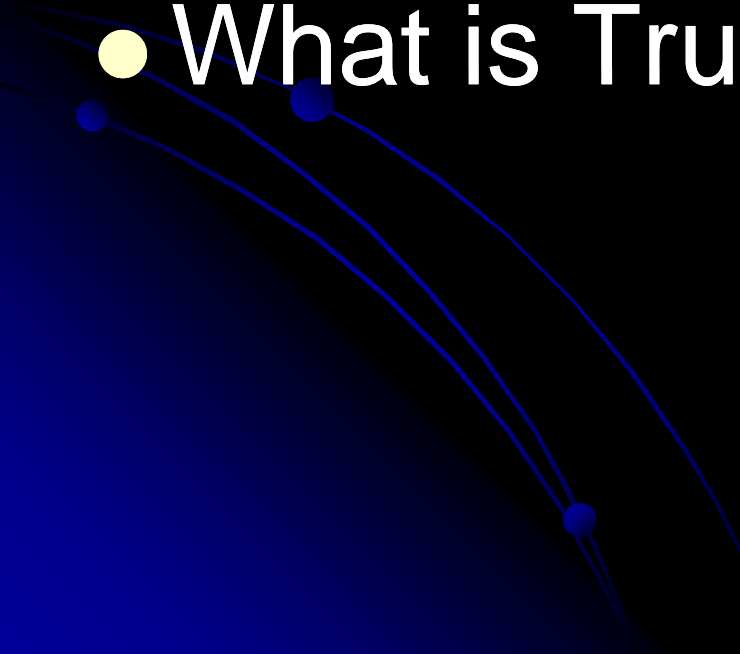



**Do All Paths
lead to the same
Destination?**



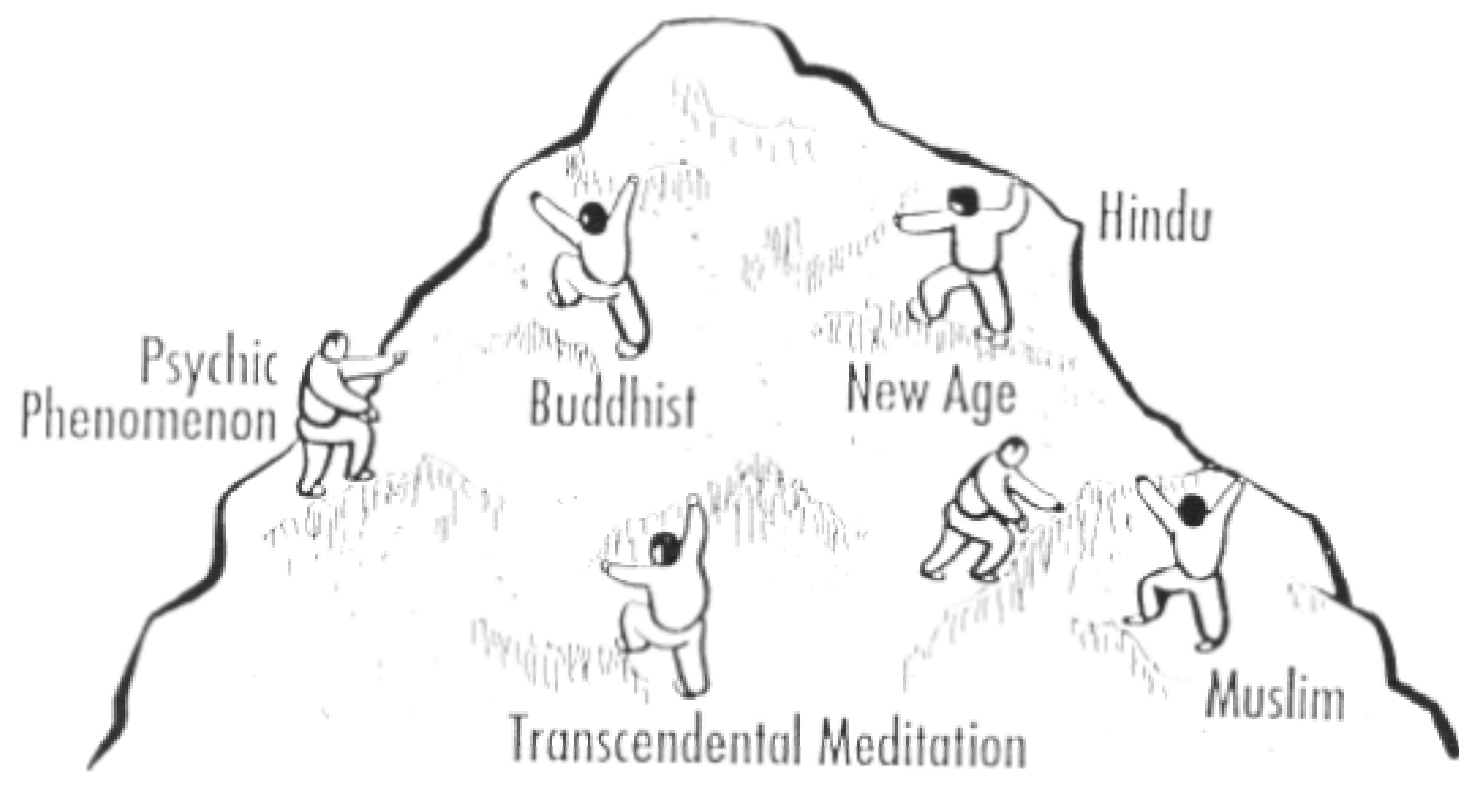
INTRO

- All paths lead to the same destination.
 - Everything is relative – including truth.
 - What is Truth.
- 

Introduction

- It is evident that we are living in a society that has the sole goal of rejecting “Absolutism”
 - If there is one remaining absolute truth, it is that there is no absolute truth.
 - Our society thrives on notions such as pluralism, relativism, Tolerance multiculturalism..etc.
- 


GOD



Do All Paths Lead to the Same Destination?

- Is it possible that Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, etc. represent differing, yet valid, paths to the same destination?
- In this section, we will briefly examine arguments **for** and **against** the claim that all (religious) paths lead to the same destination.

Option One: All Paths Lead to the Same Destination

- Some claim that all religions represent differing, yet equally valid, routes to the same destination. Though each religion may choose its own path, all paths converge at the top of the same mountain.
 - Advocates of this position typically offer the following argument in support of their point:
