Suspecting Suspicion and Fearing Fear

By Dan Umbel
Columnist

We are not living in a black and white world where many of truth claims we conclude that the quest for truth is misguided, or that truth itself does not exist, or that truth is unknowable.

Just because we do not all agree upon the truth does not mean that one group or one person does not possess it, or that many groups or many people do not possess it. Just because we are tired of thinking does not mean truth has died of being sought. What then explains our modern relativistic proclivities if not the dynamics of the problem? It is my contention that the imprints of pain and mistrust in our collective psyche better explain our modern relativism than the logical dynamics that "necessitate" such a position.

Because of our privileged position in the development of world history, we can see the interactions between power and assertions of truth, and we do not like what we see. We see that the medieval Catholic Church founded heretics because enforcing the "truth" was more important than correcting the problem to. But the problem with forcing people to assent to one's own truth is that lessens the claims to truth that one asserts to be true. Why must truth be enforced? In fact, it is true! If something is convincing, a big man with a club to "persuade" you it that it is so makes the big man more persuasive than the truth that he is upholding.

Reflecting upon the interplay between "truth" and power throughout the ages might well encourage one to despair, to give up hope in the quest itself and withdraw into a bubble of self-made perceptions, inactivity, and fleeting pleasures. But this world has no need of consumptive narcot- nicals on its hull. Think or do, or we no longer have the luxury of lux- 

But whence comes this power for thinking and doing if not from the very power of our quest for truth? Change only comes about when those inspired prophets amongst us, with the audacity to make claims on truth, preach from their deepest-held convictions. Those too afraid to speak the truth are simply fodder for those around them who do equate coercive power with "modern" people is that we are still afraid of the Inquisition, not knowing that the Inquisition of today is failure to examine our own truths and the truths of others.

We cannot afford to be reti- cent in proclaiming the truth, for if it is truth to us it is truth. We must not neglect the truth for the sake of tact. Rightly or wrongly, we engage in sensitivity training when it comes to truth. Our overbearing concern for sensitivity has bred a genera- tion of insecure people. Better to speak out as if what we hold dear is true, knowing that we are falli- ble, than to stand mute and say nothing at all. Tolerance on the foundation of relativism is mutu- al arrogance. A light on a hill is not easily hidden, nor should it be. Dan can be reached at umbel@emu.edu.

By Conrad Erb
Opinion Editor

Before we begin this week’s column, I would like to congratu- late the indi- viduals on campus who are taking time out of their bus- 

But when we disagree with peo-

people, it’s easy to attack the indi- vidual instead of the issue. When we attack individuals with names and reputations, we close the opportunity to learn and close whatever safe space existed for people to discuss openly and honestly.

That’s the big problem in political discussions here on campus: every so often, some- one begins to take things person- ally and confronts individuals instead of issues. This makes for an unsafe space for people who disagree – and as a result, dis- senters tend to desist. The result is that the status quo and the dissenters stop engaging each other, and small fragment groups form and each side becomes even more convinced of the rightness of their way of understanding and the wrong- 

As a result, discussion – and learning – is stifled.

We all know that this is a sensitive time in the political life of our country. Before you get into your next argument – on paper or in person – ask yourself one question: am I looking to batter my fellow (wo)man with a devastating mix of derogatory adjectives and insults, or do I want to participate in an intelli- gent discussion – with the possi- bility of learning something new? If the former appeals to you, I recommend that you leave EMU now and apply for the few spaces still available the bin Laden Institute of Radical Fundamentalism. Transfer credit is available. Contact the Registrar’s office for more information. For those of you who are left, congratulations for your commitment to real dialogue.

Your willingness to not label everyone and everything with whom you disagree is a good sign that we are making progress as a political people. In the same spirit I will be so presumptuous as to make a few suggestions guide- lines for day-to-day life so that we can get along better as we dis- cuss topics that fall into the "staff that matters" category.

First, to those who would consider themselves a part of the anti-war crowd on this campus: I might not always agree with you, but I salute you when you take an unpopular stand. Don’t let people bully you around for what you think: be brave and stand up for what you believe. Pick your battles care- fully, challenge people when you feel so inclined and ask for clar- ification when people paint with broad brush strokes. You may think the anti-war folks are igno- rant and stupid, and it’s possible that some of them feel the same about you. Despite this, don’t fall into the trap of labelling. Whooops. I take that back.

The Weather Vane wishes to apologize for reporting unclearly the length of Dr. Glenn Kaufman’s career at EMU in our Mar. 20 and 27 issues. This is Dr. Kaufman’s 38th year at EMU.