

# Relativism is Enslaving

*Holbrook Jackson: "Truth is one's own conception of things."*

*G. K. Chesterton: "The Big Blunder. All thought is an attempt to discover if one's own conception is true or not."*

The above exchange between Holbrook Jackson and G. K. Chesterton summarizes the radical difference between the relativist and the realist in regard to truth.

As I'll explain, this radical difference also shapes how we perceive freedom and truly attain it.

There are various definitions of "freedom" floating around today, many of which flatly contradict each other. In some cases, what one person perceives as freedom another sees as slavery.

Take the notion of sin, for instance. What some call "slavery to sin", others call "freedom from constraint".

Or take the understanding of freedom in the political arena. The "freedom" that the average Republican is fighting for has little or nothing in common with the "freedom" that the average Democrat is fighting for.

Clearly we need clarity with regard to what can be considered true freedom.

In order to attain such clarity, we need to think outside our own ideological boxes. We need to see and understand what the other person believes about freedom, even if we continue to disagree with him. We need the ability to empathize, even if we cannot sympathize. We need to move beyond the relativist

presumption that “freedom” is my own conception of things and engage with other conceptions of it in order to attempt to discover whether our own conception is true or not. We need to put our own conceptions to the test.

This is, after all, what the great philosophers have always done. You cannot persuade those who disagree with you unless you know their objections to your viewpoint and can answer them convincingly. And if you cannot answer them convincingly, you need to be less convinced of your own viewpoint.

The most beautiful thing about putting our own presumptions to the test is that it is utterly liberating! It frees us from our own self-constructed pride and prejudice. In moving outside the box, which is our own self and selfishness, to the wonderful world out there, we are enabling ourselves to grow in the presence of the other.

The trouble with materialism is that it traps us physically in a box from which it is not possible to ask important metaphysical questions, such as Pilate’s question “What is truth?”, or related questions, such as “What is good?” or “What is beautiful?” The trouble with relativism, a by-product of materialism, is that it traps us within our “own conception of things”, imprisoning the truth in the vice-like grip of the ego.

And the problem with this prideful self-imprisonment is that it prevents us from being truly rational. It makes the practice of reason impossible.

Reason requires thinking outside the box because it is an engagement with the objective reality outside ourselves, perceived through our senses. The truth does not come from within us but from outside us, and we cannot see it unless we are prepared to genuflect before it in humility. With this priceless truth in mind, we might be reminded of the line from the song “Mysterious Ways” by the rock group U2: “If you want

to kiss the sky, better learn how to kneel.” This is true, but it is equally true that we cannot really even see the sky unless we learn how to kneel.

The paradox is that relativism imprisons us in a box which gets smaller the more our ego gets bigger. The greater paradox is that true freedom can only be found on our knees.