

**“WE MUST RESPECT OTHER PEOPLE’S BELIEFS”
(AT LEAST THOSE WE AGREE WITH!)**

Opening Questions:

- What does it mean to respect a person?
- Can I respect beliefs I consider wrong?
- Is it possible to distinguish between a person and their beliefs and respect the person even if I disagree with their views?
- Does redefining terms help clarify things or bring confusion and misunderstanding?

Let us take one last look at another of relativism popular beliefs. It is very much like the “tolerance” belief we just examined in the prior chapter, except it is built on another loaded term “respect.”

Here is the “respect” popular belief:

Each person has their own beliefs, and those beliefs must be respected and not sought to be changed by another person.” Stated another way, “since there are no absolute truths, it is disrespectful to judge another person's beliefs as somehow deficient or wrong and thus needing changing or correction.

The above statement contains essentially three premises:

Premise 1. Each person has their own beliefs;

Premise 2. There are no absolute beliefs, meaning there is no unchanging universal standard to judge beliefs as true or false, right or wrong;

Conclusion. Since Premise 2 is true, it is disrespectful to judge another person's beliefs as somehow deficient or wrong and thus needing changing or correction.

Premise one is self-evidently true. (However, it is important to point out that two or more people can share the same beliefs and not have heard it from another person. It is also possible for two or more people to consider the beliefs that they share the most important beliefs to them.)

Premise two is not necessarily true. We will examine this in the following paragraphs.

The Conclusion is not necessarily true.

It is essential that the reader understand that the assumptive statement “since there are no absolute truths” needs to be true for the conclusion of the popular belief to be true - and without premise two being true, the conclusion is false. The “no absolutes” belief is often not spelled out, stated or clearly identified in the popular belief, but is assumed since it serves as the foundation of the popular belief.

Examining the Conclusion

The conclusion of the popular belief statement includes this statement - “it is disrespectful to judge another person's beliefs.” So, not only is the conclusion not true if premise two is false, the conclusion itself includes a self-defeating statement even if premise two is true!

A self-defeating statement is one that contradicts itself. For example, “all red rocks are blue” (physical), or, “kind people enjoy hurting others” (moral) are self-defeating statements since within the statement the single subject or point in the statement is contradicted within the statement. In the previous two examples, the only subject or point is the color of all red rocks, and the contradiction to that single point is that red rocks are blue. In the next example, the only subject or point is what kind people enjoy, and the contradiction to that single point is that kind people enjoy hurting others.

As we have seen, the statement, “it is wrong to judge,” is a self-defeating statement, for judgment is made with the statement!

As we have seen, the statement, “you are a hateful bigot” when stated by a person who says they are a tolerant person, is a self-defeating statement, for that person is being by their definition intolerant of the person they are condemning as “a hateful bigot.”

The statement “it is wrong to judge” is merely a simplified version of, “it is disrespectful to judge another person's beliefs.” If a person believes and expresses that “It is acceptable to judge another person's beliefs,” then that person is *judged* as intolerant and disrespectful by the person who believes, “it is intolerant and disrespectful to judge another person's beliefs.” Do you see the contradiction? When the person who says, “It is intolerant and disrespectful to judge another person's beliefs,” judges another person's beliefs as wrong, then by their principle, they are “intolerant and disrespectful”!

The above examples of arguments are proved false by using logic. One of the laws of logic says that if two things/concepts/ideas/beliefs contradict one another when addressing the same subject, and both claim to be true, then at least one is false. These statements demonstrate that principle; “all red rocks are blue” or “it is wrong to judge.” In the latter, the subject, “judgment,” is said to be wrong or is judged to be wrong. Thus, the statement is false as it contradicts itself.

Let us look at the central issue again from a slightly different perspective to help the reader grasp this critical point.

Consider the statement, "It is wrong to say something is wrong."

