

***RELATIVELY SPEAKING****The Philosophy of Individualism***Number 34****Editor: Gordon F. Brown, PhD****September 1999****GREETINGS!**

It has been a while—the previous newsletter was sent out last December. I am happy to report that progress is still being made on The Book. Once I stop this process of analyzing and reanalyzing, I anticipate about 3 additional months to pull it all together. I would enjoy the process of thinking and rethinking the ideas without end—ideas are “alive” and constantly undergoing change. However, I also wish to share the ideas with others and that requires artificially ceasing the process of analysis and freezing the ideas into a written form. Maybe another month of thinking will do it.

The focus of this newsletter has to do with change. As I see it, there is a critical process necessary for change to be constructive—and it is often over-looked. This critical process, involving “Language and Integrity,” is the foundation upon which friendships are established, marriages are kept alive, and personal integrity is maintained and matured.

\* \* \* \* \*

**GO AHEAD, SPLIT THAT INFINITIVE**

As noted in the Broadway play “My Fair Lady,” language usage and speech reveal a lot about a person.

For the Absolutist, rules govern the Right way to write and speak. To violate these rules is simply wrong and a sign of ignorance.

For the Mixed, there is only one rule governing language use: Do not say anything that would offend anyone. If everyone would speak and write in a politically correct manner then we can all be happy. Being happy— isn’t that what everyone really wants?

Here comes the Relativist! “When I use a word,” Humpty-Dumpty said, “it means just what I choose

(continued page 2)

**LANGUAGE AND INTEGRITY**

Being a person of one’s word is the prerequisite foundation for establishing and maintaining a relationship—whether with a friend, oneself, or a Force. This is an ongoing task.

As we mature and attempt to accommodate new experiences by changing the way we think, effort is required to make a parallel change in our words. For example, if we are changing from an absolute perspective to a relative perspective, the absolute phrase “You are Right” may be modified to the relative phrase “I agree with you.” And the absolute phrase “It was a Good movie” could be changed to the relative phrase “I liked the movie.” And again, the absolute phrase “What I need you to do is...” could be changed to the relative phrase “What I want you to do is....”

Friends will notice the difference. One of our readers shared with me her experience of being told by her family members that if she did not “stop talking that way,” they would no longer talk with her or interact with her as a family member. As the reader saw it, her family members were committed to an absolute perspective and terminology while she saw herself as trying to practice a relative perspective and terminology. She had a decision to make. She could either alienate her family or be true to herself. As I saw it, whatever she chose, she could always be thankful to her family members for giving her that self-defining moment where she could enhance her own personal identity. In a similar way, some parents unwittingly sever lines of communication with their children by making demands upon them to choose between being true to themselves or being true to the “family.”

Whatever we choose, our brain will seek integrity between our philosophy and our words. This is a critical process. For example, if we choose to embrace a relative perspective, we will experience a mental double-take when hearing ourselves use words like “Truth” and “Good.” If we immediately

(continued page 2)

**RELATIVIST’S QUOTE OF THE MONTH:**

*I know you believe you understood what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant.”*

Attributed to Alan Greenspan, Chairman, Federal Reserve Board

**Go Ahead, Split That Infinitive** (from page 1)

it to mean—neither more nor less” (“Humpty-Dumpty” in Through the Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll). According to Walt Whitman, “...the forms of grammar are never persistently obeyed, and cannot be...The English Language is grandly lawless like the race who use it—or, rather, breaks out of the little laws to enter truly the higher ones” (“An American Primer” in Leaves of Grass). And as Mark Twain reportedly put it, “Anyone who can only think of one way to spell a word obviously lacks imagination.”

As for me, I was happy to see that the relative perspective is influencing English language usage. At least that is how I understood an article in last year’s Wall Street Journal (“To Fully Annoy Language Purists...,” 8/14/98).

As reported, it is okay to split an infinitive, says the authoritative Oxford University Press in its recently published, first all-new English dictionary in 70 years. Split infinitives in English are “both normal and useful” and scorn for the split infinitive stems from an ill-founded analogy with Latin. Also as reported, the Oxford Dictionary seems to recommend as preferable the use of the pronoun “they” for a singular person of unknown gender, such as: “Ask a friend if they could help.” The use of “he” in such a context is “old-fashioned and sexist,” the compilers argue, while “he or she” is condemned as “tiresomely long-winded.” Jean Aitchison, a language professor at Oxford, says: “It helps enormously that a learned dictionary has stood up against elderly pedants.” [“Bravo,” say I.]

\*\*\* \*\*

**Language and Integrity** (from page 1)

replace such terms with “I agree” and “I like it,” the absolute words will eventually drop from usage. If, on the other hand, we continue to use absolute terms, the result may be our giving up the relative perspective and embracing the absolute perspective. When the absolute perspective is in place, the absolute terms will no longer be noticed. One way or the other, absolute or relative, the brain will seek integrity—absolute terms with an absolute perspective and relative terms with a relative perspective. Acting as a system of checks-and-balances, one’s personal perspective alerts one to contrary terms; and one’s words can be used to establish or enhance one’s perspective. Said another way, word usage can change how we see things and how we see things can change our word usage. \*\*\*

***ADDENDUM:***

We could choose to be Mixed. By ignoring our own sense of intellectual integrity, we could shift back and forth between absolute and relative perspectives in order to make everyone happy.. However, there is a cost. When intellectual integrity is lost, so is our sense of personality identity. We are limited to the single objective of seeking emotional satisfaction for the moment. In the absence of a personal identity, lost is the possibility of having a human relationship with others, oneself, or a Force. In contrast, the Relativist would seek *both* emotional and intellectual integrity.

