

'The Middle' Doesn't Always Equal 'True'

We live in an age in which our media frequently frames issues up as a choice between two extremes.

In such an age, it's tempting for those who consider themselves educated to consistently take the *via media*—the “middle way”—and to assume that the truth always amounts to a balanced compromise between the two sides of a debate. In such an age, it becomes cool to be a centrist.

Sometimes, indeed, the truth does sometimes lie somewhere in between two positions.

But not always.

In fact, the assumption that truth always lies somewhere in “the middle” is actually a logical fallacy called the “middle ground fallacy.”

The middle ground fallacy—also known as the “argument to moderation” or the “golden mean fallacy”—[takes the following propositional form](#):

- 1) Position A and B are two extreme positions.
- 2) C is a position that rests in the middle between A and B.
- 3) Therefore C is the correct position.

Here are a couple of examples of the fallacy applied to controversial issues today:

- 1) Side A claims that climate change *is not* primarily caused by man. Side B says that climate change *is* primarily caused by man. Person C therefore concludes that the truth must be that climate change is primarily man-made in certain areas of the earth, but not others.

2) Side A claims that the economic system of capitalism is the best way to promote human flourishing. Side B says that socialism best promotes human flourishing. Person C therefore concludes that the best economic system must be one that maintains some aspects of a free market, but with more governmental controls than we have today.

In both cases, the truth of Person C's position does not logically follow from the fact that it's an attempted compromise between A and B. Rather, it's a separate position that must be evaluated on its own merits.

To repeat, sometimes we're called to strike a balance between two seemingly extreme positions in order to arrive at a pragmatic compromise.

But sometimes what's characterized as an "extreme" position may very well just be "the truth."

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