

DISCIPLESPLANET

“Truth, justice and the Post-modern way!”

Mr. Shane Varcoe
1/1/2006



[This paper sets out to look at whether postmodern frameworks and the subsequent denial of absolute truths enable the human psyche to fully develop and reach its full potential, and whether and real justice can be understood, let alone realised in egocentric and self-promoting philosophies attempting to assert ‘relative-truth’ claims]



“Truth, justice and the Post-modern way!”

A truth to die for?

I believe it was Martin Luther King Jnr who said “*Until a man has found something to die for, he cannot really live.*”¹

The difficulty with this proposition in a relativism satiated post-modern age (spawned only from the metaphorical parents of no constraints on the ‘self’ and unprecedented technocratic driven prosperity) is that we have trouble choosing which ‘truth’ to subscribe to.

Many who champion the pluralist or should I say more accurately ‘eclectic’ cause have, in their naïve attempts to minimise ‘offence’ pushed for the ‘protection’ of the idea of culture. In so doing, they believe all ‘cultural’ forms are sacrosanct and any challenge to that proposition is an intolerance that is tantamount to genocide. In this new ‘protected’ space with its oppressive and narrow speech codes gagging all rational debate, they have deluded themselves into believing that they have successfully demolished absolutes, and therefore we have before us a veritable ‘smorgasbord’ of theo/philosophical options – all now equally valid – to choose from.

So what criteria do we use in our selection of this ultimate investment?

In the First World West, with the sociological DNA of comfort, ease, the ‘self’ first, and the aforementioned censure of debate, is any lucidity really possible? Even an impoverished ‘self-enlightenment’ that serves my egoistic yearnings is worth subscribing to - well at least for a while anyway!

Nevertheless, serving ‘self’ remains the key motivational criteria – what will it benefit me? How will I actualise? How will I be fulfilled? How will my agenda, desires and needs be met? And of course...will it make me happy? As long as these outcomes are ‘key selection criteria’ for our path of choice, then we are always able to ‘pick and choose’ from the Kaleidoscope of philosophical thought to customise our own eclectic and very subjective ‘truth’ that suits our personal need.

Ah, but it cannot end here? Reflecting back to our opening proposition/statement by Dr. King; for life to be fully lived, we must find something to be *willing to die for*. So this begs the question, are you willing to die for your newly found and so called ‘relative truth’? If yes, then courage and conviction will eventuate, at least we hope it will. However, what if this newly found ‘truth’ is merely an effigy of our own selfish psycho-social musings, a mere derivation of a bored, self-serving hedonism, attempting to find an ‘existential anchor’ in our new sub-cultural ethos? What then, will we lay down our life in service of this?

What does make sense is that one can find ‘absolute’ or ‘ultimate’ Truth – if its origins are absolute, tangible and conforming with objective reality and consistent with evidence, then there can only ‘ONE’ worthy of our allegiance, can there? After all when one looks seriously at any reasonable epistemological parameters, there is no such thing as ‘relative truth’, truth by its very definition and nature cannot be relative; perspective can be, opinion can be, however for truth to claim itself as such, must be objective, coherent, conforming with reality and ultimately, absolute.

Like all human beings every time we read and/or view data, or participate in an education/learning process, we bring our own perspective, flavour and bias – which is of course normal and acceptable. The way we are, the experiences we have had, filters we developed and traditions we are exposed

“Truth, justice and the Post-modern way!”

to, all contribute to how we ‘see things’. The 20th century diarist and social commentator Anais Nin penned... *‘We don’t see things as they are we see things as we are.’*

However, when it comes to how we educate and influence others, we need to generate as much objectivity as is possible. By objectivity I mean... *“Expressing or dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations”*² (Websters Collegiate Dictionary). This definition makes unequivocally clear the noble goal of objectivity, but is argued against by many post-modernists as naïve and unattainable. So, in its stead we attempt to furnish ourselves with new definitions that will serve our new rearranging of language. The emerging re-interpretation of the word ‘objective’ is now something like... *‘tolerantly accepting all perspectives as equally valid and free from rational scrutiny.’*

