on the same facts. This does not mean both groups are right. If disagreement justified relativism then there could never be any objective right or wrong. Genocide, murder and robbery are conflicts of "Valid" but opposing views. The nation which slaughters and kills minorities is no more guilty than a lion killing a lamb. The rapist is nothing less than the strong taking advantage of the weaker.

We would have to conclude the serial murderer just had a difference of opinion with the people he killed. He wanted them to die and they didn't want to die. Who is right and wrong? There death is nothing more than a dog killing some game chickens.

2. Disagreement disproves relativism:

Disagreement demonstrates that relativism is false. Since relativism is based on the idea that there are no absolutes of right and wrong. Disagreement needs at least two opposing opinions. Both feeling they are in the right, otherwise there would be no disagreement. Disagreement itself invalidates relativism because disagreement requires someone to "be right". Relativism would dictate that no party is right because all in essence is only relative. Therefore, there could never be disagreement since all is relative.

3. Consequences of Moral Relativism:

Moral Relativism rejects all moral judgments. Statements such as,

- killing people for fun is wrong;
- Stealing from people is a sin;
- Feeding the homeless is good;

are reduced to nothing more than preference claims. All these statements are based on objective moral norms. The words; wrong, sin and good imply there exists an objective moral standard. Relativism denies any such standard.

Sometimes the Relativist might argue that the standard is a "Cultural or Social" standard, this then becomes the basis of moral rightness and wrongness. This merely replaces one cultural standard with another cultural standard. In Mexico before the arrival of Cortez, child-sacrifice and cannibalism was a standard Aztec practice. Cortez witnessed these events firsthand, and with the force of the sword suppressed these Aztec practices. According to moral relativism, who was immoral the Aztecs or the Spaniards is a non-sense question. Moral relativism would equate child-sacrifice and the cannibalistic Aztec cultural as a non-consequential event.

This would also apply to individual morality. A modern day cannibal such as Jeffrey Dahmer is no less guilty or innocent than his Aztec predecessors. Every person's actions would justify their morality all moral judgments are negated. In the moral relativist's universe, the killing of the Jews is nothing more or less than a Lion killing a lamb.

Tolerance

1. Tolerance supports objective morality.

If everybody *ought* to be tolerant, then tolerance becomes an objective "Moral Norm". Therefore, Moral Relativism is false. Tolerance also presupposes that there is something good about being tolerant.

2. Relativism is a closed-minded and intolerant position

Relativism dogmatically asserts there is no moral truth. Tolerance is position that we should be open-minded to the positions of others. Since there is no moral truth, why should anybody be open-minded? The whole reason of being open-minded is the possibility that somebody has something true to say.

Relativism assumes that there is no truth therefore there is no reason to be open-minded. Therefore, relativism becomes a closed-minded system intolerant of those who claim to have "Truth"

3. *Relativism is judgmental, exclusivist and partisan.*

This might sound strange since Relativism claims that it is non-judgmental, all accepting and unbiased about moral beliefs.

- The relativist claims that if you believe in objective moral truth you are wrong, therefore it is *judgmental*.
- Relativism excludes those who claim to have objective moral truth, therefore *exclusive*.
- Because relativism is exclusive, all non-relativists are automatically not members of the "Correct thinking" party, and therefore *partisan*.

4. *Tolerance is either barbaric or self-refuting.*

Relativists want tolerance because of the diversity of moral and cultural traditions. However, Tolerance means to accept those who disagree with you. For example, that would mean that if the Neo-Nazi philosophy became a prevalent viewpoint, this should be tolerated. In addition, if the same group wanted to kill everybody who disagreed with them, tolerance should remain. Once the "Tolerant" reject the position of Neo-Nazi party they become *intolerant* and *self-refuting*. Tolerance means you accept everybody, including those who are barbaric or you become intolerant and self-refuting.

Self Refuting Statement:

When a statement fails to satisfy itself (to conform to its own criteria of validity or acceptability), it is self-refuting... Consider some examples. "I cannot say a word in English" is self-refuting when uttered in English. "I do not exist" is self-refuting, for one must exist to utter it.... JP Morleand, *Scaling the Secular City*

"Tolerant people reject those who have extreme views" is a self-refuting statement. Once we begin to choose whom we accept as Tolerable then we make ourselves the judge of what is "Right and Wrong". "Right and Wrong" presupposes that there are *objective moral norms*.



Is it wrong for a lion to kill a lamb?

The Christian Response:

In order to help the relativist understand the "Christian position" we must first make the position relative to the listener. First, we should recognize that without the existence of God, "The Cause of the Universe", there are no moral absolutes. The universe is one accident that came out of nowhere into existence sometime in the past. This is the heart of materialism, all is matter and that is all.

There is no morality; no higher order of humans, animals or insects all are meaningless.

Is there anything wrong with the Lion killing the lamb or, the Great White shark eating a seal? Even the most avowed PETA member (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) would say no it's a part of the natural order. Think for a moment, if there was no God, using the same logic what is the difference between say a strong people, a "Lion People" killing and destroying a "Lamb people". If there is no God, couldn't we logically conclude its just the natural order demonstrated in nature.

However, if God does exist, then moral absolutes exist. For example;

You are invited to a house for a party, when you enter the house you become the guest of the owner. As a guest, you have privileges; you can eat freely of the food, sit in the chairs provided, talk with other

guests; use the restroom, play the piano and have a good time. However, since you are an invited guest and not the owner you have restrictions. You cannot paint the walls, break the windows, be disrespectful and harmful to other guest or the owner or destroy property. As long as you abide by the terms of being a guest, you are free to stay at the party. Living in the world, we are guests of God.

