

## **RELATIVELY SPEAKING**

*The Philosophy of Individualism*

Number 28

Editor: Gordon F. Brown, PhD

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**Greetings!** Everything seems to be taking longer than anticipated. I am still working on rewriting the sex chapter in the relativity book with completion anticipated by summer. I am also pursuing the lawsuit against PCC trustees for wasting taxpayers' money. As you may recall, I am arguing that when the law says that the trustees "shall" institute specific financial safeguards into their budget process, this is "mandatory" and not "suggestive" as argued by the trustees. The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, representing with statutory authority the 107 California community colleges, agreed with my position and wrote an Amicus Brief to the California Appellate Court hearing the case. Verbal arguments are scheduled for next month. For me the question is whether or not the court system has been reduced to judicial anarchy where words can mean anything a trial judge chooses them to mean.

At the end of last semester, I took at random a couple of old newsletter from my file to show as samples to students. Several students requested a copy of the newsletter with an article on love. I looked again and noticed that it was written in December of 1982! Reading it over, I liked it--fresh and full of implications. I have reproduced partly because it will help to insure that I get another newsletter out this year, and partly because it shows the stability of relative thinking--an emphasis on relationships rather than physical content.

Check out the "winter get-together" set for Saturday, January 4<sup>th</sup> and cited on Page 3.

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**Just for fun**, here are 7 excerpts from the Fall 1996 end-of-semester "Response Forms."

*...I learned a lot that will help me on how to run my life. The book was interesting and I liked the arguments in the class....*

*...Very entertaining and blunt, liked it when you confronted people....*

*...the best most challenging class I have had throughout my years at PCC....*

*An excellent experience for me...learned to use my brain, to think and to argue without feeling upset or down, I learned to share my thoughts with others and discuss the differences....*

*...best class I have ever had, no other class has ever asked me to use my mind....*

*This class has been a great experience for me and has benefited my education greatly. The concept of "keeping the mind here" has helped me in all aspects of my education. The challenging nature of the teacher's style forced the students to think, I feel, and gave me*

**Just for fun--(continued)**

*the desire to want to figure things out on my own, rather than merely being told the answer. Thank you very much for a very interesting and delightful experience.*

*I liked the fact that we learned about thinking and how it can be used in real life.*

[The point I am focusing on is that people enjoy thinking and a relative perspective uniquely provides the framework for that thinking. As I see it, if we are to improve our educational system (and our personal lives for that matter) our first step is to distinguish between absolute, relative, and mixed perspectives. Once done, the sheer rational power of the relative perspective will insure its primary emergence in the long run. More than ninety percent of what I see in our educational system, at all levels, is either absolute or mixed. The opportunity is enormous.]

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**Semantics and Relativity: Love**

[Reprinted from *Relatively Speaking*, December 1982]

This is the season when we will be hearing about love, hope, and charity. The problem I have always found with these terms is that they can mean almost anything. Here are some relative thoughts about "love."

First, consider that the theme running through the common usage of the word could be described as 'choosing to communicate.' Thus, "I love you" means I choose to communicate with you. When parents say they love their children, this means that they choose to take the time and energy to communicate with their children. When a spouse says he loves his partner, that simply means that he has taken the time and energy to communicate with her. When someone says they have lived with and loved another person for several years, that would indicate considerable interaction in a wide variety of situations.

One thing I like about this definition of love is that it accommodates interactions that are negatively charged as well as positively charged. People can feel closer to each other after a negatively charged interaction just as with a positively charged interaction.

What greater gift during this holiday season could one person give to another than to give the gift of a little extra love--a little extra time and energy in listening to another's point of view, expressing one's own, and discussing their implications and interactions.

I tend to avoid the mechanics of the holiday season--the opening of gifts, the preparation and ingestion of food, and even the decorating of a tree. To a degree, these activities could provide a setting for communication, but it seems to me that they more often detract by focusing attention away from people and onto the objects themselves.

For those with a loved one who has passed away, this can be a time to remember an experience where they had interacted. Interestingly, those times of communicating can sometimes be more vividly remembered and appreciated now than at the time they occurred. Surely, it is no distortion of the English language to say that "their love continues." For those with a religious bias, the holiday can be seen as a time commemorating God's love for man--choosing to communicate with man.

