

On objectivity

By Timothy Smith
TECHNEWS WRITER

Wow! When worldviews collide! I wrote an article a couple of weeks ago, trying to add to the conversation regarding how our worldview affects everything we do. The response was interesting and instructive. First, I would like to note that ad hominem attacks provide no useful basis for discussion, but only enflame or antagonize. Second, I would offer that objectivity is often misunderstood and misused in a dialogue about worldviews.

The first point needs no discussion and the second provides the basis for this article. Objectivity is often used as a blunt beating tool that is intended as the ultimate end game solution for subduing the adversary in "rational versus religious" conversations, where the "religious" adherent appears intractable in his or her views.

This is a much misused tactic and should be abandoned in principle. The primary reason for this is, of course, that the person wielding the Objectivity Tool is not being objective, even as they attempt to force another person to be "objective" (by which, they are actually attempting to force the other person to adopt their own worldview). The person attempts to use the Objectivity Tool with language like "Everyone should critically examine their own worldview and see how it corresponds to reality" or "One should talk to people with other worldviews in order to gain a broader perspective." The implication here is that the author of this statement is the rational objective one, with a clear view of reality. In fact, they are making statements, which are not themselves objectively true but are based on the author's worldview. This is because they either do not understand the nature of reality, or worse, are deliberately obfuscating it in an attempt to browbeat another individual into submission.

As to the nature of reality, one must necessarily start with a presuppositional approach. Regardless of one's approach to reality, one's expression of reality is grounded in a worldview by which the data is interpreted. The interpretation process is where objectivity turns to subjectivity. It operates like a lens. The objective fact is viewed through one's worldview (the lens) and often takes on the

shape of the viewer's subjective perspective.

For example, one might consider the objective fact of radioisotope data accumulated over the years by reputable scientific agencies and scientists. The objective fact is that deep earth diamonds contain measurable amounts of the radioisotope Carbon 14, but its significance may be deliberately understated by the scientific community in general, because of its "apparent" anomalous nature. Another objective fact is the half-life of Carbon 14 - approximately 5730 years. The existence of such data would generally suggest that the deep earth diamonds were formed less than many thousands of years ago, yet such conclusions are declared invalid against the "impregnable" wall of "science" and "rationality." The challenge that we face is that many such objective facts exist and are commonly ignored or understated due to a prevailing and controlling culture, which demands adherence to an intolerant and unsustainable "scientific" but unexplainable worldview, called evolution. By the way, how did we ever get something from nothing anyway?

The point I am trying to make here is that we all view the world through the "lens" of our worldview, and none of us can claim to be truly objective. In fact, those who claim objectivity are most likely to lack it. This does not mean we should abandon all rational discussion, based on objective fact. Rather, we should recognize our lack of objectivity in interpretation and ask the question, "Does my worldview comport rationally with objective fact?"



Defining relativism

By Hannah Rosenthal
TECHNEWS WRITER

My sorority sister walked into the kitchen, as I rinsed my bowl and spoon. "Good morning" I muffled, a little groggy than anticipated due to the morning dormancy of my vocal chords. She did not hear me, as she walked casually out of the room. Were my words spoken? Sound waves left my mouth, entered my own ears and conveyed meaning that my sister did not acknowledge. The presence of the sound waves could not be negated, regardless of the fact that my sister did not respond to them.

Oftentimes, people view truth in the same manner. We derive our own truth based on individual or societal preferences. Like my sister did, we ignore or are simply unaware of reality. We attempt to dwell within a reality we make, or one that our culture makes for us. Failing to acknowledge truth leads us to consider right and wrong to be subjective terms, based on individual or societal preferences. This is known as relativistic thinking. This type of thinking transforms moral claims, like "murder is wrong" into a matter of personal preference.

It's important to distinguish moral judgments from personal preferences. Choosing a favorite type of ice cream is a personal preference, which can often be influenced by one's culture. Choosing to prosecute a man for murder is based on the truth-claim that murder is wrong. To say "murder is wrong" because that's

how the United States culture views murder is an example of relativistic thinking.

According to Scott Klusendorf, there are three different types of relativism. "Society does" relativism is the belief that different views within a culture are all acceptable. "Society says" relativism means that right and wrong are determined by a culture. "I say" relativism is the belief that right and wrong reside with the individual.

These types of relativistic thinking are self-defeating. To accept all beliefs within a culture may lead to accepting two contradictory ideas. For example, "society does" relativists may believe that it is wrong to abort a child. Yet when their neighbor has an abortion, they deny the legitimacy of their own belief and claim that their neighbor's actions were acceptable.

To say that my culture tells me right from wrong suggests that people like Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi were evil, since their ideas opposed the culture of their time. "Society says" relativism has the power to wreck havoc like Hitler's regime did in Nazi Germany.