- 

Option One: All Paths Lead to the Same Destination

1. The contrasting claims of different religions suggest that no religion possesses the entire truth, but only bits and pieces of it.

Illustration

- Imagine, for example, that three blind men are touching an elephant.
 - The first blind man is holding on to the elephant's leg. He says, "I think an elephant is like the trunk of a great tree."
 - The second blind man disagrees. "No, I believe an elephant is like a snake," he says while holding the elephant's trunk.
 - The third blind man responds, "No, you both are wrong, an elephant is like a wall." (He is touching the elephant's side.)

Option One: All Paths Lead to the Same Destination

Each blind man thinks **he is right** and that the others are wrong even though all three of them are all touching **the same elephant**.

In a similar way, is it not possible that all religions are in contact with the same ultimate reality and merely describe it in different ways?

Refutation – Inconsistencies

Each religion makes claims which contradict the claims of other religions.

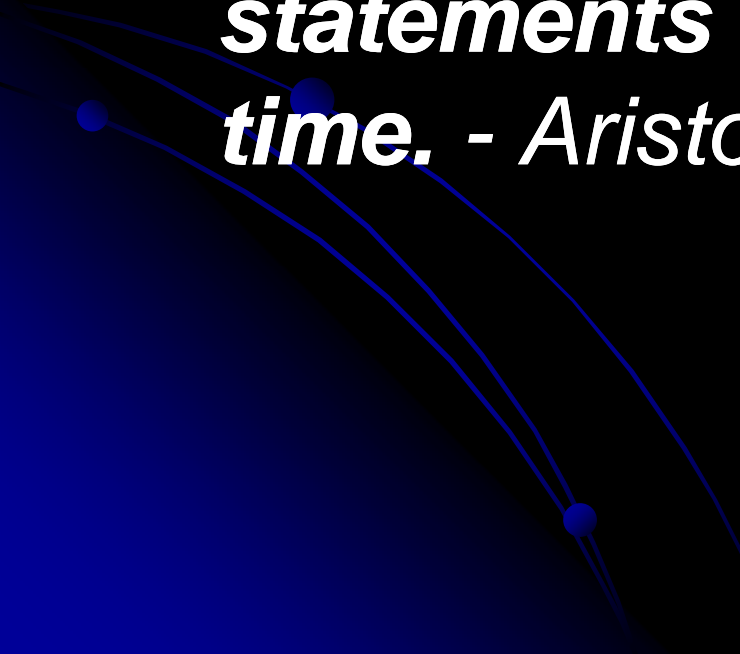
Let's examine some areas of contradictions:

