

THE ROADS AND ROARS OF RELATIVISM

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Large chunks of the history of epistemology can be read as conspiracies to gobble up relativism and drag it away into the dustbin of rotten ideas. Roughly the conclusion – now almost considered a powerful axiom – arrived at by many is that relativists are nuts. A dangerous species.

The notion that relativism is self-refuting has become the battering ram in these conspiracies. And the demagogues of objective Reason and the critical rationalists take it that they have been given the right to treat relativism so badly. The present argument – whilst buttressing the respectability or cogency of the argument for self-refutation by reconstructing and bolstering their abortion of three relativists attempts to avoid self-refutation – endeavours to show that, even from the point-of-view of the standards so dear to rationalists and usually bandied about, they are far from justified in pursuing their sadistic treatment of relativism. A deeply reflective inquiry unpacks the hidden nature and structure of the self-refuting argument and the additional reinforcing objectivist objections.

The core of the relativist vision is the harsh denial of the existence of objective truths and standards, of objectively overriding or correcting aims, values and systems, of theories with objective strength or plausibility. All ideas, beliefs, theories, paradigms, research programmes, standards, purposes, values and interests are like cats, mats and green emeralds in that they, too, are denizens of the multifaceted and multi-coloured furniture of the dynamic realm – cultural, social, physical or what have you – which gives birth to different ideas, beliefs, theories, paradigms, research programmes, standards, purposes, values and interests, and which can be accounted for only within that very realm, from the point-of-view of diverse ideas, beliefs, theories, etc. The *whole* world, or world of worlds, is, thus, at once a closed circle and an open battle zone. It is a closed circle because, quite tautologically, it is all we

have; an open battle zone since theoretical or cognitive pluralism prevails. The vision in effect 'prohibits' the existence of gods and goddesses -- be they Christian or Jewish, Moslem or pagan, whether benevolent or malevolent -- who can play language-games outside the world, who can sit in judgement of the world without being a party to it. To judge is to exist. That verifies Descartes. To exist, to exist at all, is to be in a world. That negates him. God's Eye View is no one's view.

It must be admitted that this overly simplified characterisation of relativism is but one amongst many: for, indeed, its formulations are legion; they grow, hydra-fashion, and feed on every conspirator's blow. Yet this has to be a source of the hubris involved in the relativist enterprise, rather than a foreshadowing of its prophesied or alleged funeral. "Relativism" is construed in many ways. Is this not a bit of what relativism says? It is.

But now the real potential trouble. As relativism is about ALL ideas, beliefs, theories, etc., as relativism is itself a theory, and hence, as it is included in its domain of application, i.e., it is self-referring, then it is refuted. If one decides or concludes (as the case may be) that relativism is a verification (verification instance) of itself, if relativism as a vision is itself relative, the anti-relativist needs only the frank confession that it is not true in his web of beliefs to be justified in considering relativism false. Be it noted in this regard that one of the salient points of the relativist insight is that relativism is far from lonely. It has got company. When someone shouts relativism it not only holds no comfort for us all but it is the quintessential falsehood as well; it is justifiably so. On the other hand, we may include it in its own domain of application, as before and as we must, whilst submitting it to be objectively true, and so it is its own refuting instance. Either way, it is self-refutation.¹

This is the argument from self-refutation. It is sometimes referred to as the Paradox of Cognitive Relativism.

THREE RELATIVIST GAMBITS COME TO GRIEF

An outstanding irony of the philosophic condition is that the reasoning from self-refutation, the paradox, the dilemma -- by

whichever name you care to have relativism referred to – if sound, is considered fatal by those who have the guts to embrace, or those who are tempted to defend, relativism. The enemies of relativism surely are ecstatic about this, and, therefore, have made it their habit to repeat the paradox again and again – with the consequence of finally adopting it as their favourite battle song against those whose intimations are suspected of having underwritten the great Sin of Relativism, the transgression of objective and universal Reason. So, in practice, everytime anti-relativists sing their song, suspects generally either shrug their shoulders and loudly disavow having flirted with the Sin, or acknowledge their allegiance to relativism but claim that – to exonerate their own selves – it is not a sin after all. For in this way, that way or in more ways than one, the alleged self-refutation of their vision can be avoided. Frequently, to boost the honesty of the disavowal, the suspect declares a relativism-as-an-easy-to-refute-doctrine doctrine.² Underlying the behaviour of the relativists as well as the objectivists is a belief in the crushing power of the paradox (once its cogency is conceded). Unless avoided, the self-refutation guarantees the fall of relativism. *It justifies the abandonment of relativism.* Avoiding it, then, emerges as a desideratum for the relativists. Hence the existence of evasive arguments.

Here are three samples of such comically abortive attempts at evasion. Abortive, that is, before the eyes of the objectivists and critical rationalists.

