STUDY GUIDE


# How to Understand and Refute Relativistic Thinking

KARLO BROUSSARD

# Your Truth, My Truth:

## How to Understand and Refute Relativistic Thinking Study Guide

by

Karlo Broussard

# Introduction

If you haven't seen "College Kids Say the Darndest Things," a video released by the Family Policy Institute of Washington (FPIW), check it out. You will either laugh or weep.

Joseph Backholm, the executive director of FPIW, interviewed eight students from the University of Washington about so-called gender identity. Backholm, a white, 5'9" male, asked the students what they would say if he told them he was a female. Every student was quick to say it would be okay.

Backholm then asked the students a series of questions that led to him identifying as a 6'5" Chinese woman. Although a few of the students were a bit hesitant to affirm Backholm's assertion that he was 6'5" and Chinese, they concluded it would be within his right to identify as he pleases.

You may be thinking, "This is insane! How in the world did we get here?" The answer is our culture has embraced *relativism,* a philosophical worldview that the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger called "the most profound difficulty of our time."[1]

Relativism states there is no truth independent of what an individual or group of individuals happens to think. Something is true, so says relativism, only if it coheres with an individual's or group of individuals' set of beliefs. In other words, in relativism the individual (or group of individuals) *determines* what is real rather than *discovers* what is real.

The students in the FPIW video manifest relativism in all its glory—namely, there can be no false perception of reality because there is no reality to perceive, only a reality to create. As U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote in the 1992 landmark case *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."

By embracing relativism our culture has reached the point of insanity. There can be no false perception of reality because there is no reality to perceive—only a reality to create. Can our society function with such a worldview? It's doubtful.

Relativism, therefore, is something deserving of our attention and refutation.

Here is a brief overview of the movement of the booklet.

First, we will briefly distinguish the different forms of relativism and identify which ones we will be addressing. This will constitute Chapter One.

Second, we will *critique* the different forms of relativism chosen. This will make up Chapters Two and Three.

Third, we will *counter* the common arguments relativists give in support of their view. Our counter to these arguments will cover Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

Finally, in Chapters Seven and Eight, we will give some positive arguments in favor of objective truth—both in its general and moral form.

# CHAPTER ONE
# Making Distinctions

St. Thomas Aquinas defines truth as "the conformity of intellect and thing."[2] In other words, truth is conformity or correspondence between thought and reality. If I say, "Toto is Dorothy's dog," and Toto *really* is Dorothy's dog, then my judgment is true. If Toto does not belong to Dorothy, then my judgment is false (my thought doesn't conform to reality).

Relativism is the philosophical worldview that denies this correspondence between thought and reality—between beliefs and opinions on the one hand and what is real on the other. But it does so in different ways. Therefore, we need to make some distinctions.

There are two broad categories of relativism—1) *global* relativism and 2) *local* relativism.[3]

Global relativism involves relativistic claims about truth in *general.* Whether we're talking about human nature, morality, science, religion, history, etc., global relativism states there are no absolute truths *whatsoever*. *No* belief or opinion is true independent of what an individual or a society happens to think.

"What's true for you might not be true for me," the global relativist says. For global relativism, *all* types of beliefs are either true or false relative to an individual or society's set of beliefs.

Concerning truth's relativity to the individual or society, scholars distinguish between "I Say" relativism (what is true relative to the individual) and "Society Says" relativism (what is true relative to society).[4]

The second broad category of relativism is *local* relativism, which involves relativistic claims about truth in *particular* areas of thought: e.g., morality, science, religion, history, etc.

For example, a relativist might say, "I believe absolute truth exists when it comes to things like math (2+2=4) and science (gravity is real). But when it comes to things like morality (e.g., "Don't have sex before marriage") or religion (e.g., Christianity is the true religion), what's true is *relative* to what the individual or culture thinks.

The version of local relativism that we'll be considering in this booklet is *moral* relativism: the assertion that no *moral* claim is absolutely true but only relative to the individual or the culture.

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. What is *global* relativism?

2. What is *local* relativism?

3. What are the various forms of *local* relativism?

4. Which version of *local* relativism have you encountered?

# CHAPTER TWO
# Refuting Global Relativism

Now that we have made the necessary distinctions, we can begin our critique of relativism. This chapter will focus on *global* relativism.

Recall global relativism involves relativistic claims about truth in *general.* It states there are no absolute truths *whatsoever*. It doesn't matter whether one is talking about morality, religion, history, science, etc. *No* belief or opinion is true independent of what an individual or a society happens to think. Any kind of objective truth is a mere fiction.

The three strategies below are ways you can refute this form of relativism.

**Strategy 1**
***Show that global relativism is self-refuting.***

In your first approach, you want to show how global relativism is self-referentially incoherent, which is just a fancy way of saying it's self-refuting. If you can prove that global relativism is false, then you automatically prove that objective truth exists. Consider this Socratic dialogue:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "You believe 'there is no absolute truth,' right?" Friend responds, "Yes!" You ask, "Now, is that statement absolutely true?"

If your friend answers the question, "Yes, it's absolutely true," then point out to him that there would be at least one absolute truth: namely, the statement itself—"There is no absolute truth." But this undermines relativism.

Moreover, emphasize that his belief, "It's absolutely true that there is no absolute truth," is a contradiction. Ask the question,

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "How can something be absolutely true and not absolutely true in the same respect at the same place and time?"

This question makes clear that your friend's belief violates the principle of non-contradiction, which is a first principle of reason that states something cannot be and not be in the same respect and the same place and time. Chapter Seven in this booklet defends this principle.

If your relativist friend retorts, "Well, the claim itself, 'There is no absolute truth,' is only *relatively* true," then point out that he still is making an absolute claim because the verb *is* necessarily implies a statement about what is objectively real.

It suggests conformity to reality because the relativist suggests the statement "There is no absolute truth" *really is* relatively true. But this is the same thing as saying, "It's absolutely true that there is no absolute truth," which as we saw is a contradiction.

**Strategy 2**
***Show that global relativism is trivial.***

Your second approach addresses the relativist's claim that the statement "There is no absolute truth" is *relatively*

true. It attempts to show that such a belief is trivial. Ask these questions:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "When you say that the statement 'there is no absolute truth' is only *relatively* true, do you mean that relativism is something you believe and others don't? In other words, do you mean relativism is something that's true for you but not for others?"

If the relativist responds, "Yeah, that's right—it's true for me but not for others," then you can say, "Okay, so what? That doesn't tell me anything I don't already know." Since we already know that other people don't think relativism is true, namely the absolutists (believers in objective truth), the relativist's position becomes trivial.

You can go further to show the triviality of this position. If relativism is just one belief among a set of personal beliefs for the relativist, then it is nothing more than a personal taste or preference. The belief or opinion is reduced to just that—a belief or opinion. You can make this clear with the following questions:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "If relativism itself is something that's true for you and not for others, then wouldn't that make it a mere personal taste or preference? And if your belief is a personal taste or preference, then why should we pay any attention to it? Why should we pay any more attention to your opinion concerning truth than we should your opinion concerning your flavor preference for ice cream?"

Personal tastes and opinions have no bearing on reality. They are not worthy of consideration. Relativism, therefore, is trivial, and thus the relativist has no reason to demand that we be concerned with it.

**Strategy 3**
***Show that global relativism leads to absurdities.***

Your third strategy involves showing how relativistic logic leads to all sorts of absurdities.

In the aforementioned FPIW video, Backholm gives us a great example of how to do this. He takes the logic of relativism and applies it to various areas where its absurdity can be made manifest: height, ethnicity, and gender. For some, these categories will be sufficient. But as the students' responses show in the FPIW video, there are some that will not see the absurdity of relativism as it applies to these categories.

What are we to do? We keep moving on and apply the logic to other categories. Here are some good questions to ask your friend:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "What if someone says he is a cat? Does that make that person a cat? And what if a person identifies as being disabled and desires to be a paraplegic when he is healthy? Should we treat that person according to his desired identity? If we can determine what is real for us, shouldn't we accept these sort of claims?"

Lest your friend think you are off your rocker and that such things would never happen, consider the story of twenty-year-old Nano from Oslo, Norway, a young woman who claims she is a cat trapped in a human body. She explains in an interview with a reporter that she was "born in the wrong species."[5]

This phenomenon is a real psychological disorder that is commonly referred to as *species dysphoria* or *species dysmorphia*.[6] It manifests itself in either a person thinking of himself as an actual animal or excessive concern that his body is of the wrong species.

Chloe Jennings-White, a Ph.D. with degrees from Cambridge and Stanford Universities, is a woman that

desires to be a paraplegic and identifies as "disabled." She rides around in a wheel chair with leg braces even though her legs function properly. In interviews she has expressed her intention to sever her femoral and sciatic nerves in order to paralyze her legs.[7] This psychological disorder is called Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID).[8]

With regard to Nano, you can ask your friend the following questions:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "If nature has no bearing on the absurdity of a man claiming to be a woman, then why should nature have any bearing on the absurdity of a woman's claim to be a cat? If we concede that gender is a social construction that we can alter, then why wouldn't species be a social construction that we can change as well?"