- The Bible centers on Christ's death on the cross and resurrection, the Koran **denies** Christ's crucifixion as well as his Divinity and, in fact, proclaims the Christian teaching of the Trinity to be an abomination.
- Muslims claim that there is only **one God**, Allah, who created the universe from nothing. Some Hindus, on the other hand, do not believe in a personal creator, but in **Brahman**, an impersonal absolute reality which permeates all things. Other Hindus believe that there are **millions of deities** (such as Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and Krishna) which are manifestations of Brahman.

Refutation – Inconsistencies

- According to Christianity, each of us **will die** and be judged by Christ depending on this judgment we will spend eternity in heaven or hell. In contrast, many Hindus claim that we will live (and have already lived) **many lives on earth**. Hindus believe that the conditions of our past and future existence are determined by the cosmic laws of karma. Following death each of us is reincarnated into a different form.

Refutation – Inconsistencies

- These conflicts render implausible the claim that "all paths lead to the same destination."
 - ***Mutually exclusive or contradictory statements cannot be true at the same time. - Aristotle***
- 

Refutation – Inconsistencies

- It will be helpful at this point to return to the parable of the three blind men and the elephant.
- As appealing as this story is, it leaves one important question unanswered: How do we know the blind men were all describing the same elephant?
- What if the first blind man, while holding an oak tree said, "I think an elephant is like the trunk of a great tree." Imagine the second blind man, while holding a fire hose exclaimed, "No, you're wrong; an elephant is like a snake." What if the third blind man, while touching the side of the Sears Tower asserted, "I think you are both wrong; an elephant is like a great wall."

Refutation – Inconsistencies

- The critical problem with this story is that it **assumes the very thing it allegedly proves-that all the blind men are touching an elephant.** Yet how do we know the blind men are touching an elephant? Only because the story assumes it.
- To take it a step further, what if each of the blind men made assertions about an **(alleged)** elephant which were not merely different, but contradictory? Would it still be plausible to believe they are all describing the same elephant?
- In light of the **conflicting truth-claims of various religions it does not seem rational to believe that all paths lead to the same destination.**

Option Two: All Paths Do Not Lead to the Same Destination

- The founders of many religions made claims which they knew contradicted the claims of other religions.
 - The Buddha, for example, rejected Hindu belief regarding the cause of samsara (the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth).
 - Muhammad, the founder of Islam, rejected the belief of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. (he called it imaginary)
 - Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, claimed, "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the father but through me."

Option Two: All Paths Do Not Lead to the Same Destination

- The philosopher from India, Ravi Zacharias, said that those who say “All religions teach the same thing don’t know religion”.
- the British poet and journalist Steve Turner wrote a poem called “Creed” which comments on modern Western religious thinking. Part of the poem says:
 - We believe that all religions are basically the same.
 - They all believe in love and goodness.
 - They only differ on matters of
 - Creation, sin, heaven, hell, God, and salvation.

Our Responsibility

- If all paths do not lead to the same destination then each of us must make an **informed choice** which may have **significant consequences**.
- If I am to be intellectually honest, I must believe that the answer to the question we raised at the beginning of the discussion is **NO** (all paths **do not** lead to the same destination).
- Consequently it is our responsibility to examine the paths before us and make an **informed choice**.