The Mouth-Shut Gambit

One gambit peddles relativism with the mouth shut. This goes through the rigmarole of modernised mystical philosophy, starting with the truistic but, nevertheless, odd-delayed rediscovery of man's ability to say certain things, followed by the curiously late and somewhat innocuous recognition that there are certain other things which we, try as we may, cannot say really, ending with the spurious conferring of a therapeutically enlightening power to the 'showably' ineffable. Relativism is then identified with the ineffable. It is not a doctrine, not a theory: it cannot be said in a language-game. To say it in a language amounts to picking up a particular language and invoking it in the process of evaluating other languages. The language thus invoked has to be a universal

one if the bleak condition of relativism in this context is to be improved (if relativism is not to be seen as just a language-game). But as the cosmos is not endowed with a universal language, the language of *all* languages (one is tempted to say there can be no picture of all pictures), capable of consoling us with a virginal peep into the world and into the lesser languages³ — which is what relativism asserts — so does expressed relativism turn into an impossibility. But the relativist does not have to mourn. He wishes to review the premises that has led him into this sad situation. “Why should relativism be a theory?” he rhetorically asks, intending to suggest it is not a theory. *It is shown by languages — more than this cannot be expected or even required.* One is better off by being silent than by talking dirty and ending up in the gallows. Now, how could someone who keeps his mouth shut refute himself? How could a non-propositional entity be self-refuting? Lo! The trouble disappears. How easy it is to dispose of it!

Not rightly so. There is about the mouth-shut gambit of relativism a kind of malevolent pregnancy, some form of weirdliness, which drives us back into the fright it is designed to suppress in the first place. We are cajoled into entering a huge movie house and instructed to watch a film on the linguistic becoming, as though one could see what is being shown in the absence of some screen or surrogate screen, without the scales numbing the nerve endings or as though the magic word ‘show’ has freed us once and for all from the clutches of devils (Cartesian or otherwise) who have, throughout history, deluded us into thinking the world is not what it is or that it is not what it seems to be. We have been stripped of the potency of ‘seeing the world rightly,’ as though we can make such sense of the curious act of showing something without ever in principle seeing it (for it is contended that seeing is always seeing through some medium, much as reflecting light has to be done through the use of some medium or other). In the final analysis, the man who is *supposed* to see the things shown is forced to choose between seeing them without seeing and seeing them not as they are in themselves. Or is the ‘object’ shown objectively truly manifest to him, regardless of the culture into which he was initiated? Or does he ‘construct’ the object shown? He is clamped by the horns of a dilemma. So is the silent Wittgenstein who made a mystique out of the ineffable. No wonder he opted to be noisy in the end: the ineffable says a lot of things anyway.

Real silence is just silence. In it is seen nothing more than a dead man's silence, a vision without vision, an enlightenment without existence. In such pure muteness, void of sound and judgement, no stirring in the mind, no stammering or murmuring to spark a discovery, the relativist who is suspected of self-stultification cannot find a redoubt. Pure silence is neutral: it does not damn objectivism or damage relativism; but neither does it goad any of them into the whisperings of hope. Or, more precisely, it buggers them both. As a suspected murderer cannot defend himself in court by indefinitely shutting his mouth, so the relativist (qua relativist) cannot cleanse himself of the charge of self-stultification by learning to be mute. It ought to be obvious that silent relativism *depends* on a *prior expression* of the relativist doctrine.

The silence of the relativist, like Wittgenstein, is not of the silent sort. It is noisy. That is why he is back to what has forced him to shut his mouth: Does silent relativism capture the objective or is it also relative? The mouth-shut gambit has not got past the rut the relativist dug for himself.

The story of its appeal is quite another thing. Infatuation with the ineffable is still a part of the air we breathe. Gordon C. F. Bearn's transcendental relativism presents itself as a living proof.⁴ It revolves in its socket of secure attunement talk. Secure attunements are the points where we, having recognized the fact that the explanatory and justificatory putrescences oozing from our heads are exhausted, drop by drop, and that nothing can be squeezed out anymore, stop spewing justifications and boldly confront anybody who squeezes us for more with the honest-to-goodness notion of "This is what we do." These points are the limits of rational discussion, the limits of sense which thus "consist in the attunement of our judgements; and this attunement, in its turn, is made fast by our natural human reaction"⁵ — old or new. Now "the transcendental limits of our world are *shown* in the limits of what it makes sense to say."⁶ Relativism, its truth, manifests itself clearly and distinctly in the discovery that some human communities do not share some of the secure attunements of some other communities, in particular some of those of Dr. Bearn's community.⁷ The phenomenon of relativism is manifest to the extent that one should not give it a philosophic explanation.⁸ Dr. Bearn approvingly quotes Wittgenstein: "what the relativist *means* is quite

correct; only it cannot be *said*, but makes itself manifest".⁹
 "The phenomenon speaks for itself."¹⁰

Misleading and world-rich this may seem, the dream of creating different worlds through the bare knitting of beliefs or attunements is never countenanced: people of different cultures still creep on the same planet earth, or wander about the same universe. The silly gossip on different actual worlds is as silly as ever. For "we have only one set of secure attunements; so there could be for us but one (transcendentally limited) world. Our world is the world."¹¹ And it is so because the presupposition beneath the discovery and existence of other cultures (methaphysical realism's rub-a-dub to the contrary notwithstanding) is the possibility of our translating the judgements of peoples whose secure attunements are discontinuous with ours or, at any rate, with Bearn's.¹² We can translate other cultures, therefore they exist. *A world we could not discuss or speak about is a chimera.*¹³ Other worlds exist only in so far as they are within our world, which means that they are not other worlds indeed. Thus cultural pluralism — once a threat, a butcher out to chop the one world into small if rough cubes — is elegantly wedded to the crusade of imperial monism. Here, then, is a relativism which not only preserves but also ratifies the arrogance of our Western tradition. What more could be more sanguine to our flesh?