Point out to your friend that if we can say to Backholm, "Well, you look like a white 5'9'' male, but since you claim to be a 6'5'' Chinese woman, we'll have to accept that and treat you accordingly," then with equal logic we must say to Nano, "You look human, but since you claim to be a cat, we'll have to respect that claim and treat you accordingly."

With regard to Chloe Jennings-White, challenge your friend with these questions:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Should we support Chloe in her desires? If it's okay for a man to undergo surgical procedures that conform his body to his desire to be a woman, as in the case with one like Bruce Jenner (a popular American male now named Caitlyn), then why couldn't Chloe undergo surgical procedures that conform her body to her desire to be a paraplegic? What difference is there between Jenner's desire to be transgender and Jennings-White's desire to be transable?

You must emphasize that if our culture is to be consistent with its relativistic logic that approves the actions of people like Bruce Jenner, then our culture would have to approve the actions of people like Chloe Jennings-White.

Relativism has no ground on which it can differentiate between a man rejecting his genetic makeup for the sake of redefining his gender and a woman rejecting her genetic makeup for the sake of redefining her species or a woman rejecting her healthy physical condition for the sake of being disabled. If the logic of relativism demands we accept transgenderism, then the logic of relativism also demands we accept transpeciesism, transableism, and whatever other "ism" comes our way.

**STRATEGY SUMMARY**

- **Strategy #1:** Show that global relativism is self-refuting.
  - Relativism amounts to a contradiction: "It's absolutely true that there is no absolute truth."

- **Strategy #2:** Show that global relativism is trivial,
  - It doesn't tell us anything we don't already know, and it reduces the claim to personal taste or preference, which has no bearing on reality.

- **Strategy #3:** Show that global relativism leads to absurdities.
  - It demands we accept and celebrate a person's desire to identify as a member of the opposite sex, a person's desire to be a different kind of animal, and a person's desire to be disabled when they are perfectly healthy.

**DEFINITIONS:**

**Self-referentially Incoherent –** a statement is self-referentially incoherent that when held to be true it becomes incoherent (e.g., I don't speak a word of English).

**Objective Truth –** something is true (thought conforming to reality) independent of what a person (or group of people) thinks or feels.

**Absolutist –** someone who believes in objective truth.

**Presuppose –** to tacitly assume at the beginning of a line of argument or course of action that something is the case.

**STUDY QUESTIONS:**

1. How is the statement "there is no absolute truth" self-refuting?

2. What is wrong with saying the statement "there is no absolute truth" is relatively true?

3. Why does the claim of global relativism have no bearing on reality?

4. What sort of absurdities does the logic of relativism lead to?

# CHAPTER THREE
# Refuting Moral Relativism

The incoherence of global relativism is a reason why many relativists ascribe to some version of local relativism, the most popular being *moral* relativism. It's often stated in this way: "Obviously there are *some* absolute truths. It's ridiculous to say there is no objective truth *at all.* Truth is only relative when it comes to *morality*. It is either relative to the individual ("I Say" moral relativism) or perhaps society ("Society Says" moral relativism)."

Moral relativists assert that no moral claim is absolutely true but only relative to the individual or the culture. For example, a moral relativist might say, "Abortion might be wrong for others, but not for me." A relativist will argue that homosexuality is a moral good from his point of view, but might not be from another's.

There are five strategies that you can employ when dialoguing with a moral relativist. As we go through each critique, you'll see how the reasoning applies to both "I Say" moral relativism and "Society Says" moral relativism.

**Strategy 1**
***Show how moral relativism makes the accusation of wrongdoing impossible.***

Your first strategy assumes that your relativist friend tacitly acknowledges wrongdoing at least in some cases. Use the example of a murderer. Ask your friend these questions:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "If right and wrong were a matter of *personal* definition (i.e., something is wrong only if the individual deems it so), then how could you blame a murderer? If the murderer doesn't believe his act of murder is wrong, but that it's good for him to do such a thing, then wouldn't relativism justify his action?"

If your friend wants to be consistent in his relativism, he has to answer yes. Moral relativism states that a behavior is wrong only if the individual judges it so. If the murderer judges that his behavior is not wrong, then, according to "I Say" moral relativism, the murderer is not wrong. In this scenario he would be free from blame.

Dr. Peter Kreeft puts it poignantly in his lecture on relativism:

> He [moral absolutist] alone can say to a Hitler, "You and your whole social order are wrong and wicked and deserve to be destroyed." The relativist could only say, "Different strokes for different folks, and I happen to hate your strokes and prefer mine, that's all."[9]

If your friend retorts and says, "No, the murderer is wrong because he hurt someone unnecessarily," then he ceases to be a relativist since the claim that we shouldn't hurt someone unnecessarily is a moral absolute. I address this argument in more detail in Chapter Six.

Challenge your friend with these final questions:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "What choice will you make? Will you keep your relativism and give up placing blame on wrongdoers? Or will you give up relativism in order to coherently place blame on wrongdoers?"

The relativist has to make a choice. He cannot have it both ways. Unless he is willing to say we cannot place blame on a murderer, then he ought to reject "I Say" moral relativism.

The same reasoning applies to "Society Says" moral relativism. You can ask your relativist friend the same questions as above, but just replace the "individual" with "society":

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "If right and wrong were determined by what society says (i.e., something is wrong only if a group of individuals deems it so), then how could we blame a society for any practices we judge to be immoral (e.g., Nazi Germany)? If a society doesn't believe its practices are wrong, then wouldn't relativism preclude us from saying their practices are wrong?"

If morality were relative to what society says, then it would be impossible to coherently judge another *society's* actions as wrong. There would be no such thing as unjust laws.

Unless a relativist is willing to stop judging other societies' practices and laws as wrong and unjust, then he ought to give up "Society Says" moral relativism. The bottom line is that moral relativism undermines moral blame all together. There is no possible way to accuse others of wrongdoing if moral relativism is true.

**Strategy 2**
***Show how moral relativism makes the charge of unfairness or injustice impossible.***

There are two ways that you can show how moral relativism undermines the concept of justice, thus making the charge of injustice impossible. This critique applies to both "I Say" relativism and "Society Says" relativism.

First, moral relativism precludes any form of obligation that one has to another, which is an essential component of justice. Justice means to give one his due—that is to say, giving what is owed.

Now, the idea of "one's due" or "owing something" implies obligation. But obligation is not a part of the mental framework of "I Say" or "Society Says" moral relativism. Ask your friend these questions:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "If there is no standard of morality that the individual ("I Say" moral relativism) or a society ("Society Says" moral relativism) is subject to, then how can the individual or society be obliged to *owe* something to another? How can the individual or society have an obligation toward others if there is no higher authority to oblige them?"

By making the individual or society the final arbiter of right and wrong, the relativist exempts the individual or society from obligation. And if that were true, then the individual or society wouldn't owe anything to anyone. If the individual or society doesn't owe anything to anyone, then there is no such thing as justice.

Offer this challenge to your relativist friend:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Are you willing to give up the concept of justice in order to keep your moral relativism?"

The relativist cannot have it both ways. Once again, he has to make a choice. Let's hope he's reasonable enough to choose justice over his relativism.

There is another way that you can show how moral relativism undermines justice. Begin by asking these questions:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "What if the individual or society happens to think unfairness is a good thing *relative* to their set of beliefs? If moral relativism were true, then wouldn't we have to respect their position and just hope they don't decide to be unfair to us?"

Moral relativism undermines justice because it allows for injustice to be a moral good among other moral goods within an individual's or society's set of beliefs. The relativist has to ask himself, "Do I really want to conclude there is no such thing as justice?"

Let's hope he answers this question in the negative; otherwise, he makes a way for justifying acts of injustice.

**Strategy 3**
***Show how moral relativism makes it impossible to complain about the problem of moral evil.***

Your third strategy shows how moral relativism undermines the appeal to moral evil as an argument against God's existence.

As mentioned above, in "I Say" moral relativism, no individual can be accused of wrongdoing because the individual's judgment is the final arbiter of good and bad. But if no individual can be guilty of wrongdoing, then there can be no moral evil. As scholars Francis Beckwith and Gregory Koukl write,

> Moral relativism and objective evil are strange bedfellows. They couldn't possibly both be true at the same time.[10]

If moral evil can't exist in "I Say" moral relativism, then moral evil could never be used as an argument against God's existence. Assuming your friend would see the problem of evil as a reasonable objection to God's existence, challenge your friend with these questions:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "What will you choose? Will you give up your moral relativism in order to keep the objection to God from the problem of evil? Or will you give up the objection from the problem of moral evil and keep your moral relativism?"

The same line of reasoning applies to "Society Says" moral relativism. The only difference is that the critique would shift from the individual being incapable of moral evil to society being incapable of moral evil, still making moral evils perpetrated by society a problem for the relativist who wants to use it as an objection to God's existence.

**Strategy 4**
***Show how moral relativism makes moral progress impossible.***

You can start by considering *personal* moral progress. Ask this question,

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Wouldn't you agree that in order to progress morally, one has to first be bad and then move toward goodness?"

You shouldn't have any problem getting an affirmative answer since moving from bad to good belongs to the essence of moral progress. Now ask this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "How can someone move from moral badness to moral goodness if that person can't be morally bad in the first place? If there is no standard of morality outside his own subjective judgments, which is what 'I Say' moral relativism states, then how can he be morally bad?"