This statement uses a synonym for "judge," namely a type of judgment, "wrong-ness," to make clear the false nature of the statement. The statement claims that it is wrong to say something is wrong - a clear contradiction. It is the same type of statement as "It is bad to say (or judge) something is bad." Judgment is the discernment and subsequent declaration of something as right or wrong, good or bad, true or false. The nature of the term "wrong" is undeniably an essential aspect of human judgment and an integral part of human's ability to reason. A person cannot utter a coherent, non-definitional statement containing the word "wrong" (and its associated concept) without making a judgment.

Therefore, the statement, "It is wrong to judge" is a false statement as the statement contradicts itself; for the person uttering, "it is wrong to judge" is himself proclaiming judgment and thus is doing what he says is wrong.

Defining "Respect"

This widespread belief relies heavily on the concept of "respect," for the popular belief says all people must "respect" other people's beliefs. Thus, it is important that the term "respect" be defined and adequately understood.

The people who believe this popular belief define the term "respect" as meaning, "a person should not say anything negative about another person's beliefs nor state that they believe it is false." The concept of "respecting someone's rights" might seem akin to this, but is significantly different for the following reason. A "right" is a legal concept and to respect someone's right to "free speech" for example, means to agree they are allowed to express themselves - it does not address the content of the speech, but rather a person's "freedom" to speak at all no matter what they say.

The widespread belief we are looking at has everything to do with the content or nature of a person's ideas for we are told we must "respect" other's beliefs. In other words, the popular belief is not defending some innate human "right," but rather is attempting to *shut a certain kind of people's expression down, namely, those people who reject relativism and believe there are absolute ethical, moral and existential truths.*

Here are some definitions of "respect" (in the context it is used in the widespread belief) from widely accepted dictionary sources in the United States.

"A feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements."⁴¹

"Esteem for or a sense of the worth or excellence of a person, a personal quality or ability, or something considered as a manifestation of a personal quality or ability: Example: "I have great respect for her judgment."⁴²

⁴¹ Oxford Living Dictionary, www.en.oxforddictionaries.com, April 2018

⁴² www.dictionary.com, April 2018

"Admiration for someone or something that you believe has good ideas or qualities." ⁴³

All these definitions assume there is a basis for one person respecting another. In other words, these definitions imply that *the first person sees something worthy of respect in the other person.*

For example, if you have never met someone and during your first encounter with the person, the person is doing something you believe is wrong, you are unlikely to "respect" that person. You would not likely say you respect a person if the first time you met them, all they are doing is sitting on a chair. If you did want to make that statement in those circumstances, then this author would suggest what you are saying is, "All humans deserve respect," which statement has a very different meaning than a personal respecting of a person due to their characteristics or behavior.

The attitude of "respect" or state of "respecting" is based on the judgment of the person doing the respecting. Thus, to "respect" someone means that the basis of that "respect" is valued and thus sought to be emulated, adopted or mimicked by the person doing the respecting; this would hold true for behavior, traits or beliefs. Thus, if I "respect" someone for their character trait of honesty, then I would like to be honest myself. Or, if I "respect" someone for exercising each day and thus staying physically fit, I would like to have the discipline to be physically fit. Finally, if I "respect" someone's belief that people with darker skin are valuable humans just like people with lighter skin, then I too will share or adopt that belief.

In the popular statement above, "respect" is re-defined to mean "having no concern for truth or rightness"; or, "not seeking to change another person's beliefs." (A person's beliefs should be "respected," e.g., not sought to be changed.) As we have just seen by the most commonly held definitions of respect, this popular belief re-defines (or uses a minority or uncommon definition) the term "respect" to mean "*it is wrong to judge another person's beliefs as wrong.*" This author believes the purpose of the re-definition is to bully the reader into adopting this popular belief since most people want to exhibit respect - or be respectful (an act of humility) - as correctly defined above.

Furthermore, the proper understanding of the concept of "respect" is in contrast to a philosophy which states that "a person is free to believe whatever they like, for whatever they believe is right or true to them." This philosophy is what this widespread belief is advocating, and this philosophy seeks to remove all judgment of good and evil, right and wrong, true and false from the human experience, and thus it is both unreasonable and undeniably false. In other words, reason is removed as a guide to rational thought or behavior to hold to this belief.