This breed of relativism is staggering in the enormity of its love for us, for our tradition. But it commits the mistake it deems unforgivable, namely, it talks. Dr. Bearn talks. He succumbs to the disease of "wanting to explain."¹⁴ If his statements do not embody an explanation, I do not know what they are. Perhaps they are not explanations, but surely he says what he says cannot be said; he speaks about the phenomenon which 'speaks for itself'. The greatness of Wittgenstein lies, partly, in his honesty to admit that he is not making sense when he speaks about the 'showable but not sayable', that his account is self-annihilating and not merely self-refuting. Deep inside him is the unpleasant rumbling that his attempt to escape the pain of self-refutation has subtly pushed him to the bitter consolation of suicide. Dr. Bearn does not have the slightest hint of displaying his Master's guilty conscience and embarrassment: not at all, even if only as a ritualistic, feeble, empty mimicry. Like Wittgenstein, he cannot practice

what he himself teaches; unlike Wittgenstein, he revels in his inability. It puzzles me why those philosophers who make a lot of fuss about *acting* do not act in a manner harmonious with what they preach. Does not acting "lie at the bottom of their language-game?" ¹⁵

That Wittgenstein (and Dr. Bearn after him) opened his mouth and talked is, of course, in the final analysis, laudable. Had he, in fact, silenced himself forever and from the beginning, the anaemia engulfing the world of ideas would have been more acute (not to mention the obvious effects of such silence on his own intellectual development). So I could not hate Dr. Bearn for talking or writing. The thing I should detest is his telling us these and those cannot be said on a priori grounds even as he proceeds to say them with committed audacity; it is his telling us that we cannot and should not explain the fact of relativism. Frankly without doing monstrous violence to the term 'natural reaction,' we can submit that philosophic explaining is a natural reaction to the events and processes in our milieu – in our environment. If Dr. Bearn is to maintain his much vaunted allegiance to the evidence of history, he has to acknowledge that our desire to explain is not a disease, let alone a mentally debilitating disease (unless human relief could be found in disease). ¹⁶

Leaving these standard objections aside, ¹⁷ the aim of Dr. Bearn behooves us to inquire if his system of recommendations, claims, propositions – his so-called transcendental relativism – smoothly survives the plague of self-refutation. To begin with, is the discovery "that all human communities do not share the same secure attunements" manifest to us? ¹⁸ To US? Is it manifest that the discovery manifests the truth of transcendental relativism? If it is, then why are there many people – and learned ones at that – who do not see it? Whose discovery is it anyway? A Berber in the High Atlas who believes there are no more and no less than three languages in the world (namely, Berber, Arabic and French), or a North African folk whose "vision of the world is articulated entirely from within Islam," the limits of which are for him the limits of the world? ¹⁹ NO? Is the 'US' of Dr. Bearn – when he argues, for instance, that "there could be for us but one (transcendentally limited) world" ²⁰ -- large enough to include the

Berber and David Lewis? Are the limits of the Berber world the same as the limits of Bearn's world? To reach the climax: IS TRANSCENDENTAL RELATIVISM A *SECURE JUDGEMENT* (*SECURITY*) OF ALL CULTURES AND PEOPLES, SOMETHING LIKE $7+5=12$? If not, and heaven knows it is not, may not then this divergence (of, say, between Bearn's culture and the Berber's, or between the Popperian culture and Bearn's culture) a divergence which will "not be resolvable in a way that . . . does not beg the question against one or the other or both communities?"²¹

Any consistent, plausible answer to these queries predictably cannot smile at the transcendental relativist: if transcendental relativism is true, then it is false; and this because the transcendental relativist aspect of Bearn's culture is, according to transcendental relativism, *on a par* with the extreme objectivist aspect of the Popperian culture. Alternatively, every view is *transcendentally relative*; transcendental relativism is just a view amongst others (like full-blooded objectivisms); therefore, transcendental relativism, if true, is false. More concretely: transcendental relativism defines the limits of the world in terms of the limits of language. But for some mystical traditions reality begins exactly where language ends. Once again, given the context, transcendental relativism is true only if false.

Bearn's insensitivity to this arises, in part, from the total absence of appreciation for the actuality of cultures or thought systems in which the distinction between what can and what cannot be is specified *within*. His fault is to have re-shaped, in his imagination, other peoples in his own image: not all peoples are reluctant to open their mouths when it comes to describing or giving what can and cannot figure in the furniture of their world or worlds.

It is worthwhile to count the number of transcendental relativists. As far as I know, there is only one: Dr. Bearn. He is the lone person who takes transcendental relativism as a 'secure judgement' as manifest. The collection of secure judgements he happens to be keeping diverges from *ours*. So his friendly 'US' refers only to him. 'Our world' refers to his world. Thus evaporates his unquali-

fied cognitive vote for us. (For he is not among us.) It is but a publicity gimmick. A recruiter's instrumental illusion. In fact, so soon as one delves into the cash value of 'us' and 'we' or 'our culture' and 'our world,' so does their psychological efficaciousness in fulfilling the objectives set in store for them by Dr. Bearn become pale. One cannot be reasonably certain whether one has valid license to lump together Aristotelians, Cartesians, Newtonians, Einsteinians, the members of the Copenhagen school of physics, the lone transcendental relativist, the radical relativists, intuitionists, Boolean logicians, quantum logicians, dialectical logicians, objectivists, metaphysical realists, idealists, ordinary language philosophers, ordinary street cleaners and Copenhagen burlesque dancers under the term 'us' or 'we' in 'our culture' and, therefore, in 'our world.' These people or groups of people diverge radically enough from each other. In this sad state, the slogan "Our world is the world" is quite empty -- unless a definite cash value is assigned to the said terms (but aiming at such an assignment runs the risk of limiting Dr. Bearn's 'us' to Dr. Bearn alone).

