**Golden Relativities**

So often in our society we hear suggestions that if you have a strong opinion that is different from someone else’s, you may be right for you, but you can’t say it’s *actually* right. It’s all relative, really, there is no right and wrong or black and white. It’s all circumstantial. This is moral relativism.

In Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* the characters repeatedly state that such and such a philosopher (Dr. Simon Pritchett) has *irrefutably* proven that there are no absolutes. The men who laud this dogma personify, to Rand, the ultimate evil. If we ignore the obvious contradiction in this statement and agree to move on for the moment, we can see the evil it represents, and the place it has in our own society today. Ultimate Evil: This is moral relativism.

G.K. Chesterton has characterized this as a complete perversion of the virtue of humility. He says that we’re a bunch of wimps who hide behind the virtue and use it as an excuse to escape having opinions, in case we could be wrong, or—heaven forbid—people stop liking us. Humility is supposed to mean we *know* what is right and just and true, and are aware of how far we have to go to get there, as well as what help we need. Alas, it has come to mean that we *cannot* know what is right and just and true; if you think you do, can, or should, you are the most prideful of men. Again: no absolutes. Perverted virtues: This is moral relativism.

In his book, *Modern Times,* British historian Paul Johnson claims that the cause of all our modern problems is the growing popularity of moral relativism. But Johnson describes relativism in a new and interesting way. He doesn’t just condemn the people who say you can’t know as moral relativists. His list of notorious moral relativists includes Gandhi, along with a long list of “evil dictators” such as Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, Mao, Castro, and on and on. These men, good or bad, were none of them lukewarm fence-sitters. Each stood, quite firmly, for some great and specific cause. So what does he mean by relative? They clearly accept an absolute. And that’s the twist: moral relativism does not mean that you have no principles or virtues; it means that you exalt one principle or virtue above all the rest and claim it as the *only* important one. So Lenin, for example, was a relativist not because his philosophy said nothing is absolute, but because it said patriotism was the *only* absolute, which turned into a complete loyalty to the state, above all else. You can do the same for all the other men listed. One virtue at the expense of all others is moral relativism.

In *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle teaches the golden mean, which says that there is some perfect balance between two extremes. The extremes are themselves vices, but when you find the golden mean between (and a little above) them, you find the perfect virtue. For example, the mean between and above rashness and cowardice is courage. Between stinginess and wastefulness is generosity. Between obsequiousness and quarrelsomeness is friendliness. And the list goes on. He makes two significant points with this. 1-You have to consider that there are multiple virtues, all of which matter—you have to find the perfect balance of how each virtue applies to your situation; and 2-there is simply no golden mean between virtue and vice, only between extreme and extreme—the best thing between adultery and no adultery is not *some* adultery, it’s none.

I don’t mean to say that we can have one idea of what is true—one checklist of right and wrong—and then chase people around whacking them with a shovel every time they do “wrong,” in fact, I suspect that would be taking the virtue of conviction to the extreme of crazy-shovel-whacking-villain-of-doom—you may call this obsessive zealotry.

The point is this: the main problem with the Simon Pritchetts of the world is that they *do* ignore the obvious contradiction in their creed—they try to claim, absolutely, that there are no absolutes. They want to have one virtue (respect for the opinions of others, perhaps), and use it to say no others are significant. This is moral relativism, and it is absolutely evil. Using, twisting, maiming the good to fit your purpose is obviously an extreme—a bad one. be humble enough to find the good, the real good, the *whole* good, and give your life to it, don’t try to make the good give *its* life for you.

AUDIENCE: PEOPLE WHO PLAN TO STAND FOR SOMETHING.