It seems to have good intentions - to remove improper judgment of other people not guided by humility or compassion - but unfortunately, it has a false basis. What the belief does is remove all ethical or moral judgment from the

⁴³ Cambridge Dictionary, www.dictionary.cambridge.org, April 2018

human experience as well as force people to reject specific undisputable facts about human nature or even historical events. As we shall see, a person using reason and concerned about right and wrong ought to reject such a belief as VERY harmful to human existence and relationships.

Testing This Popular Belief

Let us first test the popular statement's basic premise using some example statements. Here is a restatement of this widespread belief that we are going to test:

Each person has their views, and those beliefs must be respected and not sought to be changed by another person. Stated another way, since there are no absolute truths, it is *disrespectful* to judge another person's beliefs as somehow deficient or wrong and thus needing changing or correction.

So, the question is, should the stated beliefs below be “respected”?

Examples:

“I believe that all people with a dark skin color less evolved as people with lighter skin, and thus they are less human and ought to be relegated to some servant status only, for this belief is true and right to me.”

“I believe that people who have different religious beliefs than I do are inferior to me, for this belief is true for me.”

“I believe that it is good for adult men to sexualize young girls, for this belief (and desired subsequent behavior) is true for me.”

“I believe that Christians are all untrustworthy aggressive people who ought to be defeated and subjugated to non-Christian people, for this belief (and desired consequence) is true for me.”

“I believe that non-Muslims are all untrustworthy evil people who ought to be defeated and subjugated to Muslim people, for this belief (and desired consequence) is true for me.”

“I believe that people who say they believe God exists ought to have their foolish God beliefs removed from their minds to be enlightened by those who have a proper understanding of reality, for this belief is true for me.”

“I believe that it is good and right to protect myself (which protection includes harming them) from other people who frighten me due to their differences from me, for this belief is true for me.”

“I believe that it is good and right to distrust people who are different from me, and to allow that distrust to become fear and hatred, for this belief is true for me.”

“I believe that those who have less material things should forcibly take material resources from those who have more and who will not willingly share, for this belief and behavior is true for me.”

“I believe that “non-normal people” (handicapped, retarded, disabled, etc.) are a drain on society and thus ought to be eliminated, for this belief is true to me and ought to be true for everyone.”

Given the statements above, how does the “each person has their own beliefs and those beliefs must be respected and not sought to be changed by another person” philosophy hold up to your reasoning? The philosophy sounds good at first glance, but it does not lead to human freedom and true respecting of one another. Rather, it can be (and is) used to justify evil (the unjust harming of people) and opens the door wide for the strong or aggressive to take advantage of those who are weak or vulnerable.

Some would seek to qualify the philosophy of “a person is free to believe in whatever way they like, for whatever they believe is right or true to them” with the premise “as long as what a person believes does not cause harm to others.” This harm clause does not fix the fundamental flaw with the belief which flaw is that it begs the question regarding what standard of human behavior to use in the first place. The harm clause cannot overcome the same problem - what standard is used to determine “harm to others”? In other words, who or what is the standard a person turns to in order to know what causes harm to others? Furthermore, is the absence of harming one another an ethic that will produce love for one another? As we shall see, the answer to the latter question is no.

Let us look at some examples to illustrate the fatal flaw in the “harm clause” proposition.

Is it harmful to people to serve or sell food or consumptive items that are known to be harmful to people?

‘I believe that it is good that I can profit off of selling food (or tobacco) that is proved to contain harmful elements to other people, for this belief is true for me.’

Is it harmful to a woman who “willingly” performs sexual acts in front of a camera to make money “harmful” to anyone? What standard do you use to make that judgment?

“I believe that it is good for women to believe and be trained that they should be used for sexual pleasure by men, and to earn income for such a belief and associated activities, for this belief is true for me.”

Is it harmful to children to be allowed or led by their parents to play-act or enjoy violence?

“I believe that it is fine for parents to allow their children to play video games that involve explicit, unjustified, personal and gratuitous violence, and which games promote and glorify violent behavior, for this belief is true for me.”