Without the possibility of being morally bad, there can be no *personal* moral progress. If a relativist holds to his "I

Say" moral relativism, then he must reject *personal* moral progress. Let's hope his judge is not an "I Say" moral relativist if he ever goes to prison since the judge would never lessen his sentence due to his good behavior.

The same is true for "Society Says" moral relativism. In order for society to progress morally, it would first have to be doing immoral things and then move toward morally upright practices. But in "Society Says" moral relativism, a society cannot be guilty of immoral practices. Therefore, there can be no *societal* moral progress in "Society Says" moral relativism.

But we know social moral progress is possible. Ask your friend this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Has our society progressed morally by banning laws embodying slavery and racial segregation?"

Unless your friend is way off his rocker, he should answer in the affirmative. And if he does, then he must give up "Society Says" moral relativism.

A related aspect to the impossibility of societal moral progress that is important to note is the immorality of social reformers. If it were true that society is the measure of morality, then anyone who attempts to change the societal codes would be deemed immoral. Ask these questions:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "How could a social reformer be moral if he is going *against* what society views as moral? Wouldn't someone like Martin Luther King Jr. have to be considered immoral since he fought against what society deemed a moral norm?"

If "Society Says" moral relativism were true, then a social reformer could not be moral for going against the moral norms of society no matter what those moral norms were. Martin Luther King Jr. would have to be considered a bad man.

Unless a relativist is willing to deny the good that social reformers have done in the past, those of the likes of Martin Luther King Jr., then he ought to give up "Society Says" moral relativism.

**Strategy 5**
***Show how moral relativism reduces morality to might makes right.***

You can start your explanation by asking these questions:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "What happens when there is a conflict between people's individual judgments about what is right and wrong? What happens when societies' different moral views conflict?"

In a scenario where a standard of morality exists beyond the judgment of the individual or society, it wouldn't matter who has the most power. Actions judged good by that standard would win the day.

But if there were no moral standard outside the judgment of the individual or society, then the view of the individual or society with the most power would win the day. You can challenge your relativist friend with this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Are you willing to believe that the person (or group of persons) who has the most power determines the morality of the day?"

Assuming your relativist friend is a person of good will and is repulsed by the idea of a tyrannical government,

he should answer no. If that is the case, then he must give up both "I Say" and "Society Says" moral relativism.

**STRATEGY SUMMARY**

- **Strategy #1:** Show how moral relativism makes the accusation of wrongdoing impossible.
  - An individual (or society) can't be accused of doing wrong if his judgment is the standard of right and wrong.

- **Strategy #2:** Show how moral relativism makes the charge of unfairness or injustice impossible.
  - Since there can be no obligation to owe something to someone in moral relativism, there can be no justice.

- **Strategy #3:** Show how moral relativism makes it impossible to complain about the problem of moral evil.
  - There can be no problem of moral evil if an individual or society can't be guilty of moral evil.

- **Strategy #4:** Show how moral relativism makes moral progress impossible.
  - There can be no moral progress if an individual or society can't be guilty of moral evil in the first place.

- **Strategy #5:** Show how moral relativism reduces morality to might makes right.
  - If there is no standard of morality outside the judgments of an individual or society to determine which conflicting worldview wins the day, then only the individual or society with the most power will determine which worldview wins the day.

**DEFINITIONS**

**"I Say" Moral Relativism –** a form of relativism that states something is morally right or wrong relative to an individual's judgment.

**"Society Says" Moral Relativism –** a form of moral relativism that states something is morally right or wrong relative to the judgment made by a group of individuals.

**Justice –** the virtue by which man renders to another his due.

**Moral Progress –** the movement from immoral behavior to morally upright behavior.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Why can't a moral relativist coherently blame a murderer of wrongdoing?

2. What are the two ways in which moral relativism undermines the concept of justice?

3. Why can't a moral relativist ever coherently use the problem of evil as an objection against God's existence?

4. Why would a moral relativist have to deny individual and societal moral progress?

5. How would conflicting moral worldviews have to be settled if moral relativism were true?

# CHAPTER FOUR
# Countering the Argument from Differing Beliefs

In the previous two chapters our strategies were ordered toward *critiquing* relativism. We now turn our attention to offering a *counter* by responding to the various arguments relativists give to justify relativism, which will be the content for the next three chapters.

All of the arguments apply to both global and moral relativism. Consequently, all of the strategies apply to both as well except for strategy three of this chapter, which applies specifically to moral relativism.

The argument we're considering in this chapter is the argument from differing beliefs. "How can truth be absolute," a relativist argues, "if so many people disagree about it?"

The three strategies below will equip you to respond.

**Strategy 1**
***Show that the argument from differing beliefs is a* non sequitur*.***

Your first approach shows how the conclusion, "No absolute truth," doesn't logically follow from the premise, "People differ in their beliefs." Philosophers have a fancy term for this type of argument: *non sequitur*, which is Latin for "it does not follow."

If you can show the lack of logical connection between the two statements, then you can show how the argument from differing beliefs fails. You can do this by taking the logic embedded in the argument and applying it to other things people disagree on. Ask your friend this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "If you and I disagree about the shape of the earth—you say it's flat and I say it's spherical (something people disagreed on in the past)—would you say there is *no* shape to the earth?"

In order for your friend to be reasonable he has to answer no since if the earth had no shape, then we wouldn't be here. Reemphasize with your friend that just because people differ in their beliefs about the shape of the earth, it doesn't mean the earth has no shape.

Consider another example. Ask your friend to imagine that you are driving together down a long stretchy road in the Arizona desert, and you see what you think is water on the road up ahead. But your unbelieving friend says, "Silly, that's not water; it's just a mirage." With that scenario established, ask this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Does the fact that we disagree about whether there is water up ahead on the road mean there is *no* objective truth about the matter?"

I think it's safe to say your friend will see that the answer is no.

You're now in a position to connect all the dots.

- Just as the conclusion, "There is no absolute truth about the shape of the earth," doesn't follow from the premise, "We disagree about the shape of the earth,"
- and the conclusion, "There is no absolute truth about whether there is water on the road," doesn't follow from the premise, "We disagree about whether there is water on the road,"

- so to the conclusion, "There is no absolute truth," doesn't follow from the premise, "People disagree in their beliefs."

Since there is no logical connection between the statements, "No absolute truth" and "People believe different things," the argument from differing beliefs fails to justify relativism.

**Strategy 2**
***Show that the argument from differing beliefs begs the question.***

Begging the question is a logical fallacy where a conclusion is assumed true without evidence other than the statement itself. The current objection begs the question because it *assumes* universal agreement is the criterion for truth when that is the thing being debated. Ask your friend,

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Okay, is it true that you're saying, 'There is no absolute truth because there is no universal agreement in what's true?'"

Your relativist friend has to answer yes to stay true to his argument. If he answers, "No, the lack of universal agreement doesn't make truth relative," then he would be acknowledging that relativism doesn't follow from differing beliefs. But that negates the argument he started out with.

This puts you in a position to begin exposing the fallacy. Ask this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "If you say no universal agreement is the reason why there is no absolute truth, then wouldn't it be the case that you're saying universal agreement is necessary for there to be absolute truth?"

The obvious answer is, "Yes." But notice that the belief that universal agreement is the criterion for absolute truth is the essence of relativism. Relativism asserts that nothing is true independent of what the individual or the *group* of individuals happens to think.

By making this argument, your relativist friend assumes what he is trying to prove—namely, that truth is relative. The argument amounts to, "Truth is relative because truth is relative," which is absurd.

**Strategy 3**
***Show that the argument, when it pertains to morality, falsely assumes the difference is in moral principles rather than perception of the facts.***

Your third strategy is applied to the argument as it is used for proving *moral* relativism: the view that no *moral* truths are absolute. The reason for this belief is the diversity that exists among cultures when it comes to moral practices. The key to this strategy is showing that most of the time the diversity among cultures is *not* in moral principles but in the perception of the facts.

To use an example from Francis Beckwith and Gregory Koukl's book *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air*, in India it's immoral to eat cows. In America we eat cows (Is a big juicy steak flooding your imagination right now?). At first glance it would seem we have conflicting moral principles, but in reality it's merely a difference in our perception of the facts. In India they don't eat the cow because it might be grandma reincarnate working out her karma. In America we know it's not grandma. So the moral principle is the same, don't eat grandma, but our understanding of the facts is different.

Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli dispute the idea that cultures differ in moral principles in this way:

> [E]ven opinions about right and wrong are not wholly relative to cultures. No culture ever existed which taught a *totally* different set of values. For example, honesty, justice, courage, cooperation, wisdom, self-control, and hope were never all thought to be evil, and lying, theft, murder, rape, cowardice, folly, addiction, despair, and selfishness were never all thought to be good.[11]

Once you show that the diversity among cultures is not really in moral principles but in perception of the facts, then the obstacle of differing moral beliefs disappears.

**STRATEGY SUMMARY**

- **Strategy #1:** Show that the argument from differing beliefs is a *non sequitur* (it doesn't follow).
  - We wouldn't apply the same logic when it comes to other things that people disagree on (e.g., shape of the earth, mirage on road).

- **Strategy #2:** Show that the argument from differing beliefs begs the question.
  - The argument turns out to be saying, "Truth is relative because truth is relative."

