

Feet Planted Firmly in Quicksand

It seems as though the prevailing religion in America today is Relativism, as preached with virulent invectives in the United Church of "There is No Truth" ("TINT"). A large portion of the population, including the Christian Church, has been imbibed with the "absolute truth that there is no absolute truth," until, with feckless credulity, the general population has accepted this premise as an absolute required by all sensible and educated people. The irony of the premise that the "absolute truth is that there is no absolute truth" escapes the followers of TINT, as does the absurdity of living in a world devoid of truth and the impossibility of living consistently with feet planted firmly in quicksand. As a case in point, please consider the following conversation I recently had with a business associate of mine by the name of Jim.

"I'll tell you this, Ron, there is no such thing as absolute moral values. Just look around you, or better yet, look around the world. Moral values differ vastly from person to person and culture to culture. There is no way to say that one person's (or one culture's) values are any more correct or right or proper than those of a person with opposing moral views."

"How do you know that, Jim?"

"How do I know that? I know that simply by observing society, which apparently you don't do."

"Are you saying that because you observe differing moral values among people you know or have come in contact with that there are no, shall we say, absolute moral values?"

“Yes, Ron, that’s exactly what I’m saying. There are as many personal views of morality as there are people. Who’s to say who is right and who is wrong? It’s arrogant and narrow to make such judgments.”

“Jim, help me out here. How does it follow that because there are differing views about a statement of fact, belief, or value that there is no truth?”

“It seems to me that the answer to your question is self-evident. If there is no general agreement about a posited statement of fact, belief, or value, then it cannot be absolutely true or false. There is just no way of knowing; therefore, imposing your particular view over those of countless other people is nothing short of hubris.”

“So, Jim, are you saying that truth is determined by what a majority of the people believe or accept as truth?”

“Yes, although I have the feeling that you’re backing me into a corner.”

“Not at all, Jim, but help me to better understand your position. You will recall that in the day of Christopher Columbus and for all the prior history of mankind, the prevailing belief was that the earth was flat. Did the prevailing belief make it so? Was the earth in fact flat?”

“Well, no, of course not. See, I knew you were backing me into a corner. My previous statements concerning absolute truth do not apply to scientific facts, only to moral values.”

“So, are you saying that science can decide truth, absolutely, whether or not a majority of the populace agrees, but that moral values remain the prerogative of the majority, or the individual in the absence of majority agreement?”

“I guess so, Ron. Moral values cannot be proven, but science can test and verify all things physical or naturally occurring in nature.”

“Okay, just to make sure I understand your position, absolutes can be attributed to any issue that is subject to scientific testing, but moral values cannot, due to their inability to be scientifically tested. Is that approximately correct?”

“Yes.”

“Jim, is there such a thing as evil?”

“Well, there again, Ron, that which is evil to one is not necessarily evil to another. This is the problem with imposing one’s moral values on another, which should be eschewed at all cost.”

“Jim, given your convictions that one should never impose his morality on another, and your belief that morals are not scientifically testable and therefore cannot be subject to absolutes, I have a question for you: Is it acceptable to torture babies for fun?”

“Of course not! You are being absurd.”

“Why?”

“Because, Ron, any sane person knows that torturing babies for fun is wrong and so do you.”

“But, what if I don’t agree? Are you going to impose your morality on me?”

“You bet I would. It’s just plain insane to torture babies for fun.”

“Again, Jim, help me to understand your position. Are you saying that moral values are not testable and should not be imposed on those with opposing views, except when it’s your view? Is that what you are saying?”

Silence...

The above is but one simple example of the impossibility of living consistently and happily with a world view that denies absolutes in morality and truth. The TINT

proclamation that “it is absolutely true that there are no absolute truths” is, of course, self-refuting, not to speak of violating the law of non-contradiction (a thing cannot be both “A” and “non-A” at the same time and in the same sense). Moreover, it does not logically follow that the existence of multiple beliefs and opinions proves that truth does not exist. Truth is mutually exclusive of all opposing positions, and it does not depend upon a majority vote or the agreement of any one or number of people. Truth stands on its own and is ultimately shown to be reality. Any number of people can deny the existence of DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid), the ozone, the Big Bang, or any other axiom, but such denial has no affect on the truth or falsity of the claim. Likewise, the existence of absolute moral values can be denied, but they nevertheless persist. The proof is in the testing of the value in the laboratory of life. Just try cutting in line and you will hear the outcry, “That’s not fair.” Just try stealing someone’s stereo and you will hear the implacable outcry of the aggrieved. Just try lying about the character of an associate and you will feel the inexorable rush to defend and the resultant piercing outcry of an injustice perpetrated on the innocent. Just try justifying the ancient Indian custom of immolating the widow (otherwise alive and healthy) on the burial fire of the deceased husband. After all, the life of a woman without a husband is worthless, right? That was the custom in India until the English disallowed the practice during their occupation.

Truth exists, whether in the natural testable world or in moral values. It is impossible for a relativist to live happily and consistently in a world devoid of absolute moral values. Either he will be unhappy with the prospect of his neighbor torturing babies, or he will be unable to abide the practice and move to stop it (inconsistent). The next time someone says to you, “There is no truth!” Simply reply, “is that true?”