

Understanding the Ideas that Shape Our World • Part 4

I. INTRODUCTION

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” • Romans 12:2

A. *Modernity*

1. Philosophers & Sociologists often refer to the present era as the *Age of Modernity* or the *Modern Age*.
2. While most people think of the word “modern” as simply referring to that which is *current*, philosophy uses it in a bit different way.
3. *Modernity* refers to a way of thinking & relating to the world that is *thoroughly secular*.
 - a. While the *classical age & classical mind* looked at life from a *transcendent & supernatural* perspective,
 - b. The *modern age & modern mind* relates to life from a *purely naturalistic & materialistic* frame of reference.
4. The person who has been thoroughly influenced by *modernity* is someone who is completely *secularist* in his/her outlook.
 - a. The “here & now” is *all* that matters.
 - b. There’s no God in heaven looking over his shoulder & judging between right & wrong.
 - c. The single criteria to live by is, “What’s best for this moment?”
 - d. “What *means* will achieve the *desired ends*?”

B. *No Fixed Point*

1. In the Modern Age, *because* there’s no transcendent reality, no *fixed*, supernatural point of reference, Modern Man must draw from some *other reference point* when making his decisions.
2. Since there is no Authority above him, he becomes his *own* authority & his choices are made *relative* to his own desires.
3. So – this is our next stop on Understanding the Ideas that Shape Our World: We need to look at the Philosophy of *Relativism*.

II. RELATIVISM

A. *The Example of “Evolution”*

1. When Charles Darwin proposed his theory of evolution he had *no idea* how far reaching & influential it would be.

2. He originally intended it to describe how *life forms* progress from lower complexity to higher & higher complexity over long periods of time.
3. In other words, Darwin conceived of evolution in purely *biological* terms.
4. Many eager supporters latched on to Darwin's theory because it came at a time when *secularism* was frantically looking for a coherent & viable *excuse* for doing away with the supernatural.
 - a. Evolution was precisely what they were looking for;
 - b. A scientific-*sounding* explanation for the emergence of life through purely naturalistic causes.
5. But once the theory of evolution was embraced as a *biological* fact, people began to ask –
 - a. “If life is evolving, doesn't that mean that *society* is also evolving?”
 - b. “And if society is evolving, then that means *all the parts* that make up society are progressing - politics, economics, & religion included.”
6. For the modern mind, evolution is a fact, not just for biology, but for *society*.
 - a. And this means that whatever is *newest is best* while what's *older is deficient* by comparison.
 - b. Why? Because Evolution = Advancement. So the “newer” is automatically *better* than the older.
 - c. The evidence of this *modernist perspective* is all around us.
 - 1) Ever time you see a “New” label on a product or advertisement, it's the reflection of an underlying philosophy of evolution.
 - 2) “New & Improved” was **THE** marketing golden wand for about 20 years until it was simply worn out by advertisers.
 - d. Henry Ford is famous for a couple things.
 - 1) One is *automation*. He perfected the assembly line concept that saw the mass-manufacturing process really take off.
 - 2) The other thing Ford is famous for was his remark made in an interview, “History is bunk.”
 - a) Actually, what he said was “History is *more or less* bunk.”
 - b) Ford perfectly expressed the Modernist's attitude toward

the past.

c) The past wasn't something to learn from or honor.

d) It was something to shun because it was *lesser*, *backward*, something to leave behind as humanity *progresses* into an ever brighter tomorrow.

3) Henry Ford was a *true modern man* who embraced the idea of evolution as it was applied to society.

