

RELATIVELY SPEAKING

The Philosophy of Individualism

Number 25

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Greetings! My summer was busy -- perhaps next summer I will set aside the time for a little leisure travel or for those mundane chores that I find refreshing such as gardening or painting. Well, those of us who use September as a beginning point are looking forward to a new year. I am planning on continuing these newsletters, making progress on relativity books, supporting the idea of education—with PCC as a primary target, and taking time for personal growth.

Just for fun, here are three excerpts (minor editing) from some previous, end-of-semester "Response Forms." (Last semester's forms are still up at school.) These comments, for me, are just one more reflection supporting the usefulness of the relative perspective.

"I grew up in a Protestant school from kindergarten through high school and when you first presented the idea of relative thinking, it was so revolutionary that at first I went through this constant conflict. But, this class has certainly helped me to think critically, and it has been very helpful in my tackling issues and lessons in my other classes as well."

"I really enjoyed your class. I like your method of encouraging your students to think."

"I found it easier to participate as the semester progressed. Also, a noticeable difference in class atmosphere coincided with those who were not 'mindful' dropping the class or just not showing up. I feel I have gained quite a bit of insight from your methods Dr. Brown. Thank you!"

Philosophy: Language and Relativity

Language can be used to bring people together and/or to keep people separate. As for keeping people separate, a group can develop its own internal language which can serve as a barrier to easy entrance by non-group members. The legal society has developed its own "legal-ese" that is unique to its own membership. The same can be said for the medical association.

As with the legal and medical associations, language can become a tool of power when the in-group is responsible for delivering critical social services to the general public. Non-group members do not know how to describe their own needs or compare alternative services, and they may even feel a bit inferior for not knowing the in-group language. The net effect is that individuals turn critical decisions affecting their own lives over to others for reasons they do not understand. What follows could be a sense of personal isolation and alienation.

Similarly, listening to a person talk may quickly reveal his/her educational development and/or religious interests. Consider that the very nature of a group is to create an in-group language. This language presents an invitation to some people and a barrier to others. When a person answers the telephone with the greeting

"God bless you, and how may I help you" or "Don't speak to me unless you are prepared to define your terms" invitations are being offered to some and barriers to others. Years ago, when the Catholic Church restricted mass and the Bible to the language of Latin, many individuals were denied access to a personal understanding of either.

In addition to the languages of the medical, legal, and religious organization, are the inside terms used by sports enthusiasts, construction workers, gamblers, teenagers, chefs, liberals/conservatives, stock brokers, and any number of other groups. However, these groups can be seen as less critical because we may not feel deprived of critical services to the quality of our lives if we are left out of any one of these groups, and alternative groups with similar services are available to us.

I have read that the French government is officially concerned over the use of American phrases adulterating the French language, and that some (older) groups in Japan are concerned with American music spoiling their cultural values. And again, the significance of language was certainly recognized when one group maintains power over another group by prohibiting the subservient group from learning to read and write. Recently, a student told me how his father criticized him for speaking like a "white person." His response was to say "No, that is how an educated person speaks." Imagine the interesting conversation that may have followed!

Perhaps the most significant influence a parent makes upon the child is the language structure that is passed on. Through language use, an entire mental world is passed on to the next generation frequently without any critical thought or even an awareness that this is happening. One parent may say "That's Right!" while another may say "I agree enthusiastically!" The children are being sent down different paths without the awareness that there are other paths. Here is a thought: Language is the great tool of organization, and organization is the essence of integrity. Integrity, in turn, is the basis for personal identity. Thus, if you can control the language of an individual, you control the individual.

From an absolute perspective, it is desirable to have everyone speak the right way using the proper terms. If they are caught using the wrong words, wash their mouths out with soap or do not associated with them anymore. The right meaning for a word can be found in a dictionary, and your speech should always show proper respect for authority as in "Yes Sir." In as much as we are all subservient to the Truth, it is important to speak properly.

From a relative perspective, it is unintelligible to speak of "right" words. The goal of language is to maximize individual freedom. Thus, it would be desirable to minimize the barriers created by language particularly when it involves critical services.

Relatively speaking, a public school system could insure that everyone has at least one common language; legal and medical associations could be encouraged to use the common language and to avoid the esoteric whenever possible. I think it is instructive that the First Amendment to the United States provides for the freedom of speech -- freedom of speech is the foundation upon which individual freedom is built.

Relativist's Quote of the Month:

"I want no more of these deferences to authority -- this taking off of hats and saying Sir -- I want to encourage in the young men the spirit that does not know what it is to feel that it stands in the presence of superiors."

A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads
Walt Whitman, circa 1888 at the age of 69

Address Check:

This is a continuing process. If you do not have a *94 (or later) 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 leaving a message on my answering machine anytime except: 8:00-9:00 A.M. on Tuesday or Thursday; and 5:00-6:00 P.M. on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. 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 "*95" 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" or "*95" does not appear on your label even though you called in, please call or write again.

Next Newsletter: "The First Step in Establishing a Personal Identity"

Meetings: Those present at the last meeting decided to take a break for reflection. We have had 8 meetings, about once a month, and with about 7 people present. Perhaps we will try this again. A pre-set limited number of monthly meetings seems to be most desirable. Let me know if you have any thoughts on the matter. Incidentally, I recently got rid of a couple of six-packs of soft drink -- stored in my garage for several months, they had lost their flavor -- if you got one of these at the meetings, don't hold it against the company, it was my oversight.

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**T A L K      B A C K**

From Susan in Pasadena, CA

*"I was very pleased to receive your newsletter and thoroughly enjoyed the contents. I would indeed like to confirm my name and address on your mailing list."*

From Kevin in Monrovia, CA

*"A note to let you know how much I enjoy reading the newsletter. Since taking your class, there have been numerous occasions where I have applied the relative/absolute mind-set to a situation, and I feel I have an advantage by being able to step back from a situation and ask myself how someone with a relative approach might view things."*

*"I am now taking classes at Cal State LA, and recently finished a class in which the teacher talked about rules and regulations regarding free speech, and the 'attainment of the Truth.' Speaking with her after class it became obvious she had never taken Psych 1 at PCC. Thought you might enjoy that story."*

From Lori in Arcadia, CA

*"I've been wanting to write and let you know that I really like your newsletter. Its one I really read through the whole thing!"*

*"Love your hypothesis on managing freedom. Right on. I agree with you that that has got to be our "problem" in the modern age. How can the message get out to parents so they can model what to do for their kids when the parents of today are probably the first generation of those with too much time on their hands? One can only hope this generation is not lost waiting for the information to trickle down. I suppose the ultimate is to GET INVOLVED with our kids (Gee, what a concept) and teach them to focus on themselves as individuals."*

*"Keep up the really great work. Students for Education is a great idea, too. We all really need to look within and quit pointing the fingers 'out there' to blame and look for the answers to our problems. Any program that has this goal is a supporter of mine. I am graduating this summer, but would love to continue to receive your newsletter and hear of your work."*

From Mikel in Pasadena, CA

*"Since I am writing to you to let you know that my name and address are correct on your newsletter mailing list, I thought I would also let you know that I enjoy reading the newsletter. They are informative and they continue to give me something new and enjoyable to contemplate over. I'll be looking forward to receiving the next one!"*