

RELATIVELY SPEAKING*The Philosophy of Individualism***Number 9****Editor: Gordon F. Brown, PhD****January 1978****In this month's issue**

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ON PHILOSOPHY: FREEDOM

Introduction. What is living all about? Some people say that the essence of "living" is captured in the word "freedom." Consequently, they are prepared to risk death in an attempt to insure freedom for themselves or others. Patrick Henry allegedly said, "Give me liberty or give me death," which could be a case in point. That is, "liberty" or freedom makes living worthwhile. Life without freedom is not worth living. War or killing to preserve freedom may be justified on the grounds that it is the freedom that makes living worthwhile. What then is the nature of freedom?

AN ABSOLUTE VIEW. The following view of "freedom" may be seen as being logically consistent with the assumption that "Truth" is knowable or that man can know the nature of things as they exist independent of him.

"Freedom" and "Truth" are directly related as reflected the in the phrases: "freedom from the bondage of ignorance" and "the truth shall make you free." Furthermore, freedom is not free but must be worked for. Man begins ignorant (secular) or sinful (religious) and through perspiration and/or inspiration acquires some degree of Truth, which in turn makes him to some degree free. Freedom is a goal to be achieved—an ideal state to be attained and, if possible, retained.

"Freedom" and "equality" are directly related. Since freedom is the result of living within the Truth, and the Truth applies to everyone equally, then an ideal State would be one where everyone had equal exposure to the Truth and so an equal opportunity to be free.

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Absolute View (Continued)

Absolute Examples:

Carter's human rights—it is a universal human right to be free and so the US can tell another country that it should give human rights to its citizenry or be punished economically and/or militarily.

The California Supreme Court can require its citizens to give school children equal doses of the Truth, and so require equal monies to be spent per child; and, the "compulsory bussing" of teachers and children to bring about the appearance of equality.

Organized religions can reasonably work to have civil laws reflect their Truth so as to make everyone conform to their Truth (see issues of abortion, Black's Beach, Church's tax exemptions, etc.).

Nationalistic individuals can argue that Truth comes from the government so that citizens should be "loyal" to government; and, "love it or leave it."

Educators can ask for ever increasing tax monies, since their goal of "searching for and disseminating the Truth" should have top priority in the ideal State; and since Truth has no limits, classes should be established covering every conceivable topic. Furthermore, to refuse to give more tax money to the schools would indicate that you don't care about children enough to give them the very best.

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A RELATIVE VIEW. The following view of "freedom" may be seen as being logically consistent with the assumption that "Truth" is unknowable, that man can't jump out of his skin to see how things are as they exist independent of him, and that the only world man can ever know is the world of his personal experience, which is always relative to his sensory system, values, language, etc.

Freedom is hell! Since "Truth" is even theoretically unknowable, man finds himself in a somewhat agonizing situation of having to make choices without any guidelines as to what is right or wrong. No pat on the head is waiting to assure him of his wisdom and correctness of choice. A person does not work to achieve freedom but finds that he is "to freedom condemned."

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Relative View (Continued)

"Life," "liberty," and "the pursuit of happiness" can be restated as "Identity," "alternatives," and "making choices." A person acquires an identity (life) by having alternatives available (liberty) from which he chooses (pursuit of happiness). People often feel strongly about which alternatives should be made available within the society and, frequently, are prepared to fight or go to war in order to insure that certain alternatives are (or are not) made available to the citizenry. However, a person is always free in that he has alternatives available to him, but he may "feel free" to the degree he has the alternatives available to him that he thinks he wants.

Freedom is the means, while identity is the goal. Freedom has no particular value until it is used up. If a man is free to become a skilled general contractor or an accomplished pianist, his freedom becomes significant only when he uses it by picking one or the other at which moment he gives up his freedom. Should he never select one or the other, he would retain his freedom, but deprive himself of an identity. So, the basic question is still "to Be or not to Be"; that is, to get involved in life by choosing and, thereby, creating an identity (to Be), or the keep cool and uncommitted by holding on to freedom and, thereby, keeping all options open (not Be free).

Freedom in living may be likened to the freedom of an artist. He is somewhat free to point what he chooses even though the nature of the canvass, paints available, economic considerations, etc., may influence those choices. Each choice or decision made is like a stroke of the brush. Life can only be lived one stroke at a time, and future strokes can modify past strokes. There is no right or wrong painting but different paintings do have different "rewards" or results. By his choices throughout his life, each person is painting his own self-portrait.