Admittedly, time constraints and schedules can sometimes hinder this process of reasonable investigation; however what should not hinder our objectivity is *prejudice*. We need to exercise extra care when it comes to truth, evidence and especially well spun propaganda, particularly in a ‘post-modern’ culture where faculties of reason, logic and analysis are often neglected. These faculties, instead of merely being supplemented, are more often, supplanted by egos, oratory, philosophical opinion, or satirical cynicism and the egocentric and very subjective ‘intuition’ these can create. If unchecked, these can all engender prejudice. Consequently, in this unmonitored information delivery process, people are almost invariably being told ‘what to feel or think’ via many disturbing coercive and often clandestine means, but are not really being taught **‘how to think’!**

The post-modern conundrum is that whilst positing the idea of ‘free’ thought/expression, it does so with the mantra of *‘all things are fair, you must be ‘open-minded’ or else!’* Of course this term ‘open-minded’ seems to have a completely different interpretation in the post-modern context. Under the new ‘speech codes’ this seemingly ‘fair minded’ term, is in fact far from being just that; fair minded.

The intolerance of the new ‘tolerant’!

In this new ambiguous arena of discourse there is only one law...*do not be intolerant!* Of course this word ‘intolerant’ too is subject to a new definition. If you understand the correct use of the word then you would understand that intolerance is being...*unwilling to grant equal freedom of expression especially in religious matters.*³ (Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary) In light of this we then understand that tolerance is only really a virtue if you permit the expression of an opinion, not only that may be different, but even though it may be patently wrong or false. So to be ‘tolerant’ you at least have to have an initial disapproval or objection to a position or proposition that is presented. Now when you do that, and particularly when you hold a superior (by that I mean being more factual, evidential and thought through) position, you are indeed tolerant. Permitting another person to have an opinion and even express it does not, in any legitimate definition of tolerance, negate your right to challenge that position based on facts and truth – yet that seems to be exactly what is being labeled ‘intolerant’. Just a cursory pondering of how a legal system would work if truth was simply defined as *‘a personal opinion passionately held’*, and unassailable by the mere fact that it is ‘your’ opinion and protected by the culture as ‘truth’, because you believe it to be so and no one can challenge that! Quite frankly, and at the risk of becoming incendiary ...**THAT IS INSANE!**

“Truth, justice and the Post-modern way!”

Understand this, there is NO tolerance required (or at least the term is completely redundant) if all parties are equally wrong or false and all consider that ‘opinion’ matters more than truth.

The incredibly insightful Early 20th Century philosopher G.K. Chesterton once stated... *“Tolerance is the only virtue of the man without convictions.”*⁴ That, as they say, ‘hits the nail on the head’. If your position has no weight or bearing on anything, then of course you can have ‘your opinion’, no problems! It starts to get ‘prickly’ when one position asserts itself as superior to another and makes truth claims. It is now, in this evocative place, that the post-modern definition of tolerance is wielded and with great intolerance, I might add. It does so in a misguided attempt to ‘protect’ the existential musings of an individual or group of people regardless of facts, truth and the best outcomes these can discover. It is all posited on the idea that anyone who challenges or criticises an existential position is ‘closed minded’ and remember the new untouchable and specious mantra is to be ‘open-minded’ (whatever that means?)

But we cannot just leave it there. If any epistemological integrity is to exist we must look at this rationally and logically; to be truly ‘open minded’ you must believe, not only in the idea that everyone has a right to be heard, but much more, that actual ‘truth’ can be found. If objective and absolute truth *cannot* be found then ‘epistemological relativism’ is fine and any assertion about absolutes becomes not only inappropriate, but pointless. In this subjective space everything goes; EVERYTHING and ANYTHING.

The upshot of this is an inadvertent attempt to bury thorough investigation and even debate under the illegitimate and insidious assumption of the minimising of supposed ‘cultural offence’, creating a specious framework where we believe everyone gets to be right. Postmodernism in this context promulgates, whether deliberately or not, a censoring of debate, a stifling of truth and manufacturing of coerced consensus. However, if objective truth can and must be found, and the evidence overwhelmingly supports that this is indeed be so (if no other reason but justice), then the people who refuse to investigate fully and prevent others from doing so are in fact the **‘dogmatic and intolerant’ ones**.

In this oppressive space ‘open-mindedness’ means... *‘You have the right to agree with me, but if you don’t, you have the right to shut up!’* So much for liberty!