B. Relativism Begins

1. In the same way that *evolution* began simply as a *biological theory* but was turned into a *social fact* –
2. *Relativity* was turned from a *theory of physics* into another *social fact* called *relativism*.
3. When Einstein proposed his *Theory of General Relativity*, he meant it to apply solely to the realm of Physics.
 - a. It was meant to explain how motion can be observed from different reference points & so is perceived & measured differently.
 - b. If you're sitting inside a moving SUV & bouncing a ball on the floor, the plot of the ball's motion *from your reference point* is a simple line going up & down.
 - c. But if I'm standing on the side of the road, & the side door of the SUV is open so that I too can see the ball, the path the ball takes is a like a wave.
 - d. Different perspectives of observation cause the measurement of motion to *differ*, all *relative* to their reference points.
4. Well, what was done with Evolution was done with Einstein's Theory of Relativity.
 - a. It was reasoned, "If *measuring* motion is *relative* to the reference point of the viewer, why can't we measure other things relatively?"
 - b. And just like that, a theory of physics became a *rule of ethics*.

C. Relativism Defined

1. Relativism is another of the many children of Secularism.
2. In Secularism, since there's no God in heaven, no fixed supernatural reference point, the *only* reference point for evaluating things is man.
3. In Relativism, *self* is the reference point by which choices are

made – all choices.

4. Now, as a way of life, people realize that relativism is unworkable because it would lead to chaos if it was practiced.
 - a. If everyone did *what they wanted* & was answerable to no one, things would quickly spin out of control.
 - b. If you want to see what pure relativism looks like, replay a tape of the Rodney King Verdict riots & the looting & vandalism that took place.

D. Social Relativism

1. So pure relativism has been *moderated* in the Modern Age by a ***Social Relativism*** that makes ***Civil Law*** the reference point, the authority for measuring & judging actions.
2. But here's the problem – The philosophical basis of Civil Law has completely changed between the founding of our Nation & today – and this is yet another reflection of the influence of the Modern Age & Mind.
3. The Founding Fathers built our system of government on the idea of the transcendent & supernatural.
 - a. They drew their ideas of justice & equity from the Christian Worldview.
 - b. Their idea of law was that it was ultimately based on the unchanging truths of God.
4. Listen to the opening words of the Declaration of Independence -
When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them . . .
 - a. By “Laws of nature” they meant, not the *physical laws* that govern the material universe,
 - b. But the Moral & Ethical laws that govern the Creation.
 - c. The signers of the Declaration understood that they possessed certain RIGHTS that had been granted them *by God*, and based their action in separating from England on those God-given rights.
 - d. See how they justified their actions . . .
We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain

unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. --That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed . . .

- e. Don't miss that. The rights people possess are not merely granted by a government; they're delegated by God, and it is the duty of government to protect those rights for all.
5. A few years later when they drafted the Constitution, they merely sought to organize an effective form of government which would accomplish this end – to ensure the just & equal administration of God-given rights to all the citizens of the United States.
6. All civil law was based on the idea of the transcendent & supernatural.
 - a. In fact, when the Constitutional Convention got bogged down in the details of its drafting,
 - b. Some of the members of the convention despaired & talked about going home.
 - c. Benjamin Franklin realized the danger that was being posed to the new nation if the Constitution was not completed & urged the drafters to stay & seek God for wisdom to complete the task.
 - d. Now, Franklin was hardly a Christian. History says he was a Deist.
 - e. Whatever his personal religious faith – being a man of that time and a vital part of the Constitutional Convention, he ***understood*** what they were doing was framing a system of government & civil law based on the supernatural & transcendent.
 - f. Without God's help, it was a vain venture & he reminded them all that day of that fact.
7. Any student of the History of ***American Civil Law*** can tell you that it's based on ***English Common Law***, which is based on the 10 Commandments & Law of Moses.
8. But things have changed dramatically today.
9. Civil Law is no longer based on the transcendent & supernatural. It no longer finds it's reference point and authority to be the unchanging truths of God.
10. Today's courts & judges interpret the law from a ***relative***