To say that I decide for myself what is right and wrong suggests that every man and woman should establish their own moral code and that we are therefore incapable of judging the actions of others. But what if the man stealing your purse was an "I say" relativist and informed you that he did not think the action was wrong? To what standard could you hold him, if every man and woman establishes their own standard for just behavior?

Relativists claim neutrality but inevitably make moral judgments. Regardless of religious affiliation, I challenge you to analyze the way you think about truth. Do you identify with one of the three types of relativistic thinking? Do you find relativism to be self-defeating? Questions such as these point me to truth: objective, knowable and ordained by the God of the Bible. Like sound waves resonating in the kitchen, truth exists whether or not we acknowledge or respond to it.

"Your Honor, my client pleads not guilty by reason of cultural relativism."

Cartoon by Rex F. May aka Balo
Courtesy cartoonstock.com



Vedic Vision Society: Come rediscover the spiritual you

By Utsav Gandhi
CAMPUS EDITOR

Among the many on-campus student organizations that first caught my eye when I joined IIT last semester, the Vedic Vision Society has, since then, never failed to enlighten me. We've had discussions about matters that I don't generally give much thought to, caught up as I am in all my math and engineering classes. It's that one hour of freedom every week, if I may say so, that reconnects me with my inner spirituality and provides me a perspective to see myself and the world around me. I look forward to every week, because these sessions get me questioning a lot that I believe in and assume about the world around me. The delicious Indian lunch is also a great pull. I must say - pakodas, chole and pulav (to those who are unaware what those words mean, come and find out!) The lectures are facilitated by His Grace Nityananda Pran Das ('Prabhujii' as he is fondly called), who is a practicing spiritualist since 2003 on the IIT Campus and who has earlier worked as a marketing professional in the retail industry for over 10 years. The weekly sessions of the Vedic Vision Society propagate the principles of the Vedas (Sanskrit for 'knowledge', these are ancient sacred texts of knowledge) and help students exercise practical spirituality.

This semester, the Society has the following

lectures planned till the start of Spring Break: "Orientation to Vedic Studies" free certification course lecture series starting Feb 4th. The course will proceed as follows:

Week 1. Introduction to Yoga	4 FEB
Week 2. Karma Theory	11 FEB
Week 3. Religion vs Spirituality	18 FEB
Week 4. Faith vs Reason	25 FEB
Week 5. Practical Spirituality	4 MAR

They are held in Wishnick Hall Room 119 on Fridays from 12:40 PM onwards and lunch following immediately. You can become a member by simply attending one of their weekly lectures or any of their events or email vedicvis@iit.edu. It is absolutely free with no membership fee. For more information

About the society, visit <http://mypages.iit.edu/~vedicvis/index.htm>

About the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita, visit www.vedabase.net

Hope to see you all soon... come, and you'll be surprised at how much this makes you think!

Update! The Society has also received approval and funding for "Vegetarian Cooking Classes" to be held on campus, probably the Gunsaulus Hall, for this semester. Keep your eye out for fliers and posters on what I believe is a much-needed and very helpful series of some serious cooking classes!

Campaign: </ end hate> An interfaith community service initiative

By Mohini Lal
TECHNEWS WRITER

When I was about eight years old, I realized that people looked at me in a strange way. Some people would even cross the street to avoid me. Now I'm only 5'2" (not exactly intimidating), so this struck me as strange. My parents already knew why though: these people were scared of me because they thought I was Muslim.

This bothered me for a couple of reasons. First, I'm not Muslim- I'm Hindu. Second, it was unfair for everyone. I immediately thought of how hurtful it must be to feel that everyone had judged you before you had even spoken. It's only now I know the other side of the problem: how terrifying it must be to go through life knowing nothing about someone but fearing him or her all the same. No one should be made to feel like he or she is an outsider to the community, to the city, or even to the country; but no one should fear the people with whom they drive

to work, fly across the world, or simply walk down the street.

I believe in this campaign because I want to believe that I am not the only one who feels that they should have more freedom and that things should be better. I need to believe that good people are out there, and in the short time I've spent talking to people on campus and in Chicago so far, they've already proven that to me.

All the meetings will be in Shimer College's Cinderella Lounge at 3424 South State St. It is important that you come to see what you and your community can do. It is just as important that you make sure your voice gets heard on campus matters like these.

Mohini Lal and Utsav Gandhi are Community Ambassadors for the One Chicago, One Nation 2011 Campus Track - Illinois Institute of Technology & Shimer College. Our campaign is all about Better Together - Inter Faith co-operation and dialogue to SPEAK OUT about the importance of religious tolerance, MOBILIZE peers to participate in action on a

**THIS SPACE IS EMPTY AND WE'RE
BLAMING YOU.
WRITE FOR TECHNEWS. ERASE THE GUILT.**