Culture and the asphyxiation of truth!

I’d like to draw an analogy if I may... If Wisdom and Knowledge are meat and drink for the mind, then I would like to posit that it is Truth that is the metaphorical ‘air’ the mind breathes.

In Jon Krakauer’s book INTO THIN AIR⁵ (later film) the author gives an account of an ill-fated Everest ascent in 1996, one that was tragic on a number of levels.

In one fateful event one of the leaders Andy Harris broke one of the team’s key rules – staying on the peak past deadlines. A brief account is as follows... Andy, on his descent became in desperate need of oxygen. He radioed to the base camp informing them of his difficulties and that he had come upon a stash of oxygen bottles left behind by others, all empty, well so Andy believed. However, this was not so, in fact they were full and left for that very purpose.

“Truth, justice and the Post-modern way!”

The base camp pleaded with Andy to use the bottles, but he was convinced they were empty. The tragic irony is that the very thing he needed, not only to survive but fully function, was in his hand, but its absence in his brain made him unable to recognise, appreciate and partake of it.

I would like to suggest that it is current perception of ‘culture’ both personal and collective, that will wage war against the metaphorical ‘air’ our minds need to be free – Truth. When reason, logic, historicity, cohesion and fact are suffocated by ‘tradition’, ‘ceremony’, ‘cultural speech codes’, heavily fortified and manufactured pop-culture consensus, myth disguised as anecdote and familial ties, it becomes almost impossible for Truth not to be asphyxiated.

We can hold Truth in our hand but believe it of no value, because the mind has been breathing the ‘carbon monoxide’ of Human existentialism and not the Creator’s counsel.

Ravi Zacharias (leading Academic and globally sought after lecturer) once commented that *‘in the latter days the greatest conflagration of our time will not be over territory, wealth or even religion, but culture.’* (Zacharias,1990)⁶

Justice, ‘rightness’ and absolutes!

Justice, ‘rightness’ and absolutes!
Aristotle believed that *“Justice is the cornerstone of all ethics”*. In other words, justice is an absolute imperative in ensuring ethics not only ‘hold together’, but ‘hold up’. The renowned British statesman Benjamin Disraeli once declared that *‘Justice is truth in action!’* If you add to that what Eric Pement of JPUSA penned... *‘There can be no justice without truth and there can be no truth without absolutes!’*⁷ Then you have a clear framework by which justice can not only be understood, but more appropriately dispensed. It follows that, without absolutes, both truth and, consequentially, justice, will fail. What we are at risk of having in their stead is what Os Guinness declared most succinctly... *“Without Truth all you have left is manipulation.”*⁸ And it is abundantly clear that this is very much the reality in social and even legal arenas.

Who then is best at manipulation, not truth, gets ‘justice’!

If these statements are in anyway accurate (and evidence is mounting that it is so) then we are faced with a serious problem in our current postmodern arena of thought. Why? Because ‘justice’, the universal cry of all hearts believed to be unjustly treated, cannot be delivered in a ‘relativist’ environment. For justice to be dispensed it must be the product of and founded on truth, but as we see for truth to be such, it must be predicated on absolutes.

Clive Lewis takes the notion of absolutes into an even wider societal scope in his essay, *The Abolition of Man* which following quote also questions the ill-advised convention of relativism and the need to define and hold to objective absolutes. *“A dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery.”* The potential reality of these states is becoming more apparent as we struggle to hold our collective societal balance on the grossly inadequate ‘foundations’ of relativism. Tyranny and slavery (the metaphorical children of confusion and chaos spawned manipulation) are not far from being birthed when society has been lead into libertine driven, rights claiming egoism that is the abandoning of absolute truth.

Ravi Zacharias defines truth as follows. *“A property assigned to an assertion, which corresponds with reality as it is.”*⁹ (Zacharias, 2003) This property and assertion must be truth, must be so for all people

“Truth, justice and the Post-modern way!”

at all times. However, who is it that ‘puts legs’ on this thing? Who is it that determines ultimate absolutes; Man? Which human being or group could be trusted or believed to produce such a thing?