- **Strategy #3:** Show that the argument, as it pertains to morality, fails to see how the apparent moral differences are not differences in moral principles but in a perception of the facts.
  - America may disagree with those in India about the morality of eating cows, but the diversity is due to a different perception of the facts: whether the cow is grandma or not. We both still believe it's wrong to eat grandma.

**DEFINITIONS**

***Non Sequitur*** – the Latin phrase for "it does not follow" and the name for a logical fallacy in which the conclusion doesn't follow from the premise.

**Begging the Question** – a form of logical fallacy in which a statement or claim is assumed to be true without evidence other than the statement or claim itself.

**Karma** – means "act" or "action" and refers to the law of cause and effect that works itself out deterministically, governing the whole of man's existence.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Why does the conclusion, "No absolute truth," not follow from the premise, "People differ in their beliefs?"

2. How does the argument from differing beliefs beg the question?

3. What do moral relativists often fail to see when they argue that cultures differ in their morality?

# CHAPTER FIVE
# Countering the Argument from Tolerance

In Episode III of the *Star Wars* saga, *The Revenge of the Sith,* Obi Wan Kenobi says, "Only a Sith deals in absolutes." This was in response to Anakin's ultimatum, "If you're not with me, then you're my enemy." Notice the implications of Obi Wan's statement—if you believe in absolutes, you're a bad guy; if you believe in no absolutes (relativism), you're a good guy.

This is the sort of tact used by the enemies of truth in our current culture. They argue that anyone who believes in absolute truth is a bad guy because they're intolerant. "We should accept everyone's opinions as equally valid," say the relativists, "and since you absolutists don't, you're intolerant."

This push has had its success. Take for example a young woman from the video mentioned in the Introduction, "College Kids Say the Darndest Things." In response to the question of why she thought it was okay for a white 5'9'' male to claim to be a 6'5'' Chinese woman, she said, "I feel like that's not my place, as like, another human to say someone is wrong or to draw lines or boundaries."

The charge of intolerance is a major obstacle that stands in the way of someone accepting the reality of objective truth. No one desires to be labeled as a bad guy. No one wants to be charged with siding with the dark side.

How do we respond? I think there are three ways.

**Strategy 1**
***Show that the argument from tolerance is self-defeating for a relativist.***

You can show that the argument from tolerance is self-defeating for a relativist in two ways. First, it implies an absolute truth. Ask your relativist friend this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Is it absolutely true that we should be tolerant?"

If your relativist friend wants to stick with his argument, he has to answer yes. But notice this answer implies there is at least one absolute truth—namely, everyone ought to be tolerant.

Point out to your friend that objective truths cannot exist within the mental framework of relativism. Ask your friend,

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "How can you believe that it's absolutely true that we should be tolerant when your relativistic worldview doesn't allow for absolutes?"

Once you get your relativist friend in this position, then you can challenge him to make a choice: either give up relativism for the sake of tolerance or reject the objective good of tolerance in order to keep relativism. Your relativist friend can't have it both ways.

The second way this argument is self-defeating for the relativist is it undermines tolerance itself. To show how, you can begin by asking these questions:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "What if an individual, or group of individuals, believes intolerance is a good thing? What if someone claims, 'For me and for my culture, it's morally good to be intolerant of anyone

who disagrees with us and coerce them into believing what we believe?' Should we say his view is okay?"

Remind your friend that relativism holds that a belief is true if it corresponds to the set of beliefs of an individual or a society. Since this individual (and his society) believes it's okay to be intolerant, and relativism says whatever he thinks is true is true for him, then we would have to say that his belief that intolerance is a good thing is true for him and shouldn't be criticized. Ask you friend the following question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "How can relativism promote tolerance when its mental framework allows for the acceptance of an individual's belief that intolerance is a good thing?"

Notice how relativism doesn't promote tolerance—it actually works against it. The relativist thinks relativism is the guardian of tolerance, but it turns out relativism is tolerance's undertaker.

**WARNING:** A culture that embraces relativism is fertile soil for a tyrant to rear his ugly head. It is a green light to begin the tyranny.

**Strategy 2**
***Expose the relativist's misunderstanding of tolerance.***

You can start your second strategy by getting your relativist friend to express what *he* means by tolerance with the following question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Are you saying that absolutists are intolerant for saying someone's belief is wrong and that in order to be tolerant we must accept everyone's beliefs equally?"

Your relativist friend has to answer "Yes" if he is to hold to his argument.

You are now in a position to point out that this is a misunderstanding of tolerance. Tolerance doesn't mean we must accept everyone's beliefs as equal and valid. Tolerance is respecting a person's freedom to hold to his belief *even when you think he is wrong*. Ask your friend this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "How can absolutists be intolerant for saying someone is wrong when believing someone is wrong necessarily belongs to the essence of tolerance?"

The relativist who espouses this argument simply misunderstands tolerance.

Making clear the true understanding of tolerance is important because your relativist friend probably thinks absolutists are prone to coerce people into believing something they think is wrong. This is possibly why so many relativists make the argument from tolerance.

But nothing could be further from the truth. It is not belief in absolute truth per se that leads to the violation of a person's freedom; rather, it is a misapprehension of the truth about the dignity of a human being. The belief that someone should be able to have his own opinion without the threat of coercion is something most absolutists agree with, especially those of the Christian stripe.

**Strategy 3**
***Show how the relativist is inconsistent in applying his understanding of tolerance.***

Your third strategy shows how the relativist is inconsistent with his argument. Even if for argument's sake we

grant tolerance to mean, "You can't tell someone they're wrong," your relativist friend would not be applying the principle to himself. Ask your friend this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Am I wrong for believing other people's beliefs are wrong?"

For your friend to be consistent with his argument, he has to answer yes. But if he says, "Yes," then *he would be implying that you are wrong*, doing the very thing he said no one should do. To make this clear, ask your friend this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Why is it that *I* can't say someone's belief is wrong, but yet when I say we can judge people's beliefs to be erroneous, *you* say I'm wrong? Aren't you failing to abide by your own rule?"

Point out to your friend that if he thinks intolerance means saying someone's belief is wrong, then he would be intolerant for saying you can't say someone's belief is wrong. The relativist ends up embracing the very thing he despises: intolerance.

**STRATEGY SUMMARY**

- **Strategy #1:** Show that the argument from tolerance is self-defeating for a relativist.
  - It implies at least one absolute truth—namely, one should be tolerant and not intolerant.
  - Relativism undermines tolerance by allowing intolerance to be an accepted belief within an individual's belief system.

- **Strategy #2:** Expose the relativist's misunderstanding of tolerance.
  - Tolerance does not mean we must accept everyone's beliefs as equal and valid. It means we respect a person's freedom to hold their belief even though we think their belief is wrong.

- **Strategy #3:** Show how the relativist is inconsistent in applying his understanding of tolerance.
  - The relativist thinks intolerance means, "You can't tell someone they're wrong," but yet says the absolutist is wrong for saying, "It's okay to tell people their beliefs are wrong."

**DEFINITIONS**

**Tolerance –** the willingness to allow people to believe things you think is wrong. It is righteous when such opposing beliefs pose no threat to the dignity of human beings. It is unrighteous when it permits acts that violate the good of an individual and/or the common good of humanity.

**Intolerance –** the unwillingness to allow people to believe things you think is wrong. It is unrighteous when the dignity of a human being is violated. It is righteous when it leads to the prohibition of actions that violate the good of an individual and/or the common good of humanity.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. What are the two ways in which relativism is self-defeating for a relativist?

2. How does this argument misunderstand the meaning of tolerance?

3. How is the relativist being inconsistent when he makes this argument from tolerance?

# CHAPTER SIX
# Countering the "Believe But Do No Harm" Argument

Once the arguments in the previous chapters have been refuted, your relativist friend may try to salvage his position and say, "As long as a person doesn't harm someone, he should be able to believe what he wants." This is yet another argument you'll find in the FPIW video mentioned in the Introduction to this booklet.

What can we say to this? There are four simple strategies.

**Strategy 1**
***Show that the argument is self-defeating for a relativist.***

Your first strategy follows the same line of reasoning as strategy one in the previous chapter. It shows how the relativist undermines his relativism in making the argument. You can begin by asking this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Is it absolutely true that we *ought not* to cause unnecessary harm?"

In order to be consistent with his argument, your relativist friend has to answer yes. But notice that if he answers yes, that implies there is at least one absolute truth—namely, everyone *ought not* to cause unnecessary harm.

Like you did in the previous chapter, remind your friend that objective truths cannot exist within the mental framework of relativism. You can ask this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "How can you believe that it's absolutely true that we should not cause unnecessary harm when your relativistic worldview doesn't allow for absolutes?"

This forces your friend to make a choice: either give up relativism for the sake of his belief that we shouldn't cause unnecessary harm or give up his belief that we shouldn't cause unnecessary harm for the sake of keeping his belief in relativism. He can't have it both ways.

