

**RELATIVELY SPEAKING***The Philosophy of Individualism***Number 36****Editor: Gordon F. Brown, PhD****December 2001****GREETINGS!**

It has been almost two years since the last newsletter (January 2000). Several times, I began writing and several times I was side-tracked by some health issues. To remain open on these matters, I have cited some specifics under Health Watch.

It was last July when I was outlining a newsletter topic describing the Tiger Woods phenomena from a relative perspective. Then there was September 11<sup>th</sup> or “9-11.” I decided to set aside the Tiger Woods analysis and share with you my current thoughts on the 9-11 events, titled “Innocence Lost” and “Relativity Found.” As you may remember, in the last newsletter, I commented that “As I see it, religion will be the most significant social topic under debate during the next 20 years...Whether or not an individual utilizes religious beliefs...there will be an advantage to understanding what is at issue.” This seems to be the case, at least for now.

Check out my new earthlink.net e-mail address. I will keep the old pacbell.net for a few more months. Confirming your interest in receiving these newsletters will keep our dialogue continuing. Our choices make a difference.

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**TWIN TOWERS: INNOCENCE LOST**

Throughout our lives, we experience events that are so intense that they change how we see things from that point on. The child is told that the story about Santa Clause was a fabrication; the teenager is informed that his parents are separating; the young adult is betrayed by a close friend; the middle-aged person loses a job or savings; and the senior is faced with the death of a mate. Such events can contribute to one’s maturity in that they give rise to new perceptions that accommodate more human experiences.

However, after such events, we are not the same—ever. There is a loss of innocence. We don’t see the world in the same way. Seeing the World Trade

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**LOOKING FORWARD: RELATIVITY FOUND**

At the root of the September 11<sup>th</sup> events is absolute thinking—people claiming to be acting on behalf of God and Truth. From this perspective, it is the duty of every person to do whatever is necessary to advance the cause of God’s will and to suppress anything that is contrary to God’s will. Tolerance of Evil is not a virtue. And, because there is nothing superior to God’s will, there is no act of terror too violent when such acts are an expression of God’s will. You could even have a world-wide flood!

Osama bin Laden says that God and absolute Truth are on his side. Speaking for the United States, President Bush retorts with the absolute position that God and Truth are on our side. Bush could have made a relative-type response, arguing that any U.S. reaction would simply be a matter of establishing our national identity. He did not, so we now have a situation of two opposing absolutes.

Contradictory absolutes can be resolved only by physical force. The reason is that validating absolutes is beyond human experience. That is, absolute statements are rationally empty assertions. Whether between parent and child, or between a government and its people, at the base of any absolute statement is the assumption that something is True solely because some individual says it is True.

The physical force used by bin Laden is terrorism; the physical force used by President Bush is military might. Both sides argue that they are fulfilling the absolute will of God. The possibility of dying is not a deterrent, it is an opportunity to become a patriotic hero or a religious martyr. We can see that human history is engorged with conflicts between opposing religious absolutists. The current conflict is reminiscent of the eleventh century Crusades between Moslems and Christians. However, the problem can be seen as a consequence of absolute thinking, rather than religion per se.

The alternative to absolute thinking is relative thinking, where only relationships are knowable and they are always personal and private. A relative

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## TALK BACK

From Ann in Salinas, CA

*I would enjoy continuing your newsletter. I always appreciate the information and thoughts...I have been able to successfully utilize the concepts I have learned in both your class and through the newsletters...the relative point of view helped an employee gain perspective on his life...It really demonstrated to me how pervasive the absolute point of view is...I found my employees were very receptive to [the relative perspective]...Please continue to send your newsletter...and I will continue to help people around me to see how interesting life can be, relatively speaking.*

From Warren in Solvang, CA

*...Haven't received a recent 'Relatively Speaking,' trusting a blockbuster will come along. My best to you all.*

From Orin in Pasadena, CA

*I enjoy reading the newsletter. Your class at P.C.C. was one of my best memories. I like your being in my world. Hope you stay a long time. Your friend.*

From Merrick in Manila, CA

*Dear Gordon. For the past two years or so I've been living my life with near reckless abandonment. Doing whatever I please, relying on instinct or impulse. Hoping to find things to make my life happy. And indeed, it has been a swell time. But invariably a sort of disenchanted or disgusted emptiness comes to me, and I begin to think of different things...Following my thoughts and weighing the impact or significance of thought in general. I truly feel immersed in something grand, something beyond my scope. But what of it? I feel a tinge of poetic justice that I still find myself in a struggle of sorts. For instance, what to do with my day. At times I feel all of my projects to be worthless filler. Stuck in a rut of mindless activity that I have created with the pure intention of allowing myself to be free. It is not this calling into question the worth of my own values that troubles my stomach. It's the lack of real progress that I feel—as if I'm constantly waffling on the same issue. This is the struggle: the pursuit of honest spiritual progress. I wonder if these sentiments ring a bell to you. I wonder if you ever felt the need to pull yourself out of a rut. I suppose I know that the answers or dialogue I thirst for lie within me, alone, however these topics may be of interest to you. I wonder if there was a breaking point, in which you felt progress and from thence forth knew what actions would make you feel rewarded. I realize, too, that I've a tendency to overly dramatize at times and that the key to my struggle is perhaps only patience and an open attitude. And that this desire to feel some ultimate glory of love in my everyday waking life is a misguided one. C'est la vie. Respond if you wish. I thank you again for being a stand up kind of guy and for showing me more sides to this life. Inspiration by example is a rare thing and I'm glad you've had the motivation to share your life with so many others. Despite the drag of radiation therapy and doctor's visits, I can't help but expect that you're slightly (or tremendously) excited to be nearing the end of your life here. Forgive my being morose, but death, like birth, seems like an especially poignant time in life. I wish you all the best and will continue to ponder the impact you've made on my life. Please keep the newsletters coming.*

From Tom in Loomis, CA

*Yes, please keep me on your mailing list. Would be interested in hearing of the continuing saga of Relatively Speaking.*

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