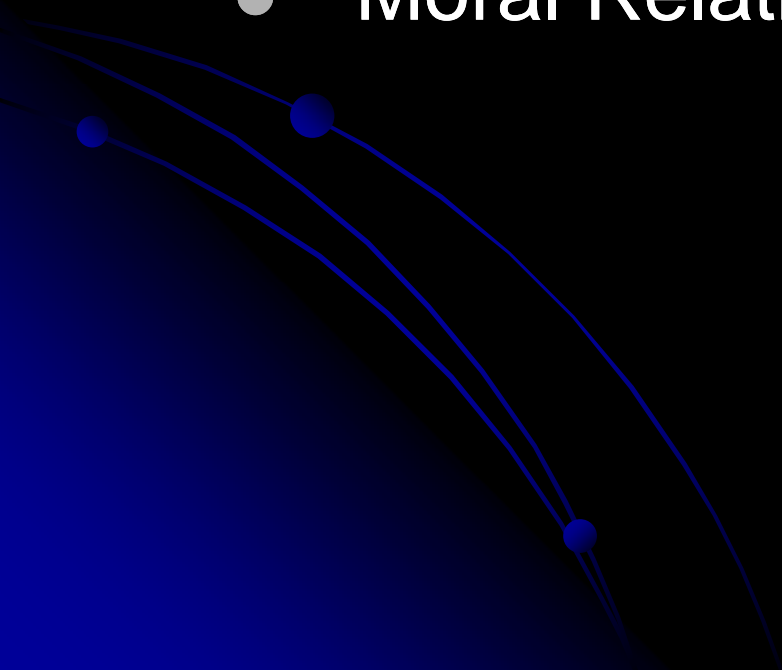
Moral Relativism

- **Definition:**

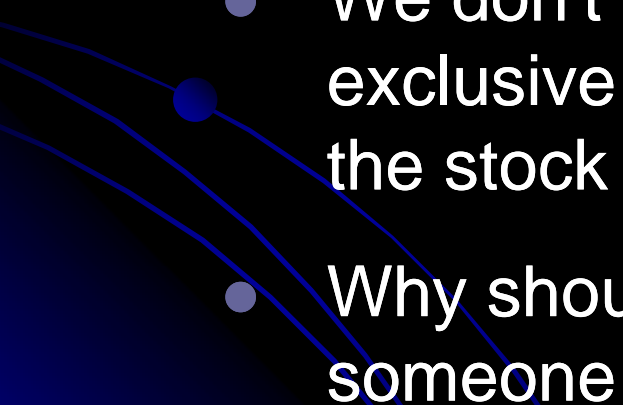
- Relativism states that all truths are equal and that what is true for one person is not necessarily true for another.
- It is the belief that there are no objective moral values that transcend culture or the individual.
- Truth is a personal preference; what's true is what works for you. This may be “true for you but not for me”

Areas of Inconsistencies

- **Unlivable and Unworkable**
 - Moral Relativism is practically unworkable. We simply can't live without a belief—explicit or assumed—that moral standards exist....
 - Moral Relativist story



Areas of Inconsistencies

- **Unlivable and Unworkable**
 - People are not by nature relativists in their everyday beliefs and practices.
 - Only when it comes to **religion and morality** that people invoke relativism.
 - We don't hear people claiming that mutually exclusive statements are true when it comes to the stock market.
 - Why should the moral relativist complain if someone took a hammer to his BMW?
- 

Areas of Inconsistencies

- **Self Refuting and Self Contradictory**

- If truth is indeed relative, then so is the statement that truth is relative
- Relativism claim, "There are no absolute truths". Isn't this self-contradictory?
- Those who argue that 'there is no truth' are putting forth that statement as true."

Areas of Inconsistencies

- **Self Refuting and Self Contradictory**
 - The claims of relativists are like saying, “I can’t speak a word of English” Our most basic reply to the relativist is that his statement is self-contradictory.
 - To be consistent, the relativist must say, “Nothing is objectively true—including my own relativistic position. So you are free to accept my view or reject it.”
 - Of course, usually when the relativist says, “Everything is relative,” he expects his hearers to believe his statement and adjust their lives accordingly.

What About “Tolerance”

- Another shade of Relativism is the notion of “Tolerance”. Relativistic individuals advocate their relativistic ideologies under the realm of “Tolerance”.
- Tolerance is a buzz-word of this day and age. We are frequently reminded that we should be tolerant of those with whom we disagree. Who can argue with this?
- Nevertheless, it is important that tolerance not be confused with truthfulness.

What About “Tolerance”

- Here are some questions to highlight the shortcoming of this trend of Tolerance....
- Kindly ask this question to those who believe in “Tolerance”.
 - Do you believe in the **pro-life** movement?
- If they oppose by saying “no”, point out that their lack tolerance.
- If you are intolerant of someone who is intolerant, then you have violated your own principle.

When are Pluralism & Relativism appropriate?