- reference point that's purely secular, humanistic, & pragmatic.
11. Consider this: How can a woman walk into an abortion clinic on the due date of her pregnancy & have a legal abortion, yet if she's killed in an automobile accident on the way there, the person who hit her can be convicted of a double homicide?
 - a. Prior to 1973, abortion was *illegal* because life was considered *sacred*, something governed by God.
 - b. But by January 1973, secular humanist pragmatism had so infected the court system of our country the Supreme Court made a ruling that said abortion was a *privacy* issue, not a *life* issue.
 - c. They took what was a *moral wrong*, murder; & made it a legal right. [Later]
 12. When the courts began to rule on pornography crimes, they said pornography had to be deemed illegal & offensive on a, get this – “*community standard*.”
 - a. That meant what's considered pornography in Des Moines, Iowa was not what would be considered pornography in Hollywood, CA.
 - b. The courts are so confused over this relativist definition of pornography that today there's virtually no prosecution of pornography related crimes.
 - c. This week, Adelphia announced they'll be adding ultra-hard core porn to their cable service.
 13. Probably the most graphic evidence of the moving of civil law *away* from a transcendent to a secularist relativist base is the recent events in Alabama with Chief Justice Roy Moore.
 - a. It was all over the news for a couple weeks.
 - b. The monument to the 10 Commandments Moore had set up in the State Courthouse was removed because it was deemed to be a *violation* of the separation of church & state. [Later]
 - c. Moore's argument during the entire debate was that our whole system of civil law is ultimately *based* on the 10 Commandments.
 - d. The removal of the monument, he said, ought to be a wake up call to all Americans about what our modern court system is based on.
 - e. If civil law isn't based on the unchanging standard of a holy &

- righteous God,
- f. Then it's based on the changing whim of man.
 - g. It will be those who **have the power** who make the laws.
 - h. Their reference point will be themselves & justice will be determined by what satisfies their need to take & hold power.
 - i. It will be the day of the Golden Rule – He who has the Gold, makes the Rules.

E. Polls

1. In 2 national surveys conducted by Barna Research, 64% of adults & 83% of teens said truth is **always** relative. [\[1\]](#)
2. Only 22% of adults & 6% of teens claimed a belief in **absolute truth**.
3. Now, as disheartening as this statistic is, those calling themselves Evangelical Christians is a much better figure right?
 - a. Only 32% of Evangelical adults said they believe in absolute truth.
 - b. And among teens, only 9% believed.
4. Clearly the churches of our nation are losing the battle for the mind if the great majority of those who call themselves the followers of Christ don't enthusiastically embrace a belief in Absolute Truth.

F. A Christian Response to Relativism

1. That's a good place for us to move over into a look at **how to respond** to the challenge of relativism.
2. In John 14:6, when replying to Thomas' inquiry about where He was going, Jesus said, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life."**
 - a. Now, you need to know that in Greek, the use of the definite article "the" is **emphatic**.
 - b. It's meant to place the emphasis **on the thing itself**.
 - c. Jesus didn't say He was truth in a generic sense – He said He was **THE** truth – the very thing itself.
 - 1) He was closing the door on any kind of fuzzy thinking that would make Him *a truth*, one of many possible options.
 - 2) He says He is **Truth incarnate**, the very nature & essence of reality.
 - d. The same can be said for His claim to be The way & The life.
 - 1) He is not *a way* or *a life*.

- 2) He isn't just one of many equally viable options we might choose.
- 3) He is THE way to THE life.
- e. In fact, He makes that clear by saying, "No one comes to the Father except THROUGH Me!
3. CS Lewis rightly analyzed Jesus' extraordinary claim by saying we are faced with 1 of 3 options regarding Him.
 - a. Either He is a Liar, a Lunatic, or The Lord!

 - b. He could be a *Liar*.
 - 1) Others have made such grandiose claims, but always to secure themselves some kind of advancement. They hope to profit by the claim.
 - 2) What did Jesus' claim accomplish for Him? A Roman cross & the most agonizing ordeal or all history.
 - 3) At any time, all He had to do was say it was all a joke or misunderstanding & the ordeal of His passion would have been over.
 - 4) He didn't recant. He couldn't!
 - 5) Liars are not known for their moral excellence – but Jesus' enemies could find absolutely nothing to pin on Him as a charge to discredit Him with the people.
 - 6) No, there's no evidence Jesus was a Liar.