In our often reason bereft postmodern culture, ‘justice’ is now dispensed on subjective terms, because claims for ‘justice’ often now issue from subjective pursuits. Once ‘truth’ is hijacked by subjective perspectives, demands, needs (and even moods, tastes and urges) and the use of manipulation as one primary key for success, then the way ‘justice’ is determined and then dispensed must follow a similar path and to any objective idea of justice, it will be disastrous.

Again, prominent academic and scholar Ravi Zacharias in his essay *Dying belief and still born hopes*, presents the following challenge...

History is replete with examples of unscrutinised cultural trends that were uncritically accepted and effectuated dramatic changes of national import. And all social analysts agree that there has never been a time as our present when such bold-faced positions are espoused, and such carriers of change prevail. When he was asked why the universe existed Bertrand Russell said “it’s just there.” The appropriate response to that is to remind Mr. Russell that the question was not one of the existence or non-existence of the universe, but the ‘why’ of its existence. The same applies to every culture. It is not sufficient to say. “This is just so” when the inquiring mind demands the rationale for its behaviour. Culture cannot be dismissed with a “just there” attitude. Cultures have a purpose and in the whirlwind of possibilities that confront society, reason dictates that we find justification for the way we think, beyond merely existing and choosing.¹⁰

We must ask again, what is the rationale, what are the reasons why laws, statues, virtues and precepts existed in the first place and on what are they predicated. If they are merely subject to the whim of capricious humanity that does not seek truth, and driven only by one’s own selfish ‘felt needs’ then our basis for locating justice is further eroded.

Identity’ and the victim posture!

This draws us into an even scarier space. If truth without absolutes is not truth at all, merely venerated opinion, then my ‘right’ for opinion validation (not merely expression) becomes sacrosanct, thus truth in any objective form is relegated to the *basement* of cultural consideration.

So now in this very subjective space when it comes to ‘getting justice’ we are often best served to portray ourselves as **victims or targets**, especially if our personal subjective world view is encroached upon by that which does not validate or affirm our ‘perspective’. In this myopic state we all seek justice for the ‘victim’ in us. The victim mindset couched in the egocentric musings of ‘what about me and mine?’ But what (if anything) deals with the perpetrator in us? For the most part, in our cloistered bastion of self-approval, we see no error issuing from us, merely the expression of my opinion or identity, which regardless of origins or outcomes, is beyond reproach simply because it’s ‘who I am’. If there is no objective and absolute measure for humanity that is not derived from subjective humanity, then we will never really see where we may (if at all) be wrong, only what wrong we believe has been done to us and our ‘identity’!



“Truth, justice and the Post-modern way!”

The following is a point by point construct for *injustice*.

- Firstly, deny the existence or at the very least, origin of any supra-cultural authoritative source for truth
- Then you can either ignore or then more easily manipulate any legitimate epistemological ethical integrity so you can dismiss, remove, or deconstruct absolutes and truth.
- Then you can impugn the clear boundaries such legitimate frameworks produce.
- Introduce ‘relativism’ – ‘Truth’ is then redefined in subjective space for egocentric purposes and then protected by postmodern speech codes, all attempting to ‘gag’ investigation and debate.
- Focus then shifts from fixed objective absolutes that have generated positive behavioural expectations and moved it toward subjective forms of personal preferences and then other subsequent ‘personal’ options.
- In this new specious arena, freedom is also redefined and becomes about ‘*my right to exercise what is best for me*’. The option of choice is, of course, both reasonable and fair, but the problem that Truth based absolutes present us is that they have so clearly defined ‘best practices or options’. So, in this light of best practice, to choose less than the best option is to choose poorly. Now under a scrutiny that diminishes my subjective values and causes (by simple logic and reason) to have a judgment of ‘inadequacy’, or worse, ‘error’, placed on my choice is perceived by the relativist, as ‘unfair to *me*’.
- ‘Unfair’ now comes the new ‘unjust’! Definitions and meanings change to suit personal agendas.
- The one under scrutiny must then defend, if they wish to salvage some semblance of spurious ‘self-esteem’. How can an individual sanitise a poor choice in the light of obvious error? One has to shift the emphasis from behaviour and outcomes to ‘identity’. When I do this I open up a new playing field where the ‘referee’ of Absolute Truth is banned. In this new game arena, the ‘I’ makes the rules because choice is not made on the basis of the objective best, rather on subjective need or urge! What is of greater benefit in galvanizing and santising this new subjective conduct is to couch it all in the context of ‘*identity expression*’ – it then becomes to both social manipulator or naïve subjectivist, no longer believed to be about behaviour - the ‘**how**’ I am. Now it is viewed as an ‘attack’ upon the manifestation of ***who I am!***
- Once here, any challenge of ‘choice’ is seen as an attack on the *PERSON*, not the product of behaviour. And to attack the ‘identity’ (no matter how it is formed) in the culture of ‘deified opinion’, is inconsumable and censorship is swift and ruthless, all under the guise of confronting political correctness’ greatest sin; ‘***intolerance***’.
- Once ‘branded’ intolerant, then the label brings with it a sentence tantamount to that worthy of murderer. The fear of such a label is now so great, and ‘identity expression’ so