- Relativistic pluralism is appropriate only in matters of taste, not in matters of truth.
- In matters of truth, we are expected to search for it and cling to it and live it.
- But religious relativism is not only deceptive and intolerant, it is also incoherent,
- The real question is: "Which exclusive claim is really true--Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, relativism, etc.?" And that can only be determined by an investigation into the evidence supporting the claims of each view.

TRUTH

- Truth by definition is the way things really are, the true or actual state of a matter.
- It is conformity with fact or reality.
- For example, the sky is blue. While people may argue what shade of blue the sky is, the statement remains true. For our statements, in order to be true, must conform to a reality that lies **outside** each of us.
- **Compass**
- Truth exists outside of what anyone thinks about it.
- Truth is independent. It's not determined by you, or by me, by our feelings, or just because it works for us.
- We need to know that no reality is contingent upon our view of it.


TRUTH

- You may say that as long as you just believe something to be true, then it will be true for you. But that is not rational either. **Just believing something does not make it truth.**
- My belief does not establish truth or destroy truth. The key is what the truth is.
- Consider the following Story:

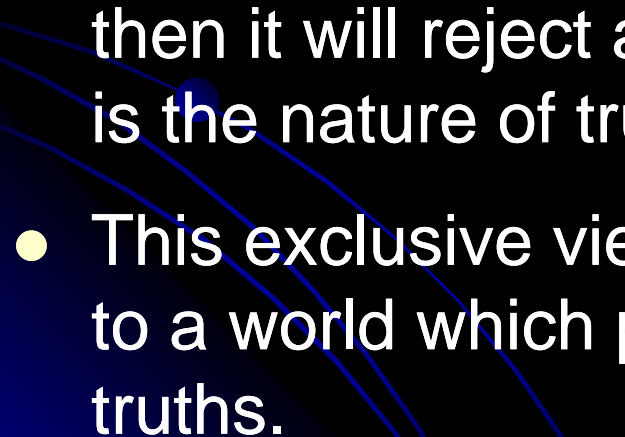
TRUTH

- Suppose that there is only a thin sheet of ice over Moscow River, but I believe that the ice will hold me so I will be able to cross the river. I begin walking across the river with great faith in that ice. But I am believing a lie. No matter how strong my belief, if I walk out there on thin ice, it will break and I will drown. My faith in that ice will not establish what I believe to be true, that the ice will hold me up.
- Conversely, the person who walks on thick ice that covers the river may have only a little faith but be able to walk on the ice safely. It is not faith that creates the safety or a lack of it. The issue is whether my faith is in the truth or in a lie, the thick ice or thin ice. If my faith, even though it is small, is in the thick ice, I will experience the reality of a safe walk.
- And even though I may have great faith in the thin ice, I will experience the reality of destruction.

TRUTH

- Truth is true — even if no one knows it.
 - Truth is true — even if no one admits it.
 - Truth is true — even if no one follows it.
- 

The Exclusiveness of the Truth

- Truth by definition is exclusive. Everything cannot be true. If everything is true, then nothing is false. If nothing is false then it would also be true to say everything is false. We cannot have it both ways.
 - By embracing one thing, it excludes everything else.
 - If the Truth acknowledges one being as supreme lord, then it will reject all other contenders for the throne. That is the nature of truth.
 - This exclusive view of truth as is simply not acceptable to a world which prefers to invent its own comfortable truths.
- 

Concluding Remarks

- The problem here is the fundamental attitude of the human race: that we want to make the rules; we want to create and design our own options; we want to dictate our own terms
- The premise of this world is that there is no God – If there is no God, there is no Absolute Truth. If there is no God, there is only the individual.... Each individual can, then, make up his own truth. We want, if we may, to construct our own reality. We don't want to be compelled to submit to a reality that lies beyond us

Suggested Readings

- Nicholas Rescher, *Moral Absolutes: An Essay on the Nature and Rationale of Morality*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1989).
- C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947)
Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1984)
- Philip E. Devine, *Relativism, Nihilism, and God* (Notre Dame: University Press, 1989)
- Michael D. Beaty, ed., *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy* (Notre Dame: University Press, 1990)
- Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987)
- James Rachels, "A Critique of Ethical Relativism," in *Philosophy: The Quest for Truth*, ed. Louis P. Pojman (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1989)
- Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus among other Gods*