**Strategy 2**
***Show that the argument makes unknown immoral behavior okay.***

Your second strategy takes the logic of the argument and applies it to a behavior that your relativist friend most likely acknowledges to be immoral—namely, adultery. Ask your friend this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "If a behavior is morally upright as long as it doesn't hurt anyone, then wouldn't it be okay for a man's wife to cheat on him as long as he doesn't find out about it? If Jack is never harmed by Jill's act of adultery, and such an affair doesn't bring any sort of harm to Bob and his family, then it would seem that Jill's affair would be morally upright according to your argument?"

It is unlikely your relativist friend will be in favor of "monogamish unions," which refers to relationships in which partners allow sexual infidelity provided they are honest about it. However, if he were in favor of such a view, then you would have to employ a whole new set of strategies that deal with sexual ethics as a whole.[12] This goes beyond the scope of this booklet.

You might try another example such as lying. Ask your friend to consider this scenario:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Suppose you discovered that your professor in college was a fraud—the transcripts for his various graduate and doctoral degrees turned out to be fabrications. Yet he taught you and your classmates many things that were true. No harm, no foul, right?"

His argument demands that he answer, "No foul." But I assume he is reasonable enough to see that even this sort of behavior is unethical.

**Strategy 3**
***Explain how the argument doesn't contribute anything to the discussion of whether truth is relative or objective.***

Your third strategy highlights the essence of the argument, which turns out to be something most absolutists already agree with. You can begin with this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Is it true that in making this argument you are saying one should be able to believe what he wants without coercion?"

I think your relativist friend will answer yes since this seems to be the heart of the argument. But this is something most absolutists have no contention with, especially those of the Christian stripe. Belief by coercion is as foreign to Christian teaching as hate is to love.

The real question is "Is truth objective or relative?" This "Believe but do no harm" argument doesn't help answer that question.

**Strategy 4**
***Show how the argument begs the question.***

Your fourth strategy exposes the argument's fallacy of begging the question. Recall begging the question is a logical fallacy where a conclusion is assumed true without evidence other than the statement itself.

To say that we should be able to believe whatever we want as long as we don't cause harm assumes no opinions will cause harm, which in turn presupposes that no opinion is false. But that would mean that objective truth does not exist. For it if it did, then false beliefs would impede our achievement of happiness since we would be made for truth, thus causing us harm.

This is problematic because the assumption that objective truth doesn't exist is the very issue we're debating. The relativist can't assume no absolute truths exist in order to argue that no absolute truths exist. That's called begging the question.

**STRATEGY SUMMARY**

- **Strategy #1:** Show that the argument is self-defeating for a relativist.
  - It implies at least one absolute truth—namely, one ought not to cause unnecessary harm.

- **Strategy #2:** Show that the argument makes unknown immoral behavior okay.
  - Just because a husband doesn't know about his wife's affair, and therefore is not hurt by it, doesn't make his wife's behavior morally upright.

- **Strategy #3:** Explain how the argument doesn't contribute anything to the discussion of whether truth is relative or objective.
  - The reason for the argument is that one should be able to believe what he wants without coercion. This is something Christian absolutists agree with.

- **Strategy #4:** Show how the argument begs the question.
  - The argument assumes that one can believe whatever he wants without harming himself or someone else. But that presupposes that there is no objective truth that humans are made to know, which is the issue at hand.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. How is the "Believe but do no harm" argument self-defeating for a relativist?

2. Can you think of other examples where the logic of this argument would justify behaviors that we all intuitively know are immoral (e.g., adultery with no harm, lying with no harm, etc.)?

3. Why doesn't this argument contribute anything to the discussion of whether truth is objective or relative?

4. How does the argument commit the logical fallacy of begging the question?

# CHAPTER SEVEN
# In Defense of Objective Truth

So far in this booklet we have *critiqued* and *countered* relativism in both its global form and its local form as it pertains to morality. We can now move toward offering some *positive* arguments in defense of the objectivity of truth—both in its general and moral forms.

I will begin in this chapter with a defense of the objectivity of truth in its general form. A defense of the objectivity of moral truth will be provided in Chapter Eight.

It's important to note that strategies one and two below could be employed when critiquing relativism as found in Chapter Two. I decided to save these arguments for the present chapter because they don't critique relativism directly, but indirectly in as much as they defend the objectivity of truth as found in first principles.

Let's begin.

**Strategy 1:**
***Expose the absurdity of denying the objective truth of the first principles of knowledge.***

First principles of knowledge are self-evident principles that are derived from the assertion that "something exists." These principles ground all human knowledge. There are four in all:

1. The Principle of Identity—A thing is what it is; everything is identical with itself (e.g., A is A and not non-A).
2. The Principle of Non-Contradiction—Something cannot both be and not be in the same respect at the same place and time (e.g., A cannot be A and not be A in the same respect).
3. The Principle of Excluded Middle—There is no intermediary between being and non-being (e.g., A is either true or false).
4. The Principle of Sufficient Reason—There is no being, no event, which is without explanation. Whatever exists has a sufficient reason for existing—that is to say, there is something that distinguishes it from nothing (e.g., A is not nothing because of B).

These first principles are *principles* in that they are the source from which something is derived—namely, knowledge. They are *first* in the sense that their intelligibility is present in every judgment, including the first judgment made, chronologically speaking.

They are *self-evident* in that they don't require further demonstration. They neither can be nor need to be proven true in terms of further evidence. For example, it would be nonsensical to talk about justifying these principles in terms of sense perception, induction, or anything else.

Finally, these principles are virtually *innate*, which is to say it belongs to the nature of the mind to be able to recognize the truth of these first principles. As the philosopher Kenneth Gallagher puts it, "Mind would not be mind without this native endowment."[13]

For a relativist to deny the existence of *objective* truth, he fundamentally denies the existence of *any* truth, including these first principles. Whenever a relativist says that there is no truth independent of what an individual or society thinks, he fundamentally means that only beliefs and opinions exist (see Chapter Two).

The statement, "There is no *absolute* truth," reduces to, "There is *no* truth."[14] Truth drops away as a mere fiction.

But if truth is a mere fiction, then there can be no self-evident first principles of knowledge.

If you can show the incoherence of asserting that there are no self-evident first principles of knowledge, then you will have established the existence of objective truth, which in turn refutes relativism. This is what your first strategy entails.

Ask your friend to consider trying to obtain knowledge without a principle that doesn't require further demonstration, i.e., a self-evident principle. Any conclusion put forth would require an infinite series of reasons why that conclusion is true.

For example, the relativist's claim, "There are no self-evident first principles of knowledge" would be true only if A is true. But A would be true only if B is true and B only if C is true, *ad infinitum*.

Notice the search for a true premise upon which the conclusion can rest would never come to an end—it would go on forever. No matter where one stops in the series of reasons, one would always have a reason that can't be known to be true because it relies on an infinite number of other reasons that aren't known to be true. Challenge your friend with this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "If no reason the conclusion depends upon can ever be known to be true, then how can the conclusion, 'There are no self-evident first principles for knowledge,' be known to be true?"

The answer is it can't. This is not something the relativist wants to conclude since it would undermine his denial of first principles being absolutely true, thus undermining his relativism.

A relativist can't deny the necessity of knowledge having a foundation in self-evident first principles without undermining his own relativism. Objective truth, therefore, exists at least in the form of self-evident first principles of reason.

**Strategy 2:**
***Show the absurdity of denying the principle of non-contradiction in particular.***

A while ago after I gave a talk on God and Science, a gentleman engaged me in a conversation in which he expressed his doubt concerning the principle of non-contradiction.

The principle of non-contradiction is one of the self-evident first principles of reason listed above. It states something cannot be and not be in the same respect at the same place and time. Aristotle identified this principle as "the most certain of all principles."[15] In other words, it is the one thing that we know *must* be true.

This strategy shows how a relativist cannot deny the principle of non-contradiction without his speech already betraying him. Point out that a relativist can only speak against the principle if his words have the intended meaning and not the opposite. Ask your friend these questions:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "If you say, 'The principle of non-contradiction is false,' then wouldn't it be true that you must intend the statement to *mean* what it expresses and *not* the opposite—namely, 'The principle of non-contradiction is true'?"

Your friend has to answer yes if he is to be consistent with his argument. If he affirms the opposite, "The principle of non-contradiction is true," then he would be affirming what he initially set out to deny. Now ask your friend,

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "But if you intend to mean what your initial statement expresses and not the opposite, then aren't you presupposing the principle and thus undermining your initial attempt to deny the truth of the principle?"

It is metaphysically impossible to deny the principle of non-contradiction without presupposing it. As such, the denial of the principle of non-contradiction, which a relativist must do to be consistent in his relativism, ultimately ends in self-defeat.

Perhaps your relativist friend could remain silent. Would that save him from the above dilemma? The answer is no, for even *understanding* what is meant by the principle presupposes its truth. The cognitional content must have the intended meaning and not the opposite.

**Strategy 3:**
***Show that the existence of the world outside the mind is an objective truth.***

Something that many relativists don't think about is that to deny the existence of objective truth is to imply that knowledge of the outside world is an illusion. If no objective truth exists, then it might not be true that the person with whom the relativist is arguing is real, but a mere illusion.

Therefore, your third strategy for defending objective truth involves a defense of the reality of the world outside the mind. You can do this in three ways.

First, there is no good reason to think the world outside our minds is not real. The three that are often given are as follows:

1. Because our senses often deceive us, we can't trust their report that an outside world exists.
2. It is possible that our experience of the outside world is a dream.
3. It is possible that our experience of the outside world is an illusion produced by some malignant power.

