# RELATIVELY SPEAKING

The Philosophy of Individualism

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#### **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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### **HEALTH WATCH**

Just after sending out that last newsletter, six weeks of daily radiation treatments were followed by about 6 months of fatigue. The treatments apparently reduced my immune system effectiveness for a nasty case of shingles to develop just as I was about to get my energy back—a six inch swath half-way around my body from spinal cord to breast bone. Shingles, in addition to being a disgusting sounding term, is described as a reactivation of the varicella-zoster virus acquired during chickenpox. If you had chicken-pox, even as a child, this insidious RNA virus remains latent for decades until a weakened state by the host signals its assault on the sensory nerve endings. In my case, while the discomfort continues even after more than a year, I am now looking forward to returning to the task of completing the relativity book and an occasional newsletter. My continuing query is "What can I learn from this?" As for the 9-11 events and my own physical challenges, the advantage of having an assumed relationship with a Force is that such events, while physically threatening, are not spiritually threatening.

# **TWIN TOWERS: INNOCENCE LOST** (from page 1)

towers struck by those 2 airplanes and the subsequent collapse was such an event. We will adapt, but we will no longer enjoy that naive sense of safety as we enter a high-rise building or board a commercial jet airplane.

With the loss of innocence, consider the following a typical response. To begin, we can note that most of us observed the horrific events on television. As we watched the events replayed over and over, the emotional impact and our distress may have increased. After numerous replays, we would expect some relief through a sense of numbness or emotional disconnect to subsequent replays.

There is the matter of connectedness. The degree to which we felt the event was happening to us would be the degree our sense of security would be diminished. We have been in buildings and airplanes just like those! On 9-11, a reasonable response would be to seek security. If we were at or near the site, we would have sought physical safety. However, watching the events on television, it would be our mental sense of security that would be diminished, and our response would be to retreat to a place of greater mental security.

For many, this more secure place is achieved by turning one's attention to thoughts relating to friends, family, nation and/or God. These basic referents can provide a sense of stability and relief, at least to the point of enabling us to continue to function and avoid freezing up. Just as the distress increases to the degree we feel connected to the tragic events, our sense of stability increases to the degree we feel connected in a more basic relationship with family, friends, nation, and/or God. Going one step further, we may find ourselves assessing the importance of our daily activities in terms of their relevance to our basic relationships.

# THE VATICAN SAYS

The Associated Press reported (September 6, 2000): VATICAN CITY – [In a declaration by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the guardian of church orthodoxy] The Vatican rejected Tuesday what it said are growing attempts to depict all religions as equal, accusing some Catholic theologians of manipulating fundamental truths of the church...equality refers to the 'personal dignity' of individuals and not to religious doctrine...Tuesday's document, and remarks by the congregation's head, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, at a news conference repeatedly referred to a trend toward a 'religious relativism'.... [partial text with emphasis added]

#### 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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# TALK BACK (Continued)

# From Anthony in Los Angeles, CA

How are you doing today? I would like to update you with my new address...just moved back to LA and I am having the time of my life. How is your book coming along. I would like to purchase a copy if you are selling them.

#### From Raquel in Pasadena, CA

Hello. I would like to continue to receive your letters, my husband enjoys them, they help us communicate... Hope you are doing well. Thank you.

# From Darlene in San Leandro, CA

Thank you for the notice to discontinue sending "Relatively Speaking." I certainly want to receive your inspirational and thoughtful views on our human condition.

Interest Updates From Californians: David in Azusa, Candis in Los Angeles, Lorraine in Altadena, and Mike in Highland Park.

# **LOOKING FORWARD: RELATIVITY FOUND** (from page 1)

religion would necessarily be based on the assumption of a personal and private relationship between God and an individual. As it is with all human experience, there is no basis for assuming absolute knowledge about anything. Consequently, there is no rational basis for imposing one's will over any other person. The focus is on creating a personal identity by one's choice of relationships; rather than identifying and implementing some assumed absolute Truth.

As for the future, while it may take 20 years before significant progress will be made in interpersonal relationships, consider that the linchpin of absolute thinking of the past will be replaced by a linchpin of relative thinking—particularly in the area of religion. The public will come to realize that absolute thinking is a prescription for mutual destruction, particularly in its most virulent form—when combined with absolute religious assumptions.

I predict the sequence of change will be as follows: (1) a general recognition of the problem inherent within absolute thinking and the rational advantage of relative thinking, particularly in the area of religion; (2) the development and proliferation of relative approaches to religion and an extinction process begun for absolute approaches to religion; and (3) the elevation of individual rights rooted in a conceptual foundation of relative thinking.

In summary, terrorism can be seen as being energized by religious, absolute thinking. A viable alternative is religious, relative thinking. While the United States provides for freedom of religion, the organized practice of religion is almost exclusively absolute. Looking forward, the serious consideration of relative approaches to religion will signal the beginning of a new chapter for human history where dignity for individual freedom is supreme and acts of aggression are seen as expressions of immaturity, limited in focus and duration.

**Address Update:** Call anytime to leave a message at (626)-445-1749

You can also e-mail a message to me at:

relspeak@earthlink.net or relspeak@pacbell.net (temporarily)