Nonetheless, Dr. Bearn may aspire to exempt transcendental relativism from the strength of transcendental relativism: every view is transcendentially relative, except transcendental relativism, which is *objectively and absolutely true* (regardless of whoever has it as part of his culture). Apparently, he has objective knowledge of the limits of rational discourse, of sense, of natural human reactions or, perhaps, of human physical constitution, and of the transcendental limits of the *one* world. These areas are deep and difficult, if anything at all can be so described. ('Transcendental' -- is that not a big word?) My understanding now fails me when I reflect on the problem why we could have objective truths in these areas whilst in the other areas (say, physics, which investigates among other things the physical structure of the universe) truths of that kind could not be had. To remove the arbitrariness of this divide, some explanation has to be given. Dr. Bearn owes us at least that much. Yet I am doubtful whether the demand for an explanation in this context is already beyond the gray of his Wittgensteinian horror of explanations. Certainly the unexplained divide enables the transcendental relativist to avoid self-refutation. But this is bad. It is too cheap and too facile a way out: if the thrust of Dr. Bearn's intellectual labour is to construct a relativism which is free from self-refutation, and if in his construction he is

not obliged to explain crucial points, he can just as well drop the clumsy 'transcendental' in 'transcendental relativism,' and settle for just 'relativism' supported by an endorsement of the dubiously unexplained exemption. A relativism which says that all truths, except the truth of the theory of relativism, are relative, is very simple, bold, and I think it would have saved Dr. Bearn a lot of time and effort.

Thus far the argument for self-refutation leveled against transcendental relativism is parasitic to the contention -- imputed to transcendental relativism? -- that fairly diverging sets of secure attunements of 'securities' (hence, diverging cultures) are on a par with each other (so that between such diverging cultures there is no 'objective fact of the matter'). Dr. Bearn says: "... where the secure attunements of others diverge from our own, we must (if we acknowledge our own secure attunements) find the others mistaken or unreasonable or worse -- and they would return the favour."²² When the exchange of favours is suggested to be the end of the matter, objective parity of diverging cultures immediately strikes the mind as a powerful impression. With this impression, we must find the transcendental relativist "mistaken or unreasonable or worse": transcendental relativism is not manifest to *us*, not a secure judgement of our culture (or even of the sub-culture of Anglo-American philosophy professors). However, Dr. Bearn goes on to say:

Such a situation could not prove that truth is relative to culture because it is false that if we were Azande, witches would exist. Empirical relativism is false. But the secure attunements of different communities *can* diverge from one another, and sometimes this divergence will not be resolvable in a way that both appeals to rational ground and yet does not beg the question against one or the other or both communities. The empirical relativist could not resist attempting a philosophical explanation of this phenomenon; that was his mistake. The phenomenon speaks for itself.²³

So truth is still objective truth. There is an 'objective fact of the matter' between two cultures whose divergence is irresolvable (between, for instance, a culture which adopts transcendental relativism as an integral part and another which does not). In the various disciplines -- in physics, in the discipline dealing with the limits of sense and elsewhere -- we can have objective knowledge.

But the term 'irresolvable divergence' is ambiguous. It may have either of two meanings. First, it may mean that the divergence *cannot in principle* be resolved (irresolvable₁); or, second, that the divergence *can in principle* be resolved, only that, at the moment and probably in the near future, it cannot be resolved (irresolvable₂). Divergence of the latter sort is compatible with objectivism. The upholding of a mere pluralism does not make one a relativist.²⁴ As it happens, the first kind of divergence, as it were plugged into the network of Dr. Bearn, completely strays away from the relativist cause and tends to subvert it. Note: The assumption that we can in principle know the objective facts surrounding a cognitive dispute implies that it can in principle be resolved *without* begging problems. 'Objective fact' or 'objective truth' is, after all, construed as something *independent* of any particular belief system. Being independent, objective facts and, consequently, objective knowledge do not beg problems. If in principle we cannot resolve the divergences without begging problems, then we cannot in principle know the objective facts of the matter. We cannot know in principle which of the rival visions is the objectively true one or whether they are all objectively false. Therefore: If we posit the actuality of cultures which diverge from each other irresolvably, and if we are committed to the view that there are objective facts pertaining to the divergence (as transcendental relativism is), then we are plunged neatly into the center of metaphysical realism: objective facts exist even if in principle we cannot know them.

This conclusion is doubly ironic for metaphysical realism has been the supporting strut of extreme objectivisms, and Dr. Bearn has evidently denounced it.²⁵

Initially, I have had the idea that his reluctance to explain the phenomenon of irresolvable divergence (mouth-shut gambit) betrays a certain fright: he is scared that he might fall victim to relativism's self-refutation. That fright has seemed to have been the only moving if unstated reason -- or cause? -- for his taking a vow to silence. Our inquiry uncovers a different angle: transcendental relativism is anything but a kind of relativism. It is a bogus relativism. Dr. Bearn is not successful in his attempt to construct a viable, non-self-refuting relativism.²⁶

As the modern variant of the mouth-shut gambit went on in the uncertainties of the flight from the spectre of self-refutation (to sum up), bathed in the absurdity of talking noisily in silence, it seemed to traverse a narrow ramp leading back to the spectre, or to pass through the quicksands of authoritarian favouritism, the cognitive landscape becoming completely uneven like a towering rock in the middle of an arid, stormy and sandy territory or of restless waters: otherwise, death through objectivist assimilation might seal its final fate. It is no more intellectually pleasing than its older sister.