\*\*\* \*\*

## FOCUS ON RELIGION AND WORLD-WIDE EVENTS

For two reasons, I am particularly enjoying the recent newsletter focus on relative religion. First, a relative view of religion is the only linchpin, as I see it, for establishing integrity within human experience. I anticipate that the topic of “religion as linchpin” will be a continuing focus in future newsletters. The second reason I am particularly enjoying the current focus on relative religion is that views on religion appear to be particularly relevant to world-wide current events. Here are my thoughts.

Throughout the world, we can see that absolute religious beliefs divide people and seem to contribute to long-standing violence. In Bosnia, we saw evidence of horrific atrocities as Christian Serbs revived the ancient conflict with the Muslim Albanians; In Ireland, peace efforts are faltering as the Protestant North and the Catholic South continue their brutal 35-year confrontation; In the Middle East, killing continues as Israeli Jews and Arab Muslims seek common ground for building a peaceful co-existence; and, in Asia, the 55-year-old,

atheistic Chinese government banned the 7-year-old popular meditation group Falun Dafa for engaging in “evil thinking” and “sabotaging social stability.” There are many more examples, but the point is already made: there is a connection between violence and embracing absolute religious beliefs.

As I see it, looking back over the last 50 years in economics, we can see the relatively-oriented capitalism prevailing by public consensus over the absolutely-oriented socialism. Again, as I see it, looking forward to the next 50 years, we will see relatively-oriented views on religion prevailing by public consensus over the current absolutely-oriented views on religion. We will still have Christians, Jews, Muslims and atheists. However, the relative orientation will make it a matter of individual choice. We will see that the absolute inspiration to brutalize your neighbor expires in the mere presence of the relative perspective.

\*\*\*    \*\*\*    \*\*\*    \*\*\*    \*\*\*    \*\*\*    \*\*\*

---

## TALK BACK

From Dan in Redmond, WA

*Since there is a \*96 on my envelope I thought it would be a good time to tell you I would really enjoy receiving future newsletters. So much has happened in my life since I took your class. All for the better...When is your book going to be published? I would enjoy reading it...Hope you are doing well...*

From Penny in Long Beach, CA

*...[written to my spouse] ...Tell your significant other I need my name put back on his mailing list! Love his newsletter....*

From Kyoko in Los Angeles, CA

*Happy Holidays! I hope your health is well. Please continue to send me your newsletter. I enjoy it so much.*

From Michel in Los Angeles, CA

*Here is a book I enjoyed reading. [Mad Cowboy by Howard F. Lyman]*

(continued on page 4)

## TALK BACK (Continued)

From Freida in Littleriver, CA

*Joe [my husband] died on November... One of his last adventures in reading and philosophizing was the result of your last newsletter. He and his physiotherapist went around and around on different points of view about "Relativism." Joe had developed a minor reputation in this small community as a "relativist."*

[You may remember Joe as an occasional participant in the Talk-Back section—GFB]

From Katie in Buena Park, CA

*Hi Gordon...First and foremost, I want you to know that it STINKS and pains me to know of your trials with prostate cancer! I would use stronger language but I promised myself that my vocabulary WAS going to improve instead of letting it deteriorate to the level of my present students..Delighted to receive your latest newsletter ...Your latest "letter"—which I've read over and over again—makes me stop and think about being raised in an absolutist environment all these years, FINALLY "slamming on the brakes," doing some "wheelies" and [only then] comprehending what a relativist sees. Planning on rereading prior issues again. Know I will see something I didn't see in earlier readings. Thanks.*

From Diana in Pasadena, CA

*I read this ["Is Truth Relative or Absolute?"—excerpt from Life Ahead by Krishnamurti] and, of course, thought of you... Best wishes.*

From: Kwanmo in Los Angeles, CA; Bill in San Marino, CA; Michael in Downey, CA;  
Marilyn in Temple City, CA; Gustavo in Los Angeles, CA; Raquel in Pasadena, CA;  
Lisa in Altadena, CA; and Anna in Long Beach, CA

*Confirm my current interest / address change / reinstate my name / add my name*

### **Address Update**

Call anytime to leave a message (626-445-1749). If you have \*97 (or \*96, and it slipped by) consider making a decision whether or not to continue receiving the newsletters. As the existentialists argue, no decision is a decision. There is no absolute reason for choosing to continue receiving the newsletters. On the other hand, our very identity can be seen as a function of the ideas to which we choose to expose ourselves. If you choose, you can also e-mail a message to me at: [relspeak@pacbell.net](mailto:relspeak@pacbell.net)