

Certainty by Dr. Mark Eckel

“Why shouldn’t I kill you right now?” I would pose the jolting question to juniors in high school laying foundations for an ethics unit. We were learning why honesty, justice, or compassion should be important at all. Who tells me killing is wrong? Ultimately, my students would postulate that there must be an outside source of authority which gives the basis for universal right and wrong.

However, doubt has replaced the certainty of an ultimate authority. John Patrick Shanley's film adaptation of his Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Doubt*, questions The Church by questioning its servants. In an age where sex scandals have rocked reputations in the rectory,¹ casting doubt instead of dispersions is certainly understood. Yet, the movie invites discussion of even deeper questions: Is certainty a myth? Is authority abusive? Should justice be blind? Does perception trump reality? Many surmise from Shanley's interviews about the film that his ulterior intention was to question the war against Iraq.

Charles Krauthammer pushed back against doubt as the new absolute. In a *TIME* magazine article entitled “In Defense of Certainty” he takes intellectuals to task for their “self-flattering pose as skeptics.” Krauthammer speaks out against doubt and the comforts of relativism. He attacks what he calls “the restless search for novelty.” Krauthammer calls for the affirmation of right and wrong, distinguishing between good and evil, and the moral clarity produced by the attacks on our country on 9-11. He sees that to abdicate personal responsibility is to reject the clarity that moral certainty makes on us as individuals and as a nation.²

Certainty draws lines in the sand. After 9-11 there was an open hostility to George W. Bush's use of the term “evildoers.” The intelligentsia rejected such absolute words. Former *Newsweek* reporter Michael Hastings writing for *GQ* magazine goes so far as to call objectivity a fallacy.³ John Stewart's Daily Show nurtures cynicism: in part a refusal to identify right and wrong. Confidence is seen as arrogance, doubt as humility. However, if there is no certainty, by what standard will we cry for justice? If there is no certainty, how can we know when peace is achieved? If there is no certainty, by what standard will we have a source of knowledge? If there is no certainty, by what standard will we claim any position about anything?

Surety is difficult in a generation which rejects absolute answers to these questions. But when my students reflected on the question why shouldn't their teacher kill them, an absolute was necessary. High school juniors came to the conclusion that absolute truth claims had to exist. Young people realized that human-sourced beliefs could not stand by themselves. Teenagers found that their own beliefs based on personal perception or group-think were insufficient sources for ethical answers. What they did discover was that there is true Truth established for all people, all places, all cultures, and all time. And as a professor I know this one truth full well: everyone who teaches believes they are right. While certainty can always be found in front of the classroom, the authority for certainty comes from above the classroom. For Prime Time America, this is Dr. Mark Eckel, personally seeking truth wherever it's found.

¹ <http://www.npr.org/news/specials/priests/>

² In Defense of Certainty By [Charles Krauthammer](#) Wednesday, Jun. 01, 2005

³ www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,443844,00.html