

Whos Afraid of Relativism? (The Church and Postmodern Culture): Community, Contingency, and Creaturehood



A Fresh Analysis of Relativism and Pragmatism It is often observed that one of the most important and revealing questions you can ask someone identified as a thinker is What are you afraid of? Writing with clarity and great sympathy, Smith helps us see that Christian theologians have betrayed their best insights by being afraid of relativism. He helps us see that the challenge is not relativism itself but rather the epistemological concerns that produced relativism. As is usually the case with Smith's work, this book is both clear and constructive: he not only provides a clear account of the work of Wittgenstein, Rorty, and Brandom but also develops an account of why and how Christians should navigate the contingent character of our lives.--Stanley Hauerwas, Duke Divinity School, emeritus In very readable and reliable expositions of Wittgenstein, Rorty, and Brandom, Smith builds an extremely attractive case philosophically for recognizing the place of contingency, finitude, and dependence in human life. From a Christian perspective, this actually reaffirms an acceptance of creaturely existence and thus of a properly orthodox version of relativism, which there is no reason to fear. A wonderful thesis.--Fergus Kerr, University of Edinburgh In 'Whos Afraid of Relativism?' Smith takes a beautiful risk, boldly and successfully making a case for the relevance of pragmatism for contemporary Christian self-understanding. In this remarkable book, he not only succeeds in making the difficult and enigmatic work of complicated thinkers like Wittgenstein, Rorty, and Brandom accessible to the uninitiated (no small task in itself) but also argues convincingly that the pragmatist emphases on contingency and fallibility should play a key role in a Christian understanding of humans as dependent creatures. The mutual hostility between religious thinkers and pragmatists like

Rorty is well known; Smith has the wisdom to see past this impasse in a timely and radical effort to encourage contemporary Christians to think differently about themselves.--Ronald A. Kuipers, author of Richard Rorty

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