Perhaps each of us has a self portrait that can be described in terms of where and with what we choose to communicate. As we look back at where we spent our time and energy communicating last year, we can see where we are; and as we look to the next year and set our priorities and start living (choosing) those priorities, we can see what we are becoming.

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**Relativist's Quotes of the Month:**

"Have you learn'd lessons only of those who admired you, and were tender with you, and stood aside for you?

Have you not learn'd great lessons from those who reject you, and brace themselves against you? or who treat you with contempt, or dispute the passage with you?

"Stronger Lessons" by Walt Whitman, 1888

[Emphasizes the significance of the individual to take control of his/her life]

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**A Winter "Get-Together"**

Consider joining me sometime between 10:00 A.M. and 11:30 A.M. on Saturday, January 4, 1997 at Pasadena City College in C400. I have reserved the room and will bring some minor refreshments. If you don't show up, I will simply take my tax-deductible refreshments home with me at about 11:30 A.M.

I do look forward to the opportunity of chatting informally with you. Perhaps some of you will recognize each other. If you have any questions, feel free to leave a message at my office phone (818) 585-7498 and I will get back to you. [PCC contact number does not apply after 1998.]

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**T A L K     B A C K**

From J. D. in Los Angeles, CA

*"I liked your analogy (newsletter #27) of the captain steering the ship and of the individual's responsibility of choosing a personal top priority; one's goal in life. If there is anything that I have learned from your class, it is the contrast which emerges between an absolutist and a relativist thinker...."*

From David in Azusa, CA

*"I received your newsletter (number 27), my first since completing your Psychology 1A course of Spring 1996. I am looking forward to the next. Please keep them coming."*

From Casey in Felton, CA

*"Please continue to keep my name on your mailing list. I enjoy receiving your newsletter. When it arrives in my mail, it is usually very timely in that it contains information I need to hear in my present moment--strange how that can happen."*

From Ly in Los Angeles, CA

*"Thank you for your newsletter. I find that it is very helpful and interesting. I am looking forward to your next newsletter."*

From Ann in Salinas, CA

*"I have received your newsletter #27 and again, I enjoyed it thoroughly. I would very much like to continue to receive future letter, and am writing to confirm my address...I can assure you, as to myself, the concepts of relativity I have learned from you do indeed still exist after the class. The hurdles I have encountered arise with those individuals who are quite comfortable living in the absolute 'world'.... So, please keep the newsletters coming as I feel I still have a lot to learn. Thank you for sharing your time and your thoughts."*

From Tony in Oak Harbor, WA

*"...Trust all is well with you. I read about your lawsuit and hope you are successful...it elevates my blood pressure every time I think of the waste and abuse...."*

**T A L K    B A C K—(continued)**

From Rob in Arcadia, CA

*"I've received several of your newsletters, but only considered responding this time...What are your views on sex?...Glad to hear you're taking part in fighting those at PCC who use public funds for private purposes...I like the idea that you think people 'will enjoy thinking if the opportunity is provided.' I think people can think on their own, but some are stubborn about it."*

From Lorne in Salem, OR

*"Thank you for the newsletter. I like the idea of choosing top priorities and taking a 'quiet time' to reflect and plan...."*

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**Address Check:**

Welcome to the 70 new sign-ups from last semester. I will send a few newsletters. If you would like to continue receiving them, verify your address and interest by simply calling or writing as described below.

Welcome to you old timers. Work with me on this address issue--it is a continuing process. If you do not have a \*94 (or later) on your mailing label and you would like to continue receiving the newsletter, confirm your address and interest by either sending a note to: School of Communication, PO BOX 1211, Arcadia, CA 91077; or simply by leaving a message on my answering machine anytime. The number is (818) 585-7498. [PCC contact number does not apply after 1998.]

When I verify your name and address, I will put a "\*96" on your label. Work with me on this. Occasionally, a call will be erased before I hear it -- something to do with PCC's automatic erasing of "old" messages. If the "\*94," "\*95," or "\*96" does not appear on your label even though you called in, please call or write again.

Feel free to request that your newsletter be sent to a temporary, college address.

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**A New Theme: A Focus On Religion**

I think the future will bring a cultural re-examination of basic religious concepts. The focus will not be religion versus no religion, but relative versus absolute perspectives on religion. It is my contention that the Bible is more intelligible when viewed from a relative perspective than from the traditional absolute perspective. I welcome your comments.