We are in the world, the one who owns the world has the right to determine what the rules on His property. The owner of the house can tear down walls, break his windows, smash the furniture, but the guest does not have the same privilege. God has the right to determine what is acceptable and not acceptable. God has revealed what is acceptable through individuals, recorded in His word the Bible.

The question of what is Truth? Who is God? Why the Bible? Are separate issues. But we must agree that "If there is a God and He did make the World, then He has the right to establish what is right and wrong", and if there is no God, then we are free to do what we want. We are nothing more then accidents and we are on an equal footing with animals and insects. One day we will cease to exist, like a leaf, falling from the tree and decays into dirt.

Scripture: The Ten Commandments are an example of God telling his guests what is acceptable.

¹And God spoke all these words, saying:

²"I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

³"You shall have no other gods before Me.

⁴"You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of *anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; ⁵you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, ⁶but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

⁷"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.

⁸"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates. ¹¹For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

¹²"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³"You shall not murder.

¹⁴"You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵"You shall not steal.

¹⁶"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁷"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that *is* your neighbor's."

Exodus 20:1-17



**If God made the Earth,
does he have the right
to set the rules?**

1 The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein.

2 For He has founded it upon the seas, And established it upon the waters.

3 Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place?

Psalms 24:1-3

Dialogue between a Christian and a Moral Relativist

Scene: Joe and Mike are two high school friends. Who meet 10 years after High School; in those 10 years, Joe comes to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and changes his life to conform to a Christian worldview. Mike remembers the old Joe who loved to go out and party, dance and have a good time with the girls. After not seeing each other for a number of years, they run into each other at a mutual friend's house. While sitting down on the couch they hear the news the Massachusetts Supreme Court has just removed the ban on same-sex marriage in Massachusetts. Joe Christian, upon hearing the news acts disgusted and makes a comment that begins the following exchange.

Mike Skeptic: What is wrong Joe?

Joe Christian: This country is in trouble when judges don't see the difference between marriage of heterosexuals and homosexuals.

Mike Skeptic: Well Joe we live in a different age, we are seeing civil rights extended to groups who have been prevented from being part of society we are becoming more tolerant of other view points.

Joe: Mike, What the basis of right and wrong?

Mike: As long as you don't hurt people, everything is ok.

Joe: So is there anywhere you draw a line of right or wrong?

Mike: Joe, As long as you have two consenting adults, there should be no limits.

Joe: What about Prostitution? Shouldn't polygamy also be legal since they would also be consenting adults?

Mike: You ask a lot of questions! I don't see a problem with prostitution. As far as marriage between two people, we need to keep some order in our society. And culture, really determines what is right and wrong. If the majority of the people in this country don't see a problem then its ok with me.

Joe: So do you think the culture and society determine what is right and wrong?

Mike: We live in a pluralistic society and *morality is relative*, that's just the way it is Joe.

Joe: What if the majority of the people in the United States thought Hitler was right, and they wanted to kill the Jews? Would they be right or wrong?

Mike: Joe, don't be silly we are not talking about Nazi Germany, we are talking about the United States.

Joe: Mike, the United States was founded on a Judea-Christian worldview, with moral absolutes of "Right and Wrong" if morality is just relative, does it matter what's right or wrong? Can we condemn Hitler's Germany and say he was wrong in what he did? Don't we sound intolerant and judgmental if we reject Hitler's view because they disagree with ours?

Mike: He was wrong because he hurt people

Joe: So if you are saying there is wrong then there must also be right, right? Are you now saying morality is not relative? That as long as you do not hurt people everything is ok.

Mike: Yes, that my position as long as you don't hurt people, everything is ok

Joe: What is the basis of your Morality? Who or What says you should not hurt your fellow man?

Mike: Well society says it

Joe: Doesn't society always change? Won't they change again?

Mike: Have you become religious on me?

Joe: If God made the world, doesn't he have the right to set the rules?

Mike: Who says there is a God? In addition, who says what the truth is?

Joe: Well I asking myself that very same question 7 years ago, thats when I found the God of the Bible is God.

Quotes from Moral Movers

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain the privation of pleasure.”

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) *Utilitarianism*

Thus, there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it. Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after this thrust toward existence.

Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of existentialism.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

The bad man is the man who no matter how good he has been is beginning to deteriorate, to grow less good. The good man is the man who no matter how morally unworthy he has been is moving to become better. Such a conception makes one severe in judging himself and humane in judging others. It excludes the arrogance which always accompanies judgment based on degree of approximation to fixed ends.

John Dewey (1859-1952) *Reconstruction in Philosophy*

“Since there is no God to will what is good, we must will our own good. And since there is no eternal value, we must will the eternal recurrence of the same state of affairs.”

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

The stronger must dominate and not mate with the weaker, which would signify the sacrifice of its own higher nature. Only the born weakling can look upon this principle as cruel, and if he does so it is merely because he is of a feebler nature and narrower mind; for if such a law did not direct the process of evolution then the higher development of organic life would not be conceivable at all...If Nature does not wish that weaker individuals should mate with stronger, she wishes even less that a superior race should intermingle with an inferior one; because in such a case all her efforts, throughout hundreds of thousands of years, to establish an evolutionary higher stage of being, may thus be rendered futile.

Adolph Hitler, *Mein Kampf*

Make war upon such of those to whom the scriptures have been given as believe not in God, or in the last day, and who forbid not that which God and His Apostle have forbidden, and who profess not the profession of the truth, until they pay tribute out of hand, and they be humbled.

Mohammed (Surah 9:29) (570-632 AD)

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself’ all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments”

Jesus *Matthew 22:37-40* (0-33 AD)

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