The Cognitive Caste System

The other relativist strategy of escape codifies the exemplary status probably accorded to relativism – exemplary, i.e., in being a doctrine above itself. It goes like this. In our pool of visions, world-pictures, theories, etc., we have two castes: the first encompasses visions on the object level of discourse, the second all those on the meta-level. Relativism is pigeon-holed into the second caste. It is a meta-point-of-view which, puffed up by the grandeur of objectivity, purports to speak, uncorruptedly truly, only about those inhabiting the lesser caste, the object level.

The flattering virtue in this consecration of relativism springs from the concretely obvious fact that while one is floating on the boilings of a restless sea, he cannot tell, without the help of a fixed reference point, which part of the sea is actually moving. But once he clings to a fixed tower in the middle, he can observe the boilings, the ceaseless comings and goings of waves, without being corrupted by them.

Unfortunately, corrupted or not, the application, the challenge and, naturally, the interest of relativism are now significantly restricted.²⁷ Some rulers retain their absolute powers only at the price of giving up parcels of their fiefdoms. So it is with relativism. Cognition ought to march forward, to stage an upward surge (preferably a steep one), a conspicuous growth. Relativism's history hardly jibes with this. It is one of shameful retreat, not advance-

ment. It is one of shrinkage, not expansion. Degeneration characterises it.

Besides: just as many societies do not honour – in theory and in practice – the caste system, so many global visions do not honour (or are not aware of) the object level-meta-level distinction (the distinction which purportedly serves the ‘objectivization’ of relativism). No sign of such cleavage is paraded by them. Who has driven the wedge anyhow? Or is the cleavage natural – in the same sense as the cleavages of a woman are natural? Well, the relativist may reply that the assertion of the distinction is objectively valid, for it is not like other assertions in that it belongs to another level of discourse. Which logically begs the problem.

This stumbling block emerges even more starkly and its presence becomes all the more obnoxious when we face orgies of contradictions. Not a few, indeed, put up with contradictions. Not a few swallow them with delirious joy. Intellectual orgasms are pumped, openly or secretly, by individuals or groups as they yoke their own selves with amalgams of hostile cognitive commitments and loyalties. So assume a man who has a special talent in this direction, who believes a $C \cdot - C$ to be true. He, at the same time, incorporates the well-known classical logic into his cognitive corpus. We need not worry about the contradiction in the conjunction of classical logic and “‘ $C \cdot - C$ ’ is true”: it is embraced. “ $C \cdot - C$ ” is relatively true according to relativism. Within classical logic (a relatively valid logic), it implies any statement whatsoever. This implication knows no distinctions or classifications of statements: the attractive cleavage between object theories and meta-theories is ignored. Specifically, the falsity of relativism is implied. Ergo, relativism is false. Alas, the same old story is in our hands: if relativism is true, then it is false.

The Self-Reconciliation Gambit

However awful the shrinkage resulting from the second means of avoidance, be it noted that it is no more than partial. Total shrinkage verging on an idolatry of the void is to be the supreme achievement of the third type of relativist jail-break. Nothing epitomizes this type best except the one masterminded by Jack W.

Meiland.²⁸ In his framework, relativism clutches on one of the horns of the relativist dilemma, and dramatizes the long-awaited, quasi-religious reconciliation of relativism with its long-lost, long-forgotten self. Relativists of all nations rejoice! Be it known to the world that the relativist theoretical baggage shall, henceforth, bear the stamp of relativism. All, but all, is grist to the relativist mill; nobility unmenaced by it there is none; and any voodoo charm drawn to exorcise it dissipates into sheer illusion.

ALL — in a Pickwickian sense, I should say. Fancy — by way of clarification — I am a Meilandian relativist. Things are so-and-so relative to me. That things are so-and-so relative to me is my privileged judgement for it is just a contention about the way I see myself. Though any claim to absolutism on my part is forsworn, it gratifies me to know that I am, in a manner of speaking, privileged, and I am happy to boast of that knowledge. I am this or that for me. My self-image is relative to my framework. Things are to the extent that they are for me. The identity of each thing is subordinated to mine. If a thing does not figure in *my intellectual baggage*, then it is not. My universe is all there is. My talk about theories and things, therefore, is a talk about those in my baggage. To put it in the less manageable classical idiom, my talk is about my *own* perceptions. Just as I categorize my perceptions as real or as illusory, so I map my statements onto the truth values. I even say, *within my global picture*, that a particular assertion, A, is mine or that it is not. It is mine in the sense that I acknowledge it to be my assertion, and not mine in the sense that I do not so acknowledge or that I contend it is the assertion of *another person*, C. But in another, more fundamental sense, regardless of whether or not A is mine in the foregoing sense, it is mine for it figures in my relativist global picture; and because it does, it exists. The 'other person', C, likewise exists only as he figures in that picture. *I do not hold A and C to be existing objectively*: if I do, then I must not hesitate to admit that the statement "There is a statement A" and "C exists" are objectively true — and by that admission, I thereby obviate my own relative relativism. I should hasten to remark, when I proclaim

the concept of relative truth, as used by some relativists seems to be a concept of a *three-term* relation between *statements, the world, and a third term which is either persons, world-views, or historical and cultural situations*.²⁹ (Italics mine.)