The appeal to the occasional deception of the *senses* does not succeed. If a man appears small when he is far away, although he is not actually small, it is not a case of the senses deceiving you. Ask your friend this question,

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "How can your senses be deceiving you when they are reporting *exactly* what they perceive—namely, the *appearance* of a small man and then the *appearance* of a tall man?"

In this scenario the sense of sight is reporting *accurately* what it perceives. It relays the appearance of a small man at a distance and then the appearance of a big man when seen close up—that's what you see. As the philosopher D.Q. McInerny writes, "This is the sense of sight functioning just as it should, in order to give me a proper knowledge of distance."[16]

Error comes in *only* if your friend makes the judgment, "That man *is* small and then *becomes* big." Truth and falsity do not reside in sensory perception but in the act of *judging* that perception. Our senses, therefore, do not give us any reason to think the outside world is an illusion.

An appeal to a possible *dream state* doesn't work either. Consider that in order to determine if our current experience is a dream state, we would have to be able to *know* what it means to be dreaming. We would have to be able to *identify* what a dream state is.

But this causes a problem for the one who doubts the objective truth of the outside world—namely, we can't

identify a dream state unless we compare it to our waking consciousness. Ask your friend the following questions:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "How could I know if I'm dreaming unless I know what it means to be awake? But how could I ever know what it means to be awake if my experience of being awake is possibly a dream?"

Notice that to conjecture about whether waking is dreaming is incoherent. If our waking is dreaming, then there is no possible way to even talk of dreaming because we would never know what dreaming or waking is—they both become unintelligible. As the philosopher Kenneth Gallagher explains,

> It would be literally nonsensical to ask: how do I know that waking is not what I ordinarily mean by dreaming, because if it were, I wouldn't know what I ordinarily mean by dreaming.[17]

The thought experiment that considers our awakened state as a dream fails and thus doesn't serve as a good reason to doubt the objectivity of the outside world.

Finally, the Cartesian appeal to a malignant power causing our sensory experiences to be a mere illusion (like in the movie *The Matrix*) fails as well. The reason is because it is self-refuting. Ask your friend these questions:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "If it were true that a malignant being is deceiving us, wouldn't it also be true that whatever soundness your argument has would be just another illusion generated by the malignant being? And if the soundness of your argument is just another illusion, then aren't we wasting our time considering it?"

Notice the objection undermines itself. By making this argument, your friend pulls the rug out from underneath his feet.

This objection from the malignant being, therefore, gives us no good reason to doubt the objectivity of the world outside the mind, thus no good reason to think objective truth doesn't exist.

A second way you can establish the objectivity of the outside world is by pointing out that consciousness necessarily involves both the subject and the object, and thus automatically transcends the self. In other words, knowledge of self presupposes knowledge of the other. Philosophers call this two-part structure of consciousness the "bipolarity of consciousness."

For example, when I look at a tree I am aware that I am a perceiving being. But I am only aware of myself as a perceiving being because I perceive a tree. Self-knowledge and knowledge of the object are indivisible. St. Thomas Aquinas puts it this way:

> For it is manifest that by knowing the intelligible object, [the intellect] understands also its own act of understanding, and by this act knows the intellectual faculty.[18]

It is impossible to divorce consciousness from its directedness or relation to an object. To do so one ends up with a *consciousness of* that is not conscious of anything, which is absurd.

Doubting the objectivity of the outside world is doomed to failure from the beginning because it wrongly views consciousness as a private self instead of openness to reality. If consciousness presupposes the reality of the other, which it does, then objective truth exists—namely, the outside world.

There is yet another way we can defend the objectivity of the outside world. Notice that when one wonders whether he is the only thing that exists, and doubts the objectivity of the outside world, he uses *language* to do the wondering.

The ironic thing is that language is essentially social. It is not a creation of one's private self but is something inherited from a social network whose existence one is trying to doubt. As Gallagher argues, "It is not the property of any particular self but exists on the frontiers of dialogue. It is a phenomenon of dialogue."[19] Challenge your friend with this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "How can the existence of the outside world not be an objective truth when the language used to doubt its existence necessarily presupposes its existence?"

The bottom line is that when one begins to doubt, the "thou" is already given. The language the doubter uses expresses not only his existence but also the existence of the other. Therefore, it is an objective truth that the world outside the mind exists.

**STRATEGY SUMMARY**

- **Strategy #1:** Expose the absurdity of denying the objective truth of the first principles of knowledge.
  - Without self-evident first principles of knowledge, the conclusion "There are no self-evident first principles of knowledge" would rest on an infinite number of reasons that cannot be known to be true.

- **Strategy #2:** Show the absurdity of denying the principle of non-contradiction in particular.
  - It's impossible to deny the principle of non-contradiction without presupposing its truth.

- **Strategy #3:** Show that the existence of the world outside the mind is an objective truth.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Consciousness –** the ability to be aware. It belongs to animals in that they are aware of their surroundings. Humans are conscious as animals are, but in a superior way. A dog may be aware of the tree it sees, but it is not aware of it *as a tree*. Humans, on the other hand, are aware of the particular tree he sees, but are aware of it in light of the *nature* or *essence* of a tree. Moreover, humans have self-awareness—that is to say, they are aware of themselves *as human beings*.

**First Principle of Knowledge –** the source from which all knowledge is derived.

**Cartesian Malignant Power –** a hypothetical evil being proposed by seventeenth-century philosopher René Descartes that may be causing our experience of the outside world to be an illusion.

**Bipolarity of Consciousness –** the idea that one cannot be conscious of self as a thinking being without being conscious of something outside itself.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Why must there exist self-evident first principles of knowledge?

2. Why is it impossible to deny the truth of the principle of non-contradiction?

3. Why does the appeal to the occasional apparent deception of the senses not give one good reason to think the outside world is not real?

4. Why does the appeal to a possible dream state fail in justifying belief that the world outside the mind is not real?

5. Why is the appeal to the Cartesian malignant power unsuccessful in giving one reasons to doubt the objective truth that the outside world exists?

# CHAPTER EIGHT
# In Defense of Objective *Moral* Truth

In our previous chapter we looked at ways we can defend objective truth in its general form. Objective *moral* truth will be the topic for our consideration in this chapter.

The objective moral system that I lay out in this chapter in the place of moral relativism is only a sketch. Nevertheless, it is a necessary sketch. For a detailed explanation of this moral account, see Edward Feser's *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide,* Chapter Five.

The Catholic Church is often ridiculed when it comes to moral teachings. Whether it's Church teaching on contraception, so-called "same sex marriage," the acting out of transgender ideologies, homosexual acts, or abortion, popular culture tends to view the Church as some evil tyrant trying to tell people what to do with their lives.

What amazes me, though, is how little the Church's critics understand *why* the Church teaches such things. They fail to realize that behind the Church's teachings about which *specific* acts are right or wrong is the *general* standard of determining what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate *human* behavior, which in turn rests on an understanding of what constitutes the good and the bad.

This chapter will depart from our standard form of listing different strategies and will proceed by way of steps.

**Step 1**
***Show how when we speak of "good" and "bad" we necessarily refer to the nature or essence of a thing.***

You can begin by asking your friend to consider a simple example. Let's say we have two triangles: one drawn on the back of a cracked seat on a moving bus and the other drawn with a straight edge on a piece of paper at a stationary desk. Ask your friend,

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Which do you think is a *good* example of a triangle?"

Obviously the good triangle would be the one drawn with a straight edge on a piece of paper at the desk. But we have to ask, "Why?" You can lead your friend to the answer with this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Isn't it true that the triangle drawn with a straight edge instantiates *triangularity* better than the one drawn on the cracked bus seat—that is to say, it best represents what a triangle is supposed to be?"

Notice that in determining which triangle is good and which is bad, we implicitly compare each to *what* a triangle is—its essence or nature.

Consider now an oak tree. Let's say we have one oak tree that has strong roots and sinks its roots deep into the ground, and the other has weak roots and doesn't sink its roots deep into the ground. Ask your friend,

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Which one is the good oak tree? Which one is the bad?"

Obviously the former is the good oak tree since it *does* what an oak tree is supposed to do *given its nature*—that is to say, it achieves the ends its nature directs it toward (e.g., sinking deep roots into the ground, taking in

nutrition, and growing). Notice once again *nature* determines what is a good or bad instance of a thing.

The oak tree's nature also helps us determine what is good and bad *for* the tree. To help your friend see this principle, ask these questions:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "What would happen if we were to spray the tree with poison? Would the oak tree be able to achieve its natural ends of sinking roots deep into the ground, taking in nutrition, and growing?"

I don't think your friend will have a problem seeing that the answer is no. Therefore, we can say that the tree poison is *bad* for the tree *given its nature.* And notice that what is bad for the tree is independent of what you or I think; it is an objective *fact*.

Now ask your friend,

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "By contrast, would the oak tree achieve the ends its nature directs it toward if we water the tree, fertilize it, and allow it to get the light it needs?"

No problem with answering yes to this question. Therefore, we can conclude that water, fertilizer, and light are *good* for the tree. And notice once again our judgment about what is good is independent of what you or I think. What is good for the tree, given its nature, is an objective fact.

