

RELATIVELY SPEAKING

The Philosophy of Individualism

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INTRODUCTION

Jim Lunsford

This is the first of an anticipated series of newsletters directing themselves to the application of "relativity" to personal and social issues. This newsletter will also be used to announce informal group discussions.

The newsletter is free to anyone receiving it. At the present moment, the costs will be covered by a non-profit, educational organization called the School of Communication (SOC). A decision will be made by those who choose to get involved as to the desirability of this newsletter.

Comments of any kind are welcome as long as their substance has significance to the writer submitting them. Please use the return address. The following comments are of particular interest: (1) address change; (2) desire to volunteer a small portion of time per month towards research and administrative tasks; (3) use of, or the purchase of a ditto machine.

Perhaps some of you have already received a previous "first" newsletter. If so, consider this a second "start."

Since the first newsletter, the anticipated format has changed somewhat. Gordon Brown will be more of an editor-advisor for articles and letters submitted by interested persons. Also, Jim Lunsford, UCLA student, will be coordinator to see that the darn thing gets circulated regularly. The next section will contain a working definition of relativity.

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DEFINITION OF RELATIVITY

Jim Lunsford

By way of introduction, my interest in Relativity is basically this: the concept of Relativity seems to be a useful, problem-solving tool. Or, said another way, the structuring of a problem provides the ingredients for its solution. Relativity seems to be an effective way of structuring problems.

Though a concept takes on meaning as a result of a person using it as a jumping off point, I have formulated a few ideas that I propose as a working definition of "Relativity"—this definition is a product of my conversations with Gordon Brown and others, and my readings and reflections on the subject.

Relativity is the assumption that man can only know his own personal (conscious) experience.

In contrast, an **Absolute** assumption is that man can know about an "external" world—an external Truth or Reality; absolute in the sense that it is Reality for all men, and Reality independent of man.

As suggested before, in order to structure a problem, some type of "data" is used. What is being suggested here is that the assumptions made about the "data" (absolute or relative) are critical for any reasoned solution. Here are some examples to illustrate: (a) the absolute-relative distinction; (b) their incompatibility; and (c) the breadth of the topics that are applicable.

The relativists in physics such as Einstein argue that "the whole objective university of matter and energy, atoms and stars, does not exist except as a construction of the consciousness, an edifice of conventional symbols shaped by the senses of man..." (Barnett, 1968, p. 19). On the absolute end, La Francois (1973) argued that people who can't "distinguish between the world in their minds and the [external] world on the other side of their senses. That, by adult definition is madness" (p. 253) or mentally ill.

Absolutists in law are reflected in the admonition "to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." But, former Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg seems more relative when he states that "we cannot be impartial...impartiality is a dream..." (*Saturday Evening Post*, December 1, 1962).

A relativist in theology argues that "I know and am persuaded...that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who things it unclean" (*Romans* 14:14). And, again, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat..." (*Genesis*, 2:16-17).

DEFINITION (Continued)

Later we will focus on the significance of these examples as well as others taken from business, politics, family life, to name a few areas.

References

Barnett, L. (1968). *The universe and Dr. Einstein* (rev. ed.). New York: Bantam Books.

Le Francois, G. R. (1973). *Of children: An introduction to child development*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc.

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T A L K B A C K

From Jim Lunsford

A Personal Note: I have recently been exposed to "relativity" as a means of problem solving; and I have found that this approach has increased the meaningfulness and intelligibility of my every day experiences.

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From Charles Dresser, Computer Consultant

Relativity makes more sense to me than any other philosophical principle or idea that I have encountered. Having seriously looked at this concept for over 6 years, I have found benefits in virtually every aspect of living, including my personal and business activities.

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ADMINISTRATIVE NOTES

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

General. There will begin a general discussion meeting on relativity every Sunday beginning June 11th at Glendale Savings, 722 E. Colorado, Pasadena. Starting at 1:00 PM, there will be breaks every hour for those wishing to leave. If you have further questions call Jim Lunsford. Gordon Brown will generally serve as "moderator."

Theology. Monday, July 19th at 7:30 PM, a meeting focusing on relativity and its relationship to theology will be held at the home of Chris Moller. A local minister will be invited. To maximize interaction, numbers will be limited to about 8; if interested, call Chris.

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NEXT ISSUE

In keeping with current events, the next newsletter will deal with relativity and the issue of totalitarianism vs. self-determination.

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