the terms 'statements,' 'world,' 'persons,' 'world views,' 'historical and cultural situations,' and 'three-term relation' do not have objective reference. Theories and things, clouds and clocks, rules and representations, mind, matter and method, reason, truth and history, fact, fiction and forecast, acts and other events, logic and language and the emperor's new clothes -- all exist, but I certainly deprive them of objective standing. Existence and nothingness meet at the edges of my picture. My picture is my world. My world is the world.

A relativism that developed roughly along these lines merits the name *individual solipsistic relativism*.³⁰ Hardly does it merit reverence though. Its 'ALL' -- the universality of its range -- does not enclose much. In fact, the purview of this relativism cannot go beyond its boundaries. Contact with the *outside* world is terribly eclipsed by the reflection, so ingrained in and so sweet to this relativism, that friends and foe alike do not have independent existence. *OTHERS* are not talked about. The relative relativist confines himself to talking about his own intellectual baggage. Relativism has ceased to be a comprehensive theory about *all theories*. Thin in terms of content, self-centered or self-indulgent in an age when astronomy and biology have wreaked havoc on human pretensions of divine anointment, when we are habituated to the thought that cockroaches (and not humans) shall inherit the earth -- need more be said?

Still the attack against relative relativism does not come to a halt. Some see in this relativism another vicious incoherence.

There is yet another reason for rejecting (RR) [i.e., relative relativism which asserts: it is relatively true that all truths are relative] as incoherent. (RR) itself purports to be true. But since it cannot be absolutely true, on pain of contradiction, it must be relatively true. (RR) thus gives way to (RRR) It is relatively true that it is relatively true that all truths are relative. Note that the prefix "It is relatively true that . . ." cannot be cashed out in terms of what every one accepts, nor in terms of what some relativists accept. This was shown in the preceding two paragraphs. But, on the other hand, if a proposition *p* is relatively true, it must be true relative to something. This is analytically obvious if anything is. Now this something cannot, for the relativist, be the Mind of God or something on that order. So the something in question can only be another proposition *q* which states that *p* is rela-

tively true. This is why (RR) requires the truth of (RRR). Clearly, (RR) cannot stand on its own, for its truth is not absolute. The truth of (RR) must therefore be underwritten by (RRR). The point is not just that if (RR) is true, then (RRR) must also be true, but that the truth of (RR) logically requires the truth of (RRR). The ensuing regress is therefore not only infinite but also vicious. In the case of any absolutely true proposition, there is also an infinite regress but an innocuous one. We must conclude, then, that relativized relativism is just as incoherent as absolute relativism.³¹

Not unlike absolute relativism, relative relativism deserves rejection. Consistent *and* total relativism is an impossibility in the objective sense. But “To be a philosophical thesis worthy of serious consideration, relativism must be both consistent and total”.³²

A RETRIAL IN THE RATIONALIST TRIBUNAL

The attack on relativism has been beefed up. Self-refutation seems to seize the relativist on the neck at every turn. Not exactly at every turn, but the way away from it is very dark. Thorny. Relativism appears crumpled like a paper in the wastebasket. So critical rationalists think everybody objectively ought to abandon relativism.

Not laudably so. Critical rationalists imagine themselves to be in the screening business, to have been commissioned — by whom and through what authority? — to give the entrance test separating the cognitive good boys and girls from the rest of mankind (and thus validating the issuance of permits that exempt some from philosophical armageddon). In other words, they see themselves as presiding Judges in the High Tribunal of the Intellect or as a Peter holding the key to heaven, a heaven rationalists love to call Progress. But they, when presiding over the case of relativism, have been bribed by filthy prejudice or dishonesty or both, for they have condemned an innocent relativism — innocent because their laws and rules tell us relativism (a form of it) is quite clean. A retrial is a must.

Relativism is a comprehensive theory. Its message is: (A) for all x's (where x ranges over statements, beliefs, theories, standards, paradigms, values, aims, interests, etc.), x is not objective or not objectively true, correct or right. Objective truths, standards,

values, etc. are 'prohibited.' Relativism, then, is to be taken as a bold explanatory theory, or, more appropriately, a comprehensive research programme about *all* statements, beliefs, theories, values, standards, etc. Cognitive diversity is also explained by it. Every theory – past, present and future – is a potential falsifier to it. The reason is that each theory may be an objective truth, each standard an objective standard. And once the relativist decides to hold that (B) A is objectively true, then A is refuted, since the 'all' of A is a strictly universal one. There is at least one x that falsifies A: B says that A is a refuting instance of A. Of course, the decision in favour of B presumably is made not so much out of free choice as out of the tormenting awareness of the price to be paid by the relativist in attempting to escape self-refutation. Relativism is self-refuting.

