

This article will take up the subject of relativism/subjectivism. The deadliness of a false belief depends on: 1) how far away from God it leads a person, and 2) how widespread it is. The isms covered so far have been: materialism, scientism, pragmatism, utilitarianism, consequentialism, and careerism. Full-fledged materialism is complete separation from God. While practical materialism (living as if materialism is true, even though I hold at least some vague belief in God) is very common today, full-fledged materialism has still not quite fully commanded the mind of man. Each of the other isms, though, lead him more and more onto that path. Scientism is on the rise, people might get bullied into surrender to it if they don't know how to withstand it, it is striving to possess the modern mind more and more and is making headway, and yet it still does not have as tight a grip as some of the other isms. Pragmatism, on the other hand, is largely entrenched in our society. If priests give a theological reason for this or that, a reason that is related to worship of God and building relation with God, he is largely ignored; without a "practical" reason for something, most listen with both ears closed. Thus, while pragmatism is not the most extreme materialistic ism, it has proven to be one of the deadliest in our society precisely because it has become so entrenched in our society. The same could be said for its very close relative – consequentialism. Blatant utilitarianism is rather extreme in its claim and many might shy away from *full-fledged* utilitarianism; and yet at the same time some degree of utilitarianism is prevalent in the mind of contemporary man; the sum total, then is that while utilitarianism is effective in pulling man away from his true end and does contribute to his demise, yet we would have to say it is not the *most* deadly.

The reason for this little review is because now we are coming to two of the most deadly of the isms – two that are widespread and lead a person, decisively, from God. Do not set the others aside, they are prevalent enough and they do most certainly set a person on the path to final separation from God. These two, however, we might say are a sort of culmination of the isms, in a sense their supreme victory. They are relativism/subjectivism and humanism. They are prevalent and decisively anti-christ. This article will take up relativism/subjectivism. As an initial illusion to the importance of relativism in the world today, Pope Benedict XVI summed it up by saying that today we live in a dictatorship of relativism.

First, why say: relativism/subjectivism, rather than just one or the other? Are they just 2 words for the same thing? They are, in fact, almost identical and so most people (e.g., Pope Benedict) just use the word relativism; we will do largely the same. However, it is helpful to first distinguish the two and, for the sake of understanding what these things mean, the term subjectivism can be helpful.

The only difference between the two is that formal relativism (if we do in fact distinguish the two) has a time and space element to it (we might say) that subjectivism does not necessarily have. Like pragmatism (and other isms to a degree) relativism is making a claim about truth/reality. It says that there is nothing that is absolutely true always and everywhere, what is true (or what is right and good and true) depends on (is relative to – hence the name) the particular time and place you are, more or less – what "everybody" holds to be true is true. Of course this immediately eliminates God and His teachings because God does make absolute claims – things that are true always and everywhere regardless of time or place; in fact, God *is* absolute truth or reality – hence (in part) His name: I Am Who Am. The very nice sounding claim of relativism is that different cultures have different things they accept, different standards, different beliefs, different morals and so on. You can't say one is right and another is wrong (notice the claim without proof or reasoning); so they are all right to those people in that time. One internet video used the example of what's acceptable dress for women; some places at some point in time might find it very acceptable for women to wear very revealing clothes while others do not. There is no absolute right or wrong, what's true or right is just the cultural norms of that time and place; and, of course, those norms (what's right or true) could change over time. Some cultures might say it's wrong to eat beef, the cow is sacred, others might accept it. What's right and true just depends on (is relative to) whatever is acceptable in that time and place. That's all that truth is – whatever is accepted in a given time and place, and of course it can change over time. You've surely heard the phrase: Who am I to judge? While that *could* be understood in a correct way, the way of our Lord, today it is most often an instruction in relativism. Do you dare go against it? Probably not because we live in a dictatorship of relativism.

Before going on further with this, we might notice immediately that relativism (like many isms) is self-contradictory. Relativism says: there is no universal truth and that is universally true! Relativism is trying to make a statement of absolute, universal truth while at the same time denying that there are any universal, absolute truths! I'm sure someone has done some sort of mental gymnastics to circumvent this obvious contradiction but if you press the matter, there is just no getting around it. This is important because as soon as something is self-contradictory, it is necessarily false. Nonetheless, it's not enough to stop there because this has been aggressively promoted in our culture today and simply pointing out a contradiction will usually not be enough to sway people from it or to protect people against it. Like with materialism, I might say something like: I don't abide with that, yet I live as if it's true.

What, then, is subjectivism? Subjectivism is basically relativism reduced to the individual person – hence just referring to both as relativism. While formal relativism has this time and space aspect to it – whatever is accepted in a particular place and time is what's true – subjectivism just says: well forget time and place, whatever is true to the individual person (the subject) is true, hence the name subjectivism.

Although we might make some use of the word subjectivism to help further clarify “relativism,” from this point forward the word relativism will be taken to mean both – especially subjectivism since that's what's actually prevalent in the world (at least the Western world) today.

One way that relativism could be described is as saying: what's true to you is true, what's true to me is true, even if they are exact opposites. You say: abortion is wrong, I say abortion is ok – both are true because the only truth that exists is what's true to the individual person. There is no universal, absolute truth like: abortion is wrong, the only “truth” is just whatever is true to you.

To illustrate just how widespread relativism is, and Pope Benedict's statement that we now live in a dictatorship of relativism, consider these 2 statements and ask yourself which is the safer one to make, not which statement you would necessarily make but which is safer – neither is really safe in our country today but which is safer:

- Abortion is wrong, period.
- To me personally, I think abortion is wrong.

I think everyone knows that if you were going to say anything at all that is opposed to abortion, the second one is definitely the safer one to make. Certainly young people know it. We did this exact little test in our CCD class, and every single one of the students knew that the second one is the safer one. Yes, we have been well schooled in relativism, yes we do live in a dictatorship of relativism.

It will be worthwhile to come back to the term subjectivism to further clarify relativism. For now, though, let us just continue with some basic observations. With just a little bit of thought, it doesn't take long to come to the realization that if relativism is accepted, then we have to say: well at one time and place, slavery was right, extermination of Jews was right, human sacrifice to the gods was right, (and so on) because it was right or true to those people of that time and place. Frankly, I don't know offhand how relativists skirt this issue; a hard core relativist simply wouldn't. I remember hearing somebody say one time something like: well there are no absolute relativists, nobody really holds absolutely to relativism; then he went on to say, in effect: but well, the social norms of our time are true! In other words, I don't hold with relativism, well except in my own time and place! That's not much of an answer! Say what you want, relativism has a stranglehold in the Western world today.

In the space left, let's just make one more observation. It seems that “psychological disturbances” or maybe just plain craziness, is increasing today. Gross confusion leading to outlandish acts. Ask yourself what effect would relativism have on a person's mental stability? How can you mentally maintain, for example, that two exact opposites are both true? What does this do to a person's mental stability, especially given that the mind naturally seeks truth, part of which is unifying things which entails eliminating contradictions. One cannot help but wonder if the dictatorship of relativism is not affecting the mental stability of our times.

*God bless you, Fr Kuhn.*