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(1) M.A. Program in Philosophy of Religion; (2) B.A. in Apologetics; (3) Certificate in Apologetics:
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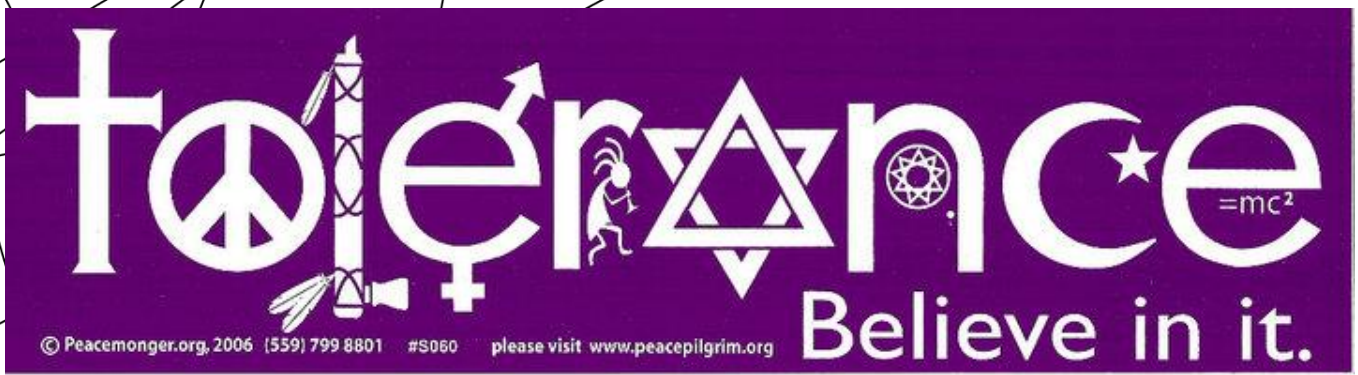
Visiting Professors: J.P. Moreland (Talbot School of Theology); Ryan Mullins (University of Lucerne); Robert Garcia (Baylor).



Disagree—Relativism Must Be True.” “You’re Just
Western Logic.” “Who Are You to Judge Others?” “C
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Jesus Is Just Like Any Other Great Religious Lead
Jesus Never Said, ‘I Am God.’” “People Claim JFK a
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Overcoming Objections
to Christian Faith

PAUL COPAN



**“TRUE FOR YOU, BUT NOT FOR
ME!”
RESPONDING TO TODAY’S
RELATIVISM**

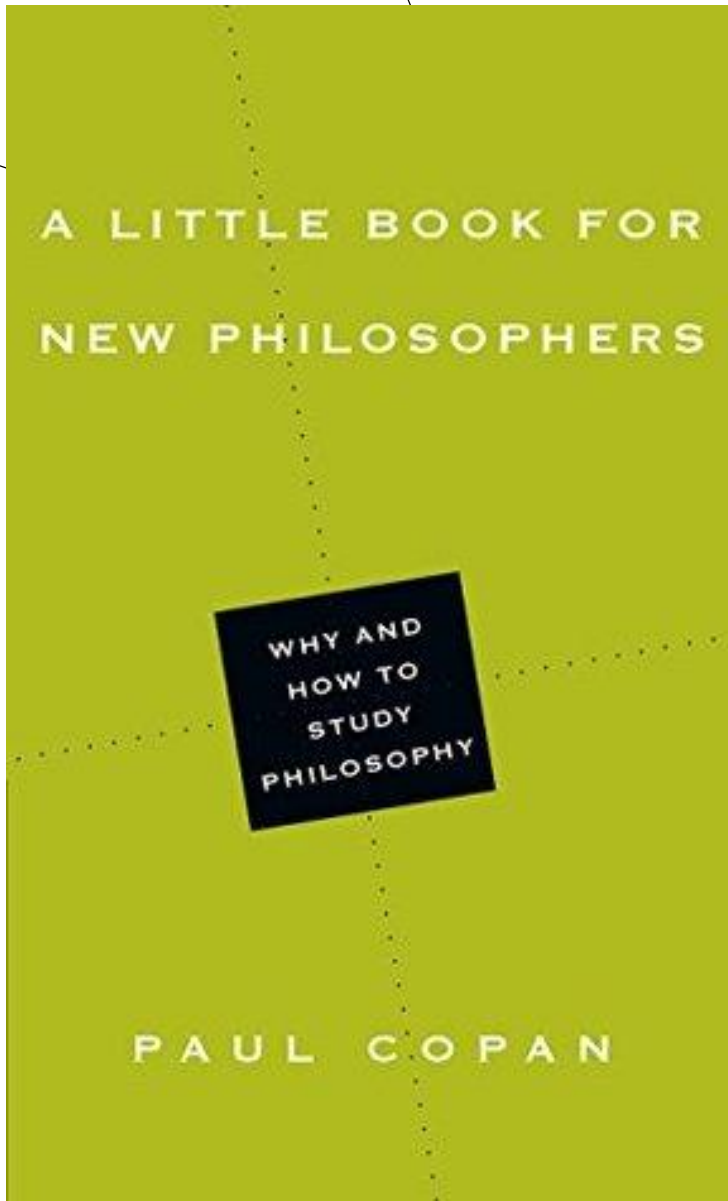
**Dr. Paul Copan, Palm Beach Atlantic
University**

