

## Topic 4.1: Relativism

10/29/17

“We are building a **dictatorship of relativism** that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires. We, however, have a different goal: the Son of God, the true man. He is the measure of true humanism. An 'adult' faith is not a faith that follows the trends of fashion and the latest novelty; a mature adult faith is deeply rooted in friendship with Christ.”  
– *Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, homily to the conclave that elected him Pope, 18 April 2005*

**Relativism** claims that there is no absolute truth. It's a commonly accepted and rarely examined assumption in our culture. Yet Pope Francis has said that “relativism wounds people” and Pope Benedict called it the “greatest problem of our time.”

### **Key points:**

- Relativism is self-contradictory. Ask the question: “Is it absolutely true that there is no absolute truth?”
- Limited to morals, it's still self-contradictory: “What scientific proof do you have that only scientifically-verifiable statements are true?”
- It underlies many / most major problems in the world today: what we believe affects how we live, our society, and even whether we discover reality itself.
- It hurts people in many ways, including:
  - Robs life of meaning
  - Offers no criteria beyond personal taste or preference for moral decisions
  - Deprives children of the formation they need
  - Undermines the right to life
  - In general, makes it easy for powerful to manipulate others
  - Damages freedom of speech
  - Destroys faith
- Why then is it so popular?
  - Convenient – doesn't interfere with what people want to do (see Prof B's article too)
  - Foist rules on others without having to justify them. e.g. “I'm for choice.”
  - Unquestioned cultural assumption
  - Fear of violence / persecution: Tolerance is believed essential to get along in a pluralistic society, and religious absolutism is seen as a threat to tolerance
- Real tolerance actually requires moral judgment
- Actual violence and persecution results from *what* people believe, not the fact *that* they believe.

## Topic 4.2: Combating Relativism

10/29/17

“The paradox of tolerance is that when we rightly tolerate something bad or false, we do so not because we don’t love truth and goodness enough to defend them but because we love them too much to defend them in the wrong way.” ~ J. Budziszewski

### ***What is tolerance, really?***

- To tolerate something is to put up with it even though we believe it to be bad or false.
- Tolerance is virtue that actually requires moral judgment
- AND knowing which bad and false things to put up with, in what ways, to what degrees, and on which occasions.

### ***Battle Relativism! Start Today!***

1. Widely share the booklet *Absolute Relativism*, by Chris Stefanick or the audio equivalent
2. Read more about the topic. (See Resources for suggestions.)
3. Mind your language! Speak of certainties as certainties, not opinions.
4. Challenge relativism with humor and truth.
5. Speak the truth in love!
6. Be joyful.
7. Become a saint!

### ***Tips to Challenge Relativism***

- Again, always be charitable. It’s better to lose an argument than to lose a soul!
- Step 1: Get out of the trap: Show the tolerationist that he is actually being inconsistent
- Step 2: Steer in a constructive direction: away from avoiding moral judgments and toward sane and prudent judgments

### ***Resources:***

*Absolute Relativism: The New Dictatorship and What to do About It* by Chris Stefanick, Catholic Answers, 2011

*Tired of Being Called a Morality Cop (and Other Bad Names)?* By J. Budziszewski (*This Rock*, January 2006)

*A Refutation of Moral Relativism* by Peter Kreeft, Ignatius,

*The Splendor of Truth*, encyclical by Pope St. John Paul the Great, available online.

*Ask Me Anything* and *Ask Me Anything 2*, by J. Budziszewski

See blog at [beginningapologetics.wordpress.com](http://beginningapologetics.wordpress.com) for more, including an audio recording of Chris Stefanick presenting the essential points of his booklet.