

RELATIVELY SPEAKING*The Philosophy of Individualism*

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Greetings, I want to be able to tell myself that I got a newsletter out this summer. It has been about 8 years since the last one (Number #21) was sent out. My book is just about completed, and I am looking forward to starting up the SOC newsletters again.

Just for fun, here are a couple of excerpts (minor editing) from last year's end-of-semester "Response Forms." I think they reflect the usefulness of the relative perspective.

"I am much more self-confident in my abilities and in my right to occupy space. I am also more tolerant of the right of others to have an opinion different than my own."

"At first I was very intimidated by your absolute/relative diagrams during class participation but as I became more comfortable with the notion I can now say that it has done wonders for my speech."

Philosophy: Relativity and Banana Bread

Last week, I was looking around for a knife to cut a slice from a fresh loaf of banana bread--I was not willing to use a clean knife for just one cut. I found a fork left over from a previous snack--close enough.

I carefully separated a "slice." I enjoyed doing it! The separation was rough rather than smooth as would have been the case with a knife. This reminded me of an occurrence some 20 years ago.

After the close of the semester, a student asked me to join him on the following Saturday for a 10:00 AM brunch. It was his treat and we would meet at the restaurant in China town---on North Hill Street in Los Angeles.

The quiet and cozy setting created an ambiance conducive to thoughtful and reflective discussion. At one point, I was about to cut a piece of bread off the loaf, but I saw no knife. My benefactor suggested that I use the fork and "separate" a piece of bread. He noted a difference between "cutting" with a knife and "separating" with a fork.

The knife, to a greater degree, imposes its influence on the bread--the cut can be smooth and predictable from the characteristics of the knife. On the other hand, when you use a fork, the result is more of an interaction between the influence from the pressure applied by the fork and the characteristics of the bread itself. The bread yields to the pressure of the fork resulting in a rougher and less predictable line of separation. A parallel can be made between absolute (knife) relationships and relative (fork) relationships.