INTRODUCTION

- Oprah Winfrey, 2018 Golden Globe: “speaking *your* truth is the most powerful tool we all have.”
- A 60-year-old Dutch man wanted his birth certificate changed because he feels 40 years old.
- 2016: A 5’9” white male interviews students at University of Washington: “What if I told you I was Chinese? Or six-foot five? Or a woman?” Some students affirmed them by saying, “Good for you!” Others weren’t so sure.
- Allan Bloom: “Conflict is the evil we most want to avoid.”
- Is truth just a matter of perspective or opinion or preference or feeling? We live in an era in which how I feel (“my truth”) is the basis of my identity.



WHAT IS RELATIVISM?



The notion that *a belief or an idea can be true for one person or culture and its opposite be true for another.*

E.g., I may believe that sex outside of marriage is wrong, but it's not true for all people.

It claims that *all* beliefs are just opinions—except *that* opinion that all beliefs are just opinions.

One of the implications is that there's no such thing as lying any more. We just have “my truth” and “your truth.”

C.S. Lewis: Good vs. bad philosophy



**I. Truth Is a Match-up with Unconstructed,
Inescapable Reality**

**II. “My Truth” and “Your Truth” as Trivial and
Contradictory**

**III. Truth As Essential to Knowledge with Practical
Relevance**

IV. True and False Tolerance and Judging

V. Moral Relativism as a System of Absolutes

VI. A Final Word

I. TRUTH IS A MATCH-UP WITH REALITY, WHICH IS UNCONSTRUCTED AND INESCAPABLE

WHAT IS TRUTH?

Reality makes something true.

Metaphysics: the study of ultimate reality.

Truth is a match-up with the way things really are.



REALITY: FIXED OR CONSTRUCTED OR INACCESSIBLE?

Claim 1: “Reality is a construct.”

Problem: those who say reality is construct are saying at least something about reality that can't be constructed: the one unconstructed thing about reality is that it is constructible by human minds. Even if one were able to shape reality, then “shapeability” would be the definitive state of reality; you cannot escape some kind of unchangeable reality.

Claim 2: “Reality is inaccessible to us.”

Problem: to know this is to know at least something about reality—namely, that it is characterized by being inaccessible to humans.

To say reality is a construct is to know that something about it is “constructible.” To say it's unknowable is to know something about it.

TRUTH, TOLKIEN, AND TEMPERATURE

Coherentism

A story or statement or belief isn't true simply because it's coherent or "rational." J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* tells a coherent story. But Middle Earth doesn't exist in reality.