But so what? Surely the relativist need not swoon in grief. Surely the self-refutation does not give one the objective right to discard relativism. The mere recognition that there is one refuting instance of relativism (which is itself) does not justify or necessitate its abandonment any more than does the decision to accept the statement "In space-time region k, there is a pink swan" legitimates the abandonment of the universal statement "All swans are white." Critical rationalists should assent to, and be deeply moved by this upon pain of freezing the intellect, of immaturely killing the elegant and daring structures produced by the human mind. A Newtonian who *accepts* a counter-instance to his theory need not abandon Newtonian physics. To legitimate the withdrawal of loyalty from a theory, one needs more than a collection of counter-instances – more than, to be sure, a single refuting instance. What he needs more is a better theory, one that is bolder and whose truth content far exceeds its falsity content. It is essential to remind ourselves that relativism, aside from its staggering boldness, has a truth content which far exceeds its falsity content.³³ History unveils before us a notomously large number of theories that are not objectively true, even by the lights of the critical rationalist tradition; and the fascinating drama of cognitive abandonments, of the twists and turns of doctrinal loves and hates, the reversals – oftentimes unexpectedly sudden, sometimes deliberate – of intellectual flirtations, the storms of cerebral spasms and 'revolutions' in the sciences and elsewhere all enlist history to the side of relativism. There is no doubt a huge world

of possibilities beyond the horizon of present history, and the relativist does not now stoop to what rationalists describe as an invocation of inductivism in order to get past the horizon and have a picture of anything lurking there. No, his case is to be reasoned out within the streamlining of critical rationalism.³⁴ Invitations to read history, coming as they do from the relativist who is on trial in the rationalists' High Tribunal, are meant to put us in a state of mind whereby we can grasp the failures — as failures — of the objectivist attempts in the various disciplines to search for objective truths, standards, values, aims, etc. Objectivists and others are spending a lot of time trying to construct or develop theoretical nests that have the prime function of catching objective truths, and this construction industry has proceeded with a Faustian passion which not infrequently sucks resources in the form of money and blood of men or animals. But for all the sacrifices they offer before the altar of their God — sacrifices made for His apparition — the objectivists so far have failed. They have failed to falsify relativism, for their attempts are attempts to falsify it. The objectivist God perhaps demands more blood — how much more no one knows and the objectivist is ignorant about this as much as anybody else — but the relativist is steadfast in his insight that He is nowhere to be found. Personally, however, when someone succeeds in showing he has sufficiently large bundles of objective truths, and if, in the heat of rational debate, all traditions — scientific, mystical, Buddhist, Christian, and much more — 'converge' without the ubiquitous help of gunboat diplomacy, then my conscience dictates that I should loosen my grip on relativism. (Still, to abandon a bold theory with high truth content such as relativism, we need to conceive a better replacement.)

This chance of objectivism to crawl into, and sabotage, the relativist mind, I daresay, is yet to be bumped out of the amorphous piggery of plain possibilities. The stream of events sticks to its brutal way of saying "NO" to the constant flow of invitations (and affectations) coming from the Church of Objectivism: millennia of objectivist speculation has not resulted in more agreement, and I do not perceive profoundly lesser disagreements in our own era than in the time of the monkey-men or of the Greeks. So relativism enjoys the blessings of history as much as objectivism

experiences agony in it. By this, I do not signal any willingness to smudge myself with the quibble that the objectivist failures to summon their God or Gods are deadly enough to smite the objectivist industry. Each failure is a blow against the objectivists; each is not a fatal one (in part because they are quite obscure regarding whether objectivism is to be formulated as a reasonably universal doctrine as to allow for falsification or criticism), and I do not, for an instant, believe that they have now changed into zombies who have a knack for roaming around, scaring people in academic halls and corridors and during symposia, or at any rate, I, personally, do not imagine them to be less than alive. I challenge them, all the same, to work and earn more for a living: they are starving and that puts their credibility in a precarious ecology. Each blow, indeed, is a blow all the same. Presently, there is not much blood to be seen rushing through their veins. For instance, some take objectivism to be the bald statement that there are some objective truths, standards, values, or objectively right aims -- no more and no less.³⁵ So construed, objectivism is outrageously thin. Is this the doctrine that can dislodge so daring a doctrine as relativism? It is not even an ant kicking a giant elephant!

Another permutation of objectivism, the so-called convergent epistemological realism now in vogue and exhibited in the display rooms of philosophic bazaars, is introduced to explain the *success of science*.³⁶ Chasing this objectivism to show all its muddles is not embarked upon by the present argument, but one fears its "explicandum is often absent even in the 'mature' sciences" and that its peddlers "have not only got their history wrong in so far as they imagine that cumulative retention has prevailed in science, but we can see that -- given their views on what should be retained through theory change -- history could not possibly have been the way their models require it to be."³⁷ May I say deep queries tend to besmirch this brand of objectivism? The mind wonders: How about scientific failures and catastrophes? Are there more scientific successes than failures? Should we not bother ourselves also with other traditions, their successes? Or are we so rock-headed as to assume that traditions outside the harem of science are just objectively bad fantasies and unmindful jerks, and that science is easily objectively superior to them all? Is there no need to validate such assumption -- validate, i.e. through arguments, standards and values which are independent of all traditions and object-

ive (in brief, in the way objectivists require things to be validated)? Or, does not the demand for validation itself reflect some values and aims peculiar to some, but not all, traditions? And so on.³⁸