Or, “I believe that it is good for children to learn to enjoy perpetrating violence by partaking in virtual violence and thus training their minds as such, for this belief is true for me.”

Is it harmful to people to believe and thus practice that using a powerful narcotic is an excellent way to "relax" or to worship God?

“I believe that it is good for me to use LSD (or whatever the latest drug is) to connect with my god, for this belief is true for me, and I am not harming anyone.”

Is it harmful to one group of people to raid a neighboring group, and to take their women and children for slaves for their group?

“I believe that un-contacted tribes in the Amazon basin have a right to be free of all outside influence due to evolutionary principles and relativism; which leads me to believe that all their behavior is right for them (which tribes do in fact forcibly take women and children as slaves from neighboring tribes), for this belief is right for me.”

Is it harmful to one person to see another person being harmed, and yet do nothing about it?

“I believe that I should have done nothing today when I saw the old man in the trench coat reveal himself to the little girl in the park because this belief is right for me.”; or,

“I am free to believe that I did not have to do anything to help the person lying on the street bleeding today - I don't owe them anything, and they might sue me if I do something wrong - because this belief is right for me and I am not harming anyone.”

Is it harmful to one person to see another person being verbally abused, and yet do nothing about it?

“I believe that I am not responsible for helping that young girl I saw crying today due to being yelled at and called all kinds of terrible things by her dad – she needs to deal with that herself, its none of my business – for this belief is right for me and I am not harming anyone”.

Is suicide harmful to others?

“I believe as a hopeless young person that I can kill myself, and I know that I am not harming others when I do so, for this belief is good and right for me.”

The above examples demonstrate the erroneous nature of the “as long as it causes no harm to others” clause. If each person determines what is “true and right” for them, and their definition of “harm to others” is different than another person’s (which is a reasonable assumption), then some people will be viewed by others as harming other people. What then? What happens when others see one person as hurting another person or allowing harm to come to another person? Which side will the referee take?

What is the referee's standard to make such judgments for that matter?!

What is the right action to take? Without any standard of right and wrong beliefs and behavior, who is to say what is right and wrong? Indeed, if you

follow this philosophy consistently, it has and will lead to destructive human conflict within any given human group (or among groups). This philosophy will lead to the physically stronger dominating and using the weaker persons as their slaves - in other words, human history.

Let us take another look at this widespread belief in light of the relativism doctrine.

“Each person has their own beliefs, and those beliefs must be respected and not sought to be changed by another person. Stated another way, since there are no absolute truths, it is disrespectful to judge another person's beliefs as somehow deficient or wrong and thus needing changing or correction.”

As you can see, this widespread belief is merely a slightly different wording for expressing relativism. This widespread belief goes a step further than just stating relativism, however, and seeks to defend relativism by providing “ought not's.”

As we have seen, this is a self-defeating exercise since relativists state there are no “ought's” (no universal moral standard by which to judge right and wrong for human beliefs or behavior), so how can there be “ought not's”?

This widespread belief piggy-backs quite closely with relativism since it promotes the following idea: That a person should not be pressured to hold a different moral or existential belief or adopt behavior that they did not hold before the person desiring to use reason to examine their belief approached them. Trying to convince someone that a view is better than what they currently hold would be wrong since there are no universal truths that apply to all human beings. This author has used reasoned arguments to demonstrate that this belief is false - it is self-defeating or self-contradictory. Thus, this widespread belief ought to be rejected and a better understanding adopted.

Let's wrap up our examination of relativism and the popular beliefs it is built on in the next chapter. In so doing, we will help the reader be able to see more clearly, and thus be in a better position to judge whether Christianity is indeed a successful failure.

Chapter Summary:

- To “respect” someone means to esteem or honor *their person or their character*, not one or more of their beliefs;
- The term "respect" has been redefined to mean "agree with someone's belief or view or perspective or position." The term's meaning has been shifted away from a view of one's person or character or behavior, to a view of a person's beliefs;
- This redefinition is harmful and is contributing greatly to the strife that exists in the U.S. culture at this time;
- We should not "respect" a person's wrong view of something, but we should respect a person if they have good character even if they hold a