While coherence is a necessary component of truth, it doesn't constitute truth. Something more than coherence or rationally fitting together is needed to make something true.

Pragmatism

Something that is true will often work, but that's different from saying that truth *is* whatever works.

If the current temperature at the North Pole is -20 degrees Fahrenheit, it may be an accurate temperature reading but may not make anything "work" in a person's life. But the temperature reading is still true.

II. “MY TRUTH” AND “YOUR TRUTH” THINKING RESULTS IN TRIVIALITY OR CONTRADICTION

We’ve seen good reasons to believe that truth is objective. Truth, which is anchored in reality, is independent of human thinking or feeling or preference. What is objective is true for all people even if they hold to their false belief.

Moral truth wasn’t invented or relative to one time period versus another’s. It was discovered. This invented-discovered distinction illustrates the difference between objective and relative. Objective is the opposite of relative.

Reality confers truth on something. Reality is the truth-maker.

If we deny the truth, we are affirming the truth. We’re saying that it’s true that there is no truth—which is a contradiction and a confusion of thought.

ICE CREAM AND THE RELATIVIST'S DILEMMA

You probably have a favorite ice cream flavor. When we're talking about ice cream flavors, we're dealing with preferences. This is a lot different from racism and genocide.

Consider the relativist's view that truth is all a matter preference or opinion or perspective. When truth is relativized and there is no truth for all people then we're left with a view that is either trivial or self-contradictory. That is to believe something that is insignificant—like your own ice cream preference—or anti-relativistic.



“TRUTH IS JUST A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE.”

Trivial:

The relativist's viewpoint is just as much a preference or perspective as anyone else's. So why believe it? (This is like saying you prefer your own ice cream flavor.)

Self-contradictory:

The relativist believes his perspective is universally true. And if you disagree with his perspective, you're wrong. (This is like saying another person ought to prefer your ice cream flavor too!)

- **Don Cupitt: “reality has now become a mere bunch of disparate and changing interpretations.”**
- **Friedrich Nietzsche: “There are no facts, only interpretations.”**
- **Roger Scruton: “A writer who says that there are no truths, or that all truth is ‘merely relative,’ is asking you not to believe him. So don’t.”**

WHY BELIEVE ANYTHING AT ALL?

The reason we ought to believe something is because it is true—not because we prefer it, like it, or feel comfortable with it.

If truth is truth, it must exclude something—namely, error. The truth is that lots of uncomfortable things come our way, but we must accept this reality and live in accordance with what we can't change.

Here's a problem that only encourages relativism, which often boils down to not wanting to say anyone is wrong. We don't want to hurt people's feelings. But this contributes to weakening our intellectual, social, and emotional lives.

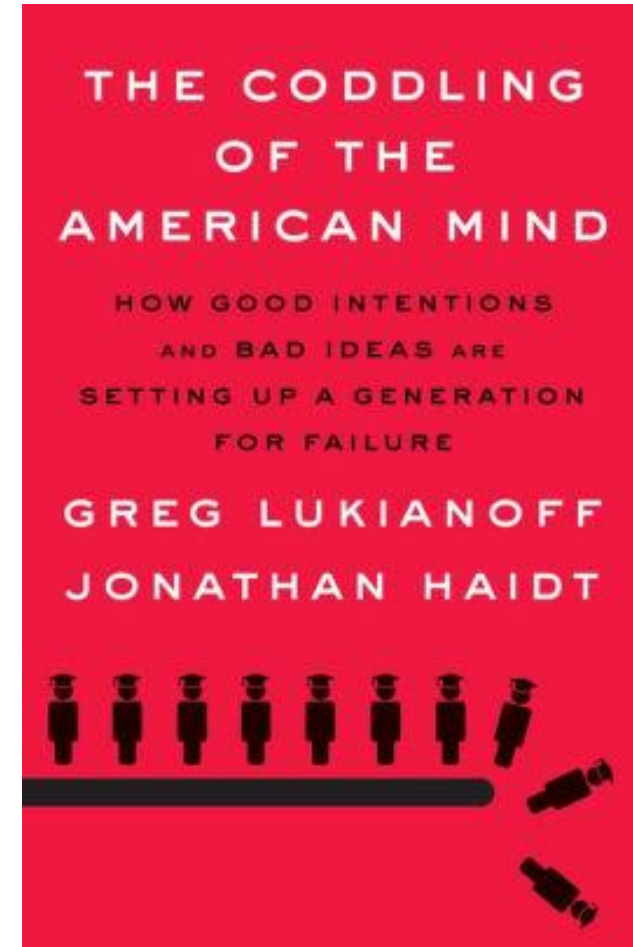
“THREE GREAT UNTRUTHS” INCREASINGLY EMBRACED BY MANY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

