

RELATIVELY SPEAKING*The Philosophy of Individualism*

Number 23

Editor: Gordon F. Brown, PhD

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Greetings! Here is an update of current activities and an article on New Year's resolutions. In the "Talk-Back" section I have reproduced a letter received after the last newsletter.

The book on relativity is being reviewed for minor editing. By February, I will Xerox about 100 copies to circulate to those who have indicated an interest in receiving a copy. After I incorporate the suggestions from these readers, I will look to publishing it in book-form with complimentary copies to those providing thoughtful suggestions. If you wish to be added to the current list of persons receiving one of the 100 copies, leave your name and address on my voice mail.

My voice mail is (818) 585-7498. [PCC contact number does not apply after 1998.]

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

"I find it [relativity] very interesting and challenging because it contradicts a lot of what I've been taught in my life, yet it makes sense."

"I believe that, when first hearing about the relative perspective, I had an absolute view of the world. I now hope that I am on my way to developing a relative view of the world. This mode of perception and thinking is very helpful to me in my work and in my relationships with other people. Thank you."

"The relative perspective has helped me understand how to respond to my child in a more productive and helpful way."

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Students For Education (SFE) is being formed with about 70 persons indicating an interest.

Here is the background leading to the formation of this group. For some time, I have been concerned about the lower academic standards being offered to students compared with those 20 years ago. About 15 years ago, I joined with some of my colleagues to form Teachers For Education (TFE). We have accomplished some significant objectives, but the task is on-going. With my book completed, I now have more time to direct toward this effort of resisting those in the school bureaucracy who are intent on redirecting student efforts away from academic accomplishments and toward social-restructuring agendas such as grades by race (which is the most recent assault). Joining with students would seem to be a natural extension to the teachers' efforts. I would be particularly interested in working with former students from my classes

because we have a full semester behind us in establishing lines of communication. For the former students, this could be an interesting and constructive way to practice and discuss issues using the relative perspective as a mental tool for problem solving.

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Let's meet at Pasadena City College on Saturday morning, January 21, 1995, from 10:00 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. During the first 45 minutes, we could share examples of using the relative perspective in everyday living. During the second 45 minutes, we could discuss some approaches to getting education back into our schools. I will invite one or two of my colleagues to join us. I have reserved Room 400 in the "C" building (next door to our former classroom). Whoever shows up can form the core group and, if he/she chooses, can become a Charter member. So that I can provide refreshments for an appropriate number, if you would, let me know you are coming by leaving a message on my voice mail.

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Personal Development: Relativity and New Year's Resolutions

For the absolutists, this is a time to make New Year's Resolutions. Typically, these involve commitments to improve themselves. They promise to try harder to become the types of people that they think they should be. In their efforts to fit themselves into molds created by their current images of goodness, they have been likened to people trying to raise themselves up by pulling on their own boot straps.

For the relativists, the New Year could be a time to set priorities. Typically, these involve commitments as to where (people, things, or ideas) they are going to spend their time for the next 12 months.

Contrasting the two perspectives, the absolutists tend to focus on outcomes, while the relativists tend to focus on interactive relationships.

For example, an absolutist could resolve to improve his/her relationship with a certain friend, while a relativist could resolve to spend more time communicating with a certain friend.

On the one hand, the absolutist would make efforts to achieve the goal of an "improved" relationship. People and situations would be manipulated in an attempt to bring about this predetermined goal.

On the other hand, the relativist would simply spend more time in communicating. This could result in anything from a closer relationship to a complete breaking-off of the relationship.

The focus of the absolutist differs from that of the relativist. For the absolutist, the focus is on the goal. For the relativist, the focus is on the step-by-step, interactive relationship.

Interpersonal communications of the absolutist and relativist can be seen to differ in content. For the absolutist, he/she tries to communicate only in ways that achieve the preconceived notion of an "improved" relationship. For the relativist, he/she tries to communicate only in ways that reflect what he/she is as a person at a given moment in time.

As for the ideal New Year's resolution: the absolutist could make a commitment to being a "better" person in his/her own image; the relativist could make a commitment to becoming more a person of his/her own choices.

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Address Check:

If you would, drop me a note to confirm the spelling of your name and accuracy of your address. Send to: School of Communication, PO BOX 1211, ARCADIA, CA 91077-1211.

If you prefer, simply leave a message on my voice mail anytime except: 8:00-9:00 A.M. on Tuesday or Thursday; and 5:00-6:00 P.M. on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. [PCC contact number does not apply after 1998.]

When I verify your name and address, I will put a "*94" on your label. Last time, a couple of names were inadvertently erased from my message memory. If the "*94" does not appear on your label even though you called in last time, please call again.

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T A L K B A C K

From: George J. Kelley, retired in Paradise, California (July 24, 1994)
First-time recipient of the Newsletter

Your newsletter was read and enjoyed. The absolute/relative Treatise was a real mental experience to me. I never analyzed my relationship with my environment prior to reading your article.

As a total Relativist, married to an Absolutist, I have been ashamed and angry at my failure to meet her expectations as to promptness, completion of projects, retaining in my possession articles of clothing, specially gloves, hats and tools. Then there was the problem of reminiscing. Our memories differed as to the good times and the difficult times. Your point, "The absolutist learns to become comfortable with conformity, predictability and certainty; whereas the relativist learns to become comfortable with change, variety, and uncertainty." brought into focus that which was fuzzy. I now understand why she was disturbed when after 15 years in St. Paul we picked up and left a good paying position on the promise of a job in Eugene, OR. To me, release from Union Representation on a Local and National level with all the Time Limits, restrictions, rules and schedules (you don't keep the President of the USA waiting) was every bit as enjoyable as my release from the Army. Whereas with Maudene, it must have created a feeling of frustration and helplessness. Now I understand why I recall the transition as days of joy while Maudene views them as a time of tribulation.

I am trying to bring some absolutism into my life, I have found and am in possession of all 4 of my work gloves, prior to your letter I had 3 lefty hands and a full missing glove.

Your letter also gave me a big assist in my relationship with those I am in immediate contact. I have several positions in Fraternal and Social organizations where I am expected to choose members as Committee Chairmen or nominees for Office. I do this on the basis of what I know of the man's background, etc. prior to retirement, plus present popularity and personality. Since most of these offices are merely ego trips and self-healing, my record has been good -- I mean, if you can't be Big Sir or Head Turtle you shouldn't be walking around loose. However, when the job called for an absolutist I failed miserably. Case in point is my choice of a Golf Tournament Chairman. I now realize I was picking relativists. All were happy, popular, fun to be around, and volunteered their service with a smile. Scheduling, formatting and running a Tournament calls for an absolutist. I appointed one after I received your Newsletter and he is doing GREAT.

One thing I found out by applying your template to those around me is, many relativists were able to hold positions requiring the characteristics of absolutism, because of the money or status. When they retired, they reverted to form as in my case.

We have 16 Great-Grandchildren, ranging in age from 9 years to unborn. I am having a wonderful relationship with those old enough to run, play and communicate -- I believe this is because most humans are born relativist and only become absolutist through training and/or to survive in an absolutist society.

Thanks for including us in your mailing. I sent a copy to our daughter, Darlene. She is working on her Doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania. I believe it will be a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Human Sexuality. She might write to you.

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**Send in your "Talk-Back" to: School of Communication
Box 1211
Arcadia, CA 91077-1211**