So, for living things we appeal to nature not only to determine whether it is a good *instance* of the kind of thing it is but also what is good and bad *for* the thing, given the ends its nature directs it toward.

**Step 2**
***Show how the ends and capacities of human nature determine the "good" and the "bad" for human beings.***

The same reasoning applies to human beings. Human beings have a nature or essence with various capacities and ends, the fulfillment of which is good, and the frustrating of which is bad, as a matter of objective fact.

For example, nature directs us to preserve our own existence. This is something we share with all living things. Nature also directs us to preserving our species through sexual intercourse and rearing children—something we share with animals specifically. Finally, nature directs us to certain ends or goals that are peculiar to us as rational animals—namely, to know the truth about God, live in society, shun ignorance, and avoid harming and offending those whom one has to live with.

Therefore, we can know what is good and bad *for* human beings objectively speaking. Any behavior that facilitates the achievement of these natural ends is considered *good*—that is to say, it will fulfill human nature. Any behavior that frustrates the achievement of these natural ends is considered *bad*—that is to say, it won't bring about human flourishing.

Human nature therefore serves as a standard for what is good and bad behavior for human beings, and it is independent of what you or I think. On this analysis, what is good and bad behavior is an *objective* fact.

The formulation of general moral principles on the basis of human nature's capacities and ends and the systematic working out of their implications is what the Catholic Church has called in her Tradition the *natural law.* Charles Rice, an American legal scholar, defines the natural law as "a set of manufacturer's directions written into our nature so that we can discover through reason how we ought to act."[20]

St. Paul describes this law in Romans 2:14-15 when he reflects on the Gentiles' ability to know God's law without having the benefit of Judeo-Christian revelation:

> When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts.

Since this law is inscribed in human nature, and is accessible by the natural light of human reason, even atheists and agnostics can know and follow at least *some* aspects of the natural law without direct reference to God's existence.

This is why it is appropriate to say that atheists and agnostics can be a good person, at least in *some* respects. Even though the natural law necessarily involves our duties toward God, if an atheist or agnostic is seeking truth earnestly and is not responsible for his failure to see the truth of God's existence, he would not be willfully frustrating his duty to worship God, and thus wouldn't be considered a *bad* person.

**Step 3**
***Show that we intuitively appeal to human nature to evaluate appropriate and inappropriate human behavior.***

The natural moral law is not something foreign to our common human experience. We appeal to human nature to evaluate human behavior all the time. Here are just a few examples that your friend will probably agree with. Begin with this question:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Do you believe slavery is wrong? If so, wouldn't you agree it's wrong because it impedes the exercise of human freedom?"

Your friend shouldn't have a problem with answering yes to both questions. Point out that his evaluation of slavery is based on an appeal to human nature. He recognizes slavery as a violation of human freedom, but freedom is something that belongs to the *nature* of man.

You can also use murder and theft as examples. You could say something like this:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Wouldn't you agree that murder is wrong because it frustrates a person's intrinsic right to life? Isn't it true that theft is wrong because it frustrates a person's right to private ownership of goods and resources?"

Notice that the right to life that murder frustrates and the right to private ownership of goods and resources that theft frustrates are things that belong to man by *nature*. It is man's nature that we appeal to in order to evaluate these behaviors.

We also appeal to human nature when evaluating behaviors that pertain to sex. Take for example *bestiality*, a topic I assume your friend rejects. You can phrase your Socratic question in this way:

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "Isn't it true that when we say bestiality is not appropriate sexual behavior for humans, we are recognizing that such behavior is not conducive to what our sexuality orders us toward—namely, another human person?"

If your friend concedes that our sexuality is at least ordered toward persons and not animals, then point out that such an evaluation is an appeal to the *nature* of our sexual powers.[21]

Another example is rape. We say rape is wrong because one is being *forced* into sexual activity contrary to his or her *will*. The assumption is that consent is necessary for appropriate human sexual behavior.

But notice how such reasoning is premised on the idea that one should not physically impede another from exercising his or her freedom when it comes to sexual behavior. Isn't that an appeal to *human nature*?

We also appeal to human nature when we object to adultery. Even though some may not be able to articulate the reason why adultery is wrong based on natural law theory (it threatens the stable union of husband and wife, which is necessary for the rearing of children that sex brings forth), they intuitively recognize that sexual love is *supposed* to be exclusive.

The appeal to human nature when evaluating human behavior, therefore, is not a foreign concept.

**Step 4**
***Show that it belongs to reason to behave in a way that facilitates the achievement of the ends nature directs us toward.***

St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that the human faculty we call *will* is an intellectual appetite, a tendency to be drawn to the good apprehended by the intellect. Where the sensitive appetites respond to *sensual* goods presented through sense knowledge, the intellectual appetite—will—responds to the good as understood or perceived through intellectual knowledge.

The intellect presents an object (or objects) as a good, and the will responds. You might say the intellect relates to the will like a man relates romantically to a woman. As the man, as a part of his wowing the woman, bestows her with gifts, the intellect "woos" the will by presenting to it objects under the aspect of good—providing it with a *desirable* object.

The good without qualification—not *this* good or *that* good but goodness in general—is the formal object of the will. Just as truth is the ultimate end of the intellect, goodness is the ultimate end of the will. In this we have no choice. The human will is necessarily ordered to universal goodness as "necessity of end"[22]—not "necessity of coercion," which is repugnant to freedom.

Our freedom of choice and self-determination arises when faced with *finite* or *particular* goods. Because finite goods do not express goodness in its universality (totality) but express it only in this or that *particular* mode, and thus exclusive of other goods, the will is not necessitated to them. The will is free to choose among particular goods as means to its end: goodness itself. This is called "freedom of specification."

But whenever the will does choose, it only does so *sub specie boni*—under the aspect of good.[23] The human will cannot choose evil *as* evil.

"But wait a minute," your friend may object. "Humans choose objective evil all the time? What gives?"

It is true humans choose evil things, but the psychological explanation for our being able to do this is that some good is always *perceived*.

Since it belongs to our rational nature to do good and avoid evil,[24] and the good is the achievement of the ends nature directs us toward, the *rational* person will perceive those ends and behave in a way that facilitates their achievement. The person that chooses to behave in a way that frustrates man's natural ends would be acting *irrationally*. And because man is free to behave in either way, he will be either worthy of praise or blame depending on his choice.

So, to the moral skeptic's question "Why should I do what is good?" the answer is, as the philosopher Edward Feser writes, "[B]ecause to be rational just is (in part) to do what is good, to fulfill the ends set for us by nature."[25]

**Step 5**
***Show that God is ultimately necessary to ground the moral obligation to follow the natural law.***

There is a sense in which one can speak of nature as a *proximate* ground of moral obligation. Just as we can study the causal power of things in nature without reference to God, so we can speak of moral obligation without direct reference to God.

As laid out above, we are naturally ordered toward the good. We cannot choose anything unless it is perceived as good in some way. Therefore, what the intellect perceives as good, nature obliges us to choose.

What is truly good is the achievement of the ends that nature directs us toward. Therefore, when the intellect grasps what is truly good for us as human beings, we are obliged by nature to pursue it.

This is the sense in which moral philosophers and theologians talk about nature as the *proximate* ground of moral obligation.[26]

But we must ask, "Whence does human nature come?" Does the order of nature laid out above come from us? In other words, are we the source of our own nature and its design? Of course not! Therefore, no human will can be the ultimate source of our moral obligation. Even if we were the creators of our own human nature, which is absurd, we couldn't morally bind ourselves to live in accord with that nature.

Furthermore, if the order of human nature is not the expression of a supreme intelligence and will beyond human beings, then it would be merely a product of random and chaotic non-rational processes. Ask your friend,

> **SOCRATIC QUESTIONS:** "How could random and chaotic non-rational processes morally bind us who are rational beings?"

It doesn't make sense. The bottom line is that nature has no authority without a rational being behind it. And when worked out philosophically, one arrives at the conclusion that the only rational being that can ultimately ground the existence and order of human nature is God,[27] the being that Aquinas calls *ipsum esse subsistens*—subsistent being itself.[28]

Without God, we're left only with the order of human nature and our own free will to follow it or not. And who's to say we *ought* to follow it? As Thomas Merton writes,

> In the name of whom or what do you ask me to behave? Why should I go to the inconvenience of denying myself the satisfactions I desire in the name of some standard that exists only in your imagination?[29]

Merton recognizes that without God, moral precepts, including the idea that we should follow the natural law, are simply personal moral codes—mere tastes or opinions that are not binding on all people. Such moral preferences would be no more binding than one's preference for chocolate over vanilla ice cream. Thank God, because I prefer vanilla!

Scholars Francis Beckwith and Gregory Koukl describe the unreasonableness of the moral atheist's position:

> A moral atheist is like someone sitting down to dinner who doesn't believe in farmers, ranchers, fishermen,

> or cooks. He believes the food just appears, with no explanation and no sufficient cause. This is silly. Either his meal is an illusion, or someone provided it. In the same way, if morals really exist…then some cause adequate to explain the effect must account for them. God is the most reasonable solution.[30]

Beckwith and Koukl understand that denying God's existence ultimately results in an insufficient explanation for moral obligation. How can the moral law be binding if there is no moral lawgiver behind it that surpasses human authority? The answer is, "It can't!"