#1: What doesn't kill you makes you weaker.

#2: Always trust your feelings.

#3: Life is a battle between good people and evil people.

Believing these truths results in a “culture of safetyism”; this in turn “interferes with young people’s social, emotional, and intellectual development” and “makes it harder for them to become autonomous adults who are able to navigate the bumpy road of life.”







III. TRUTH IS ESSENTIAL TO KNOWLEDGE, AND HAVING GENUINE KNOWLEDGE HAS PRACTICAL RELEVANCE

3 KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE:

- **Personal Knowledge**: knowing a person rather than being aware of facts about that person.
- **Procedural Knowledge**: involves knowing how to do something.
- **Propositional Knowledge**: has to do with truth (deals with true or false statements).

PLATO'S THREE COMPONENTS OF KNOWLEDGE

Belief

To know something requires believing it. If I say that I know that the earth is round but I don't really believe that it is, I should get some psychiatric help. Knowing requires believing.

True

If I claim know something, then what claim to know can't be a falsehood. If I say that I know the earth is flat, that's a problem. Why? Because the earth isn't flat. Knowledge requires that a belief be true.

Warranted

Even if I have a true belief, that still isn't a guarantee that I know it. I could be accidentally right; so something more is needed.

TRUTH, ERROR, AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Most relativists live out their relativism selectively; they are only partly in denial of objective reality—not wholly in denial of it (global relativism).

If truth is truth, it must exclude something—namely error. The problem for the relativist is that error or falsehood doesn't mean anything deep or serious. There is no objective reality to which beliefs must confirm to be true. Beliefs just happen to be false for some people but not for others based on preference or feeling.

In our everyday lives, we do take the reality of truth and knowledge for granted. In the depths of our being, we know that a relativistic life leads to breakdown in our rational, moral, personal lives.

Relativism rejects the need to guard one's conscience or integrity.

SOMETHING MORE PERSONAL?

- **Perhaps what lurks behind a person's relativistic beliefs isn't something intellectual.**
- **I suspect a deeper concern is that the relativist has felt betrayed when people she has loved and trusted end up abusing that trust.**
- **Perhaps many relativists simply find it too painful to continue to trust anyone anymore.**

IV. TO TOLERATE SOMETHING IS TO PUT UP WITH IT—NOT TO CELEBRATE IT

Classical Definition of Tolerance

There is a degree of *negativity* built into it. Tolerance means *putting up with what we find disagreeable or false.*

We *put up with* the person sitting next to us on a plane who has body odor; we don't like body odor. We *don't* tolerate the pleasant fragrances: we *do* tolerate the body odor. *Tolerance simply isn't enjoyment.*

Modern Revised Definition of Tolerance

For the relativist, a misguided tolerance—*acceptance of all beliefs*—is the chief virtue.

Tolerances as “accepting” or “affirming” all views as true is flawed and problematic. This false tolerance turns out to be nothing more than apathy.

