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Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted In Mid-Air



Synopsis

"An extremely well researched, intellectual approach to the problem of relativism and its effect on education, public policy, and our everyday lives." Youth worker

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It was the late, great Francis Shaeffer who spoke of a group of people "who have both feet firmly planted in mid-air." This phrase brilliantly describes people in our society who adhere, as much as anyone can adhere to such a system, to moral relativism. For one can only be planted so firmly on a system that has no foundation. Relativism, written by Greg Koukl and Francis Beckwith, critiques moral relativism and explores the myriad inconsistencies inherent in this position. The authors launch a five-pronged attack on relativism. In the first part they help the reader understand relativism and see the three different types: "society says," "society does" and "I say" relativism. In the second part they critique relativism, exposing seven of its most fatal flaws before turning in the third part to an exposure of the impact of relativism on education. In the fourth part they examine relativism in public policy, and specifically its application to homosexual marriage, abortion and euthanasia - three of the pressing issues of our time. The final part provides some tools to refute relativism. The final part was the one I found most helpful. Having explained the background and dangers of relativism, the authors suggest some tactics that are helpful in arguing against relativism. First, they suggest showing the contradictions inherent in relativism, for in practice, this position is self-refuting. One effective tactic, then, is to show people that many of their positions depend on some type of absolute stance. They suggest the best way of dealing with the charge of "don't force

your morality on me," is to simply ask "why not?" What gives him the right to impose his morality on you when you are not able to do the same to him? Second, they suggest pressing the person's hot button.

This book impressed me. Some of the other reviews give the impression that the book is very shallow or is not substantive. I disagree. The book accomplishes its task admirably. The authors seek to show that moral relativism is false, the consequences of moral relativism and that moral objectivism is true. I note that the author is indebted to the book Principia Ethica by G.E. Moore for some of his ideas. Definitions: moral relativism: "The view that when it comes to moral issues there are no universal objective right or wrong answers, no inappropriate or appropriate judgments, and no reasonable or rational ways by which to make distinctions that apply in every time, in every place and to every person." (page 12-13) moral objectivism: The view that when it comes to moral issues, there ARE universal right or wrong answers, inappropriate or appropriate judgments, and reasonable or rational ways by which to make distinctions that apply in every time, in every place and to every person (this is a composite of the view point the author's offer and defend) The authors argue that people know that there are morally objective rules by intuition. This may be misunderstood to be a whim or emotion. The author's give an example of another thing that is known by intuition: "My hand is injured," I say "How do you know it's injured?" you ask. "Because it hurts." "How do you know it hurts?" "Because I feel it." "But how do you know you feel it." "I just know..." (pages 57-58; please note the last line is a summary of the author's further explanation) I think the author's provided a devastating critique of various different forms of relativism. The different forms they attacked were: Society Does Relativism (i.e.

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