Much of human effort is expended in attempting to escape from the uncomfortableness of freedom. A somewhat attractive alternative to making choices day-by-day is voluntary slavery—creating an "idol" and then worshipping it by pretending that it tells you what you should do. Who would deny the comfort provided by the commonly used idols of our time: (a) "reason"—if it makes sense, you are justified in doing it; (b) "health"—I must do it to eat or live longer; (c) "schedules"—I must hurry to keep on schedule; (d) "God"—I must do it to be good or right; (e) "society" / "law" / "government"—society require it, or I must be

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Relative View (Continued)

loyal; (f) "friends"—what do you think? That sounds good, I think I will do that; (g) "family"—I did it for the family or, altruistically, for the human family (others); (h) "activity"—keep busy by having a constant flow of stimulation (music, problems, etc.).

Each idol seems to have its own way of "telling" us what we should do, and so we escape the feeling of being "responsible" for our own lives. Occasionally, we can use more direct means of feeling that we are controlled. We create problems or situations that seemingly control us for a period of time after we once decide to play with them: (a) drugs (uppers, downers, alcohol, etc.), and games (racing, gambling, stock market, monopoly with real or imagined assets, problems, causes, etc.)

A primary contribution of a relative point of view is not to proclaim that people should "Be," but to point out that "to Be" or "not to Be" from day-to-day is the fundamental issue for those who fancy themselves as being alive.

Another contribution of a relative point of view is for those who choose to be alive, the fundamental issue is not to fight to become free, but to learn to recognize and use the freedom that is always available to us.

Relative Examples:

At a 35-nation conference in Belgrade about a month ago, Czechoslovakian delegate Dvorak angrily asserted that the crime rate in the United States exposes "the deformed morals of a sick society." US Ambassador Arthur J. Goldberg reportedly said that "I disagree completely but I welcome the dialogue that seems to be getting under way." I see Goldberg's reply as typically relative in that open and candid dialogue is more important than whether or not we agree. (The absolutist may argue that if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.) Goldberg was also reflecting the American commitment to freedom of speech and dissent as provided in the US Constitution.

About 9 months ago, the US Supreme Court ruled 5-4 on a case involving police questioning of suspects and criminal confessions (Miranda Rule). The absolutist logically prefers unanimous decision, and can be contrasted with the relativist

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Relative View (Continued)

who can feel logically comfortable with split decisions. The Absolutist has logical problems when arguing that God and Truth are on our side when "our side" was established by a 5-to-4 vote. He may call for a second vote, whereby the losers vote with the winners in order to artificially create the image of unanimity. Truth cannot be "two-faced," and so it is essential that everyone support the majority and not voice open dissent. In several ways, the US Supreme Court acted consistently with the relative frame of reference that the expression of differences are the life-blood of freedom. First, as a matter of procedure, the Court issues a formal "dissent" when it exists, wherein the arguments against the majority opinion are outlined and permanently documented for the public. Secondly, a dissenting justice may poignantly air his differences to the public. As in this 5-to-4 ruling, one of the dissenting justices was Chief Justice Warren E. Berger who reportedly denounced the majority, declaring: "The Court regresses to playing a grisly game of hid and seek...", and that "only one convert is needed to bring back rationality." Another dissenting Justice, Byron R. White called the decision "utterly senseless."

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Whereas the absolutist argues that the good life is escaping from the bondage of ignorance and living in peace and harmony by freely committing oneself to the single-mindedness of Truth; the relativist argues that the good life is having the guts to use one's freedom to create an individual identity, hopefully in a society where individual differences are tolerated and even encouraged as essential to the development of future generations of individuals.

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ADMINISTRATIVE NOTES

MEETINGS

1. On alternative Friday evenings from 7:00 to about 9:30 PM. Informal discussion on whatever philosophical issues arise. Last week (Jan. 6, 1978) happened to

ADMINISTRATIVE NOTES: Meetings (Continued)

deal with how one of those present, a psychiatric technician trainee, could make sense out of committing a substantial portion of her life to working with severely retarded and brain-damaged children. These Friday meetings are for those who give such meetings s high priority when scheduling their activities; or, are somewhat familiar with the relative orientation.

2. For Pasadena City College students and faculty: Tuesdays, 12:00 (Noon) to 1:00 PM in Room 400 in Building "C."

3. We are thinking of setting up occasional "one-shot" meetings for persons that are not familiar with the principles of relativity or do not set a high priority for such meetings.

NOTE: Gordon Brown will generally be available for comment at these meetings. For additional information call John Caldecott at (213) 286-7969. **[This contact number is no longer current.]**

MOVING AHEAD

1. We now have the use of an IBM typewriter and a mimeo machine. Hopefully the newsletter will be easier to read.

2. Have any questions or issues you would like raised? Tell us about them and we will include them in the next newsletter (subject to editing).

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