“Truth, justice and the Post-modern way!”

enerated, that all challenges are muted – Wolah! A huge nail in the coffin of ‘absolute truth’ – well so we are ‘forced’ to believe. Fear of censure, ridicule and labeling all ensure that those wanting to see truth discovered, are silenced or marginalised. (This smacks of intolerance to any objective view.)

- Now that objectivity has been marginalised, if not eliminated, justice enters a new labyrinth of legislated egocentricity. In this new ‘game’ of self-actualisation; *freedom* is then at the very real risk of becoming a vehicle of harm, rather than help, and not only for the unwitting egocentric, but for all those around them. It would be well for us to recall the words of Social Commentator and Academic, Martin Robinson ... *“It is not freedom by itself that gives dignity, since freedom can be used to demean or degrade humanity. Freedom and the intent to choose the **good** constitutes that which bestows dignity.”*¹¹ (Robinson 1994) But who is it, in this now incredibly dysfunctional arena, gets to say what is ‘good’?
- Finally, outside absolute truth, with choice and subsequent behavioural outcomes subject only to the un-refereed game of self-actualised identity, we must spend inordinate energy setting up convoluted humanist protections of the ‘identity’ driven ‘choices/rights’ of every single ‘nuance’ that an individual believes part of their identity. We need to be cognitively and culturally clever at conjuring ways to protect our new definition of ‘freedom’, regardless of how much censorship, intolerance, intimidation and oppression we must use to maintain it. It takes no imagination to see the frightening end this unchecked process will produce.

It is finally here in this place that we have what Os Guinness mused nearly 20 years ago... *“Justice is no longer about justice, it’s now only about JUST US!”*¹²

© 2006, Shane W. Varcoe

Mr. Shane Varcoe
B.Min (p); Dip Min; A.C.R.A.C.S.
Executive Director, Dalgarno Institute
Chaplain
Affective Domain Educator
Author

Endnotes

¹, Dr Luther-King Jnr, Martin

² & ³ Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary - Encyclopedia Britannica 2006 Deluxe Edition CD/DVD ROM Version
2006.01.00.000000000



“Truth, justice and the Post-modern way!”

⁴ **Chesterton, G.K.**, http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/g_k_chesterton/quotes

⁵ Krakauer, Jon 1996 (187-88) **'Into Thin Air'**, Villard Books, New York

⁶ Zacharias, Ravi, 1990 (pp) - **“Jesus among others gods”** – W Publishing Group, division of Thomas Nelson. Tennessee

⁷ **Pement, Eric** – © 1995 Cornerstone Magazine - JPUSA

⁸ **Differences Make a Difference** from *Time for Truth: Living Free in a World of Lies, Hype & Spin* by **Guiness, Os** <http://www.mtio.com/articles/bissar20.htm> Used by permission of Baker Book House Company, copyright 2000

⁹ Zacharias, R, pp 99, © 2003 – **Recapture the Wonder**, Integrity Publishers, Brentwood Tennessee

¹⁰ Zacharias. R – essay **'dying beliefs and stillborn hopes'** www.rzim.org/resources/essay_arttest.php?id=16

¹¹ Robinson, Martin, pp 123. © 1994 **'The Faith of the Unbeliever'**, Monarch Publications, East Sussex, Great Britain

¹² Guinness, Os – Taken from notes quoted at Leadership lecture 1992 Apostolic Leadership Training Day