 - c. He could have been a *Lunatic*, someone who was mentally deranged.
 - 1) How is it then that His teaching & example have served as the premier inspiration for countless men & women throughout history?
 - 2) A lunatic does not deliver the words of a Sermon on the Mount or confound the brightest minds of the day with theological & philosophical riddles.
 - 3) A lunatic's words do not bring comfort to the distressed & hope to the hopeless.
 - 4) Of all the options regarding Jesus, that He was mentally unstable is the least tenable.

 - d. So, we are left with only one option – He is Lord!
 - 1) What He said is true.
 - 2) He is The Truth.
4. Relativism is a philosophy that actually is *nonsense*. Here's way -

- a. Relativism says that there is no such thing as absolute truth.
- b. It's most often stated this way, "Everything is relative."
- c. Really? If EVERYTHING is relative, then so is that statement!
- d. But the relativist would say the statement "Everything is relative" is *itself* an absolute truth.
- e. You see – relativism is a *self-contradicting idea*.
- f. The assertion of its existence denies it.
- g. Another way to say this is that to assert relativism, you have to begin with an absolute truth, and then use absolute truth to deny its existence.
- h. It's like you saying, "I do not exist."
 - 1) Your statement can only be made IF you exist.
 - 2) Asserting your non-existence on proves the opposite of your assertion.
- i. Every time the relativist says, "Everything's relative" they are in fact proving that absolutes exist & that *relativism is nonsense*.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Me, But Not You!

1. While most people claim relativism when it comes to *personal morality* because it gets them off the guilt-hook,
2. They don't really want *others* to live by a relativist philosophy.
 - a. They want others to *honor* their right to privacy & personal property.
 - b. They want to be able to shut their door at night & not worry about someone breaking in in the middle of the night & taking their stuff.
 - c. They want to be able to park their car in the parking lot at the Mall & not have someone ding the side.
 - d. They want to travel the roadway & not see it covered with litter others have thrown out the window.
 - e. They want others to obey the traffic laws & to observe basic rules of etiquette, like standing in line & waiting your turn.
3. But if a person is going to be a *consistent relativist*, then he/she can say *nothing* when someone cuts in line, runs a stop sign, or tosses a dirty diaper out the window.
4. If there's no God above us, no ultimate judge before whom we

stand, then right & wrong are a fiction & it's a world where *anything goes*.

5. No one really wants to live in a world like that.
 - a. It would be too messy, inconvenient & risky.
 - b. John thinks it's okay if he shades the truth with a client but when his business partner lies to *him* he's outraged.
 - c. Mary shares a juicy bit of gossip about Sharon, but when she finds out Sharon has said the same thing about her, she explodes.
 - d. Mark thinks it's okay to cheat in order to score a few more points but when he gets on the jet to fly across country he expects the pilot to go strictly by the rules.
 - e. Maggie doesn't run the part for the satellite she's responsible for testing through all its diagnostics but when she buys a car, she expects the brakes to be properly calibrated & the cylinder gaps to be precise.
6. Relativism! Let's face it – it's not really a philosophy at all.
7. It's nothing but an immature desire to get away with murder.

B. Anarchy

1. There's a growing movement of people today who have realized the full implications of modernity & have whole-heartedly *embraced* a lifestyle of total moral abandonment. They're known as *anarchists*.
2. They refuse to submit to any rule or law other than their own desires & whims.
3. The Bible describes a period in Israel's history known as the Judges when people lived this way. It was social & moral *chaos*; a time of oppression & cruelty.
4. It's described this way in Judges 17:6 [cf 21:25]
In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.
5. As God & the Christian Worldview are being increasingly rejected as a significant influence in our culture, relativism is becoming more & more the basis for moral & ethical choices.
6. Chaos lurks around the corner not far ahead.

[1] <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=106>