JUDGING: TWO VIEWS

- No one at this “cultural moment” wants to be considered “judgey.” But, as we’ll see, there is a good way to judge and a bad way.
- We can’t escape making judgments. Will we do it properly and wisely or superficially and arrogantly?” Perhaps we could distinguish between judgmentalism and making judgments. Judgmentalism is always wrong—that is feeling morally superior at the failure of others.
- Jesus isn’t promoting lack of judgement. Proper judgment means to critically assess on the basis of substance, not superficiality. And we should examine ourselves first—that is “take the log out of our own eye.”

V. MORAL RELATIVISM IS A SYSTEM OF ABSOLUTES

We've talked about relativism in relation to truth, reality, and knowledge mostly, but here I want to shift a bit to moral relativism: "Your view is right for you but not for me," that is, morality is merely personal and subjective, and what I consider moral isn't necessarily moral for you.

Perhaps you're a relativist. You believe you have your truth, your reality, and your morality, and other people have theirs. As we've seen, while people can have their own individual opinions or beliefs or tastes, we cannot confuse taste or preference with truth.

MORAL RELATIVISTS HAVE THEIR OWN SET OF ABSOLUTES

- **“If you’re not a relativist, you’re absolutely mistaken.” (Only the relativistic viewpoint is the correct one.)**
- **“You should never say that someone else is wrong.” (The relativist, can say that those who disagree with her are wrong.)**
- **“It’s absolutely true that all views are equally acceptable.” (Not to accept someone’s view is immoral.)**
- **“It’s wrong to impose your morality on others.” (Where does this moral standard come from?)**
- **“You should always be tolerant.” (Not to do so is morally wrong.)**
- **“You should never judge.” (This is an example of judging someone for judging.)**
- **“You ought to be open-minded.” (But is the relativist open-minded to the absolutist’s ideas?)**
- **It’s arrogant, bigoted, and imperialistic to be ethnocentric. (But isn’t ethnocentrism a universal moral wrong?)**



MORAL RELATIVISM'S SELECTIVITY

The only way to be a relativist is to be a selective one.

Sports scores, the stock index, the current weather outside is not “true for the meteorologist but not for me.”

The same is the case when it comes to *morality*—matters of duty, of right and wrong.

People tend to become relativistic when it comes to moral standards. They will say that morality—right and wrong, good and bad, ought and ought not—is relative.

But why is anything wrong for the relativist? Why should the relativist get upset when her personal preferences are ignored or violated?

REAL MORALITY

1. **Morality is properly basic.** At a fundamental level, we understand justice and fairness and when deep wrongs are done. Children on the playground understand this.
2. **The “reformer’s dilemma” presents a problem for the relativist.** Why think that abolishing slavery, ending apartheid in South Africa, establishing civil rights in America were such great moral gains?
3. **Human dignity and worth undermine relativism.** If we really believe morality is relative, then human beings have no intrinsic worth.
4. **Distinguish between knowing moral truths and being a morally significant being.** How did we become moral beings in the first place? *Being* is more fundamental than knowing. God’s existence furnishes the basis for affirming our dignity as human beings, which enables us to know moral truths.

VI. A FINAL WORD

Learning to Disagree Well

- Distinguish between the **person** and the **belief**. (Proverbs 27:17)
- Differentiate between **attitude** and **person**. (Proverbs 15:1; Ephesians 4:15)
- In the end **truth** should be what imposes, not **persons**. For this reason, we should seek to **persuade** people about what we take to be true –if they are willing to listen.

LEARNING TO TRUST AUTHORITY

While relativism seemingly protects us from moral authorities, I would suggest that a wiser, more satisfying path is to take a step toward trust. To draw a very clear line between those who simply claim moral authority, and God who actually has it.

UNDER THE PROPER AUTHORITY

Jesus claims to have the kind of authority that only God has—the authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:7-11), to be the judge of all people (Matt 7:22-23), to be present with his followers to the end of the age (Matt 28:20).



We can escape living by someone else's authority, but we will live by some authority, perhaps our own authority.

The question is, Whose authority is the most trustworthy? How reliable an authority are you?

Jesus has a credibility factor that none of us has, and as the Gospels reveal, he is an authority worthy of our trust.