There are many atheists and agnostics that we theists could look to and lock arms with in the pursuit of a just and peaceful society. However, only the theist would be consistent in saying that just and peaceful behaviors are morally *obligatory*. One can get away with personal moral codes without God, including following some aspects of the natural law, but not moral obligation.

An atheist and/or agnostic is going to have to make a choice: either give up his atheism and/or agnosticism in order keep moral obligation or give up moral obligation in order to keep his atheism and/or agnosticism. Let's hope your atheist friend will choose the former.

**Conclusion**

It is the natural law that the Catholic Church has always appealed to in defense of her prohibition of certain behaviors. Whether it's contraception, homosexual acts, or abortion, the Church sees in these behaviors a frustration of certain ends our nature directs us toward, and as such they cannot contribute to human flourishing—that is to say, they cannot contribute to authentic human happiness. In this sense they are *bad*. Since the Church is in the business of leading her children to authentic human happiness, it says no to such behaviors.

Rather than being an evil tyrant trying to limit everyone's freedom, the Church is simply trying to be a voice for what it means to be human and how to flourish as one. What's so intolerant about that?

**STEP SUMMARY**

- **Step #1:** Show how when we speak of "good" and "bad" we necessarily refer to the nature or essence of a thing.
  - E.g., the good triangle versus the bad triangle; e.g., the good oak tree versus the bad oak tree.
- **Step #2:** Show how the ends and capacities of human nature determine "good" and "bad" for human beings.
  - Man has certain ends, the achievement of which is good and the frustration of which is bad. The systematic working out of the implications of this order is called the natural law.
- **Step #3:** Show that we intuitively appeal to human nature to evaluate appropriate and inappropriate human behavior.
  - We appeal to human nature when we evaluate slavery, murder, theft, bestiality, rape, adultery, etc.
- **Step #4:** Show that it belongs to reason to behave in a way that facilitates the achievement of the ends nature directs us toward.
  - We are naturally ordered toward the good. The good is the achievement of the ends our nature directs us toward and the avoidance of the frustration of those ends. Therefore, it is reasonable to live according to the good.
- **Step #5:** Show that God is ultimately necessary to ground our moral obligation to follow the natural law.

- God is the source of the existence and order of our human nature. Therefore, he is the ultimate source of our obligation to follow such an order.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Natural Law** – the order of nature that determines what is the human good known by the natural light of human reason.

**Proximate Ground of Moral Obligation** – that which is the *immediate* source of moral obligation.

**Ultimate Ground of Moral Obligation** – that which is fundamentally responsible for the proximate ground of moral obligation.

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. How do we determine if something is good or bad in general?

2. How do we determine what is good and bad for human beings?

3. What sorts of behaviors do we evaluate by intuitively appealing to human nature?

4. Why is the natural law not enough to ground moral obligation?

# CONCLUSION

The late American philosopher Allan Bloom observed, "[T]here is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative."[31]

The FPIW video referenced in the Introduction seems to confirm Professor Bloom's observation. This is cause for alarm because it raises the question, "If those being trained to be the future leaders of our country aren't able to draw a line on an observable reality as simple as someone's height, ethnicity, and gender, how will they discern truths from lies on other issues that matter, such as how we should treat other human beings and even ourselves?" The answer is they won't—at least, not if they continue to espouse relativism.

This is why it's imperative that we work to change the relativistic worldview prevalent in our culture. As Peter Kreeft says, we don't want "just to present a strong case against moral relativism, but to refute it, to unmask it, to strip it naked, to humiliate it, to shame it, to give it the wallop it deserves."[32]

We can rest assured that we have reason on our side in this pursuit because in the end, relativism has no legs to stand on. All of the arguments mentioned in this booklet fail as rational support for relativism and in fact undermine it. I think absolutists, inspired by the language of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:55, can rightly say, "Oh, relativism, where is thy sting?"

# Endnotes

1 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 72.
2 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I:16:2.
3 This division was taken from philosopher Edward Feser's article "The Absolute Truth About Relativism," http://edwardfeser.blogspot.com.
4 See Francis Beckwith and Gregory Koukl, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).
5 Siofra Brennan, "I was born in the wrong species: Woman who says she's a CAT trapped in a human body hisses at dogs, hates water and claims she can even see better at night." Accessed January 27, 2016. http://www.dailymail.co.uk.
6 See Christopher M. Earls and Martin L. Lalumière, "A Case Study of Preferential Bestiality," *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, vol. 38, 605-609. See also P.E. Keck, H.G. Pope, J.I. Hudson, S.L. McElroy, and A.R. Kulick, "Lycanthropy: alive and well in the twentieth century," *Psychological Medicine*, 18 (1988): 113-20 and A.R. Kulick, H.G. Pope Jr., and P.E. Keck, "Lycanthropy and Self-Identification," *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 178: 134–7.
7 David Moye, "Chloe Jennings-White Wants Operation To Be Permanently Disabled," Accessed July 20, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com.
8 See R.C. Smith, "Amputee identity disorder and related paraphilias," *Psychiatry*, 3:27–30.
9 Peter Kreeft, "A Refutation of Moral Relativism—Transcription." http://www.peterkreeft.com.
10 Francis J. Beckwith and Gregory Koukl, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 1998), 64-65.
11 Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions,* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 376.
12 For a refutation of "monogamish unions," see Ryan Anderson, *Truth Overruled: The Future of Marriage and Religious Freedom* (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2015). For a general approach on sexual ethics from the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, see Edward Feser, "In Defense of the Perverted Faculty Argument," *Neo-Scholastic Essays* (South Bend: St. Augustine Press, 2015).
13 Kenneth Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Knowledge* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 137.
14 For a detailed argument that defends this claim, see Edward Feser, "The Absolute Truth About Relativism." http://edwardfeser.blogspot.com.
15 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV.3.
16 D.Q. McInerny, *Epistemology* (Elmhurst: The Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, 2007), 192.
17 Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Knowledge,* 41.
18 Thomas Aquinas, ST, I:14:2-3.
19 Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Knowledge,* 58.
20 Charles Rice, "Chapter One," in *50 Questions on the Natural Law: What It Is and Why We Need It* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), Kindle edition.
21 The ordering of our sexual powers doesn't stop with persons in general. They are specifically ordered toward a person of the opposite sex. Such a topic goes beyond the scope of the argument for which it is being used. For more details on this natural ordering of sex, see Paul Gondreau, "The Natural Law Ordering of Human Sexuality to (Heterosexual) Marriage: Towards a Thomistic Philosophy of the Body," *Nova et Vetera* (2010) 553–92.
22 See Thomas Aquinas, ST, I:82:1.
23 Ibid., I-II:8:1.
24 Ibid., I-II:94:2.
25 Edward Feser, "Chapter Five" in *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide*, (London: One World Publication, 2011), Kindle edition.
26 See Michael Cronin, "Chapter Eight" in *Science of Ethics, Vol. I* (Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, 1930).
27 For proofs that substantiate this claim, see Feser, "Chapter Four" in *Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide*.
28 Aquinas, ST I:4:2.
29 Thomas Merton, *The Ascent to Truth*, 112.
30 Francis Beckwith and Gregory Koukl, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air,* 169.
31 American Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (Simon & Schuster, 2012), 25.
32 Kreeft, "A Refutation of Moral Relativism—Transcription." http://www.peterkreeft.com.

# INTRODUCING CATHOLIC ANSWERS' NEWEST APOLOGIST

Karlo Broussard, a native of Southern Louisiana, left a promising musical career to devote himself full-time to the work of Catholic apologetics. As a staff apologist and speaker for Catholic Answers, he travels the country giving talks on apologetics, the Bible, theology, and philosophy.

Karlo holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in theology and is working on his master's in philosophy. He worked for several years at the Magis Center under nationally known author and philosopher Fr. Robert J. Spitzer, S.J. Karlo is one of the most dynamic and gifted Catholic speakers on the circuit today, communicating with precision of thought, inspiring enthusiasm, and a genuine love for God.

## TALKS

**Defending Truth in a Relativistic Culture**

**Why God Still Matters**

**Is the Jesus Story a Myth?**

**Apologetics for an Age of Unbelief**

**Heaven: A Destiny Worth Living For**

**Miracles: God's Light in the Darkness of Unbelief**

**The Splendor of Hope in the Valley of Tears**

**What Difference Does Jesus Make?**

**Catholicism: The Unabridged Edition of Christianity**

**Reason, Marriage, & Homosexual Unions**

**Science: A Believer's Friend or Foe?**

**Existence Beyond the Grave: Reasons**

**Why There is Life After Death**

**Living Life to the Fullest: A Compass for Human Happiness**

**A Catholic View of the End Times**

**The Eucharist: Symbol or Substantial Presence?**

**Finding True Happiness Through Real Love**

** The talks can be modified for various age groups*

"Karlo is intelligent, on fire, and authentic. I love this dude and can only imagine what would have happened to me if I heard him speak back in my agnostic days. He's the real deal. I'm thankful to almighty God for his service to the Church."

—**Matt Fradd**, Director of Content Strategy at Integrity Restored

**For more talk titles and booking information, call:**

619-387-7200