There is another consideration that should nudge us not to abandon relativism, and it should tickle critical rationalists, for according to the rumours they have disseminated, they are seducers of criticism. *If objectivism is a theory* which is to be subjected to severe criticism, then relativism provides the comparison needed in materializing that severity. Relativism creates or unlocks factors and facts (so precious to objectivists) which otherwise cannot be *produced*. These factors apply the much-invited stress and strain on the objectivists' hanging cocoon. (Of course, if objectivists do not listen to what they have invited on the cute reason that relativism is self-refuting, it is up to them. I can allow them to be dogmatic. Whether they may allow themselves to be so is another matter, however.) Amongst these is the much discussed phenomenon of incommensurability. The problem of incommensurability, to my mind, ultimately and amusingly boils down to the problem of whether a *rational debate* is possible between Herr K and a beetle, or between an amoeba and Einstein, or, less dramatically, but perhaps more controversially, whether such a debate can obtain between (on the one hand) brigands who believe (and act in accordance with the belief) that the best method to attain enlightenment or knowledge is to engage in butchering people and (on the other hand) Popperians who seem to faint at the sight of a man sowing some piece of metal inside the skull of another man in the street.

Popper toys with the idea that the system of the amoeba is not incommensurable with that of Einstein's: they have the same method, namely, the trial and error method. So "there is only one step from the amoeba to Einstein." Popperian methodology has been vindicated ages before mankind sprang from the fertile womb of the earth! Sir Karl thinks ('conjectures') that his is the objectively correct method. Thus everything else is to be assessed in his terms. But now a different methodology, the bloodbath methodology, climbs up the ring, showing that Popper's is *just* one amongst many. Are the two rivals commensurable? The relativist does not think they are: a Popperian gives arguments to the brigand, where-

as the brigand makes a reddish faucet on the Popperian neck.³⁹ It is even probable that a Popperian would become more inconsistent than the brigand once the latter approaches the former to cut off his throat. For I suppose the Popperian would also draw his rusty knife — rusty due to disuse — and fight back (with the knife and not with the prayers and arguments of his rationalism), and he might prove to be deadly if only because his weapon could cause tetanus.

Now my guess is had not some philosophers distanced themselves from objectivism, had they not undergone a switch to relativism, they would not have seen the phenomenon of incommensurability. Those who are under the total sway of objectivism always see thought systems (or action systems) as commensurable, since *each system is objectively either true or false (correct or incorrect)* and since each is compatible or incompatible with *the* true or correct thought system. The rub is: objectivists have not until now gored the objectively true or correct system. So the historic and ideological role of relativism is to remind the objectivist that his only light is his present light (nobody can use a candle he is yet to have, let alone a non-existent candle), and this light (say, Popperianism) is incommensurable with another light (say, the brigands' bloodbath light).

Relativism has posed a thesis and a problem of enormous gravity against the objectivist, and the result is, at the very least, a non-boring word-slinging.

A somewhat related consequence of relativist thinking which should be mentioned in passing, one that a critic of relativism must not be spared having to investigate, is the hammering of the objectivist principle of bivalence (the principle declaring every statement to be objectively either true or false (or not true)). Again, we do have in this area fiery altercations and exchange from which new issues arise and in which old issues are redefined, to which we owe the searchingly sceptical, perhaps burning scrutiny of meaning and cherished logic (the ancient sanctuary of objectivist and absolutists), thus rubbing in the *sub judice* character of *all* thought — logic and semantics included — and whipping the objectivist who has been habituated to the complacent dingdong that logic (read: classical logic) and classical semantics are superbly

OK. A homely sample: Dummett's intuitionism,⁴⁰ which takes truth not as objective truth but as proof or justification, is giving so much hot liquid to objectivism in semantics, mathematics and elsewhere — liquid which might not have been brewed otherwise. And it is a travesty of thought to announce that hotness is over, or that the problems generated are not worth our glance. To discard relativism now is to think that all the problems and issues brought out by an anti-objectivist thought, like intuitionism, are settled *finally*. Ferreting out demons to haunt objectivism is an impossibility, or nearly so, without erecting a satanic temple. The God who created a devil that would challenge him to a thunder fight is one of those childish fables. Nor does the passing of a thousand grants guaranteeing the budding, in due time, of objections out of the blue pacify the clamour of our souls. Nor can we rest content with a too positive view of human nature, one picturing man, especially the objectivist man, as swarmed by hidden inclinations that prompt him to divulge the ugliness and follies of his mind. No, in the heaven of objectivism where prophets partake in the vision, wisdom and holiness of a God, one hears nothing but praises for objectivism, and he is filled with the horrors awaiting anybody who dares to step out of it until he becomes His spokesman himself.⁴¹

A theory is not to be left alone. In no time should it gallop unchallenged. There must *always* be an opponent. A rebel theory. This goes in science and in all areas of cognition, and a deviation from this cognitive precept shows that we are not critical enough. Hence an opposing theory must not be abandoned without a successor opposing theory. (It is analogous to democratic politics: a government must always have an opposition, and if an existing opposition is to be abandoned, there must be another opposition to take its place.) Whilst abandoning a ruling vision in the absence of a replacement perchance fosters chaos, the spectacle of opposition abandonment in the absence of a replacement generates a gulf where an opposed theory descends into a state of loneliness. So relativism, the bold opposition to objectivism, is not to be abandoned by relativists without an alternative opposition.

Therefore, whilst it is one thing for a theory to be refuted or self-refuted — and self-refutingness is conceded as hurting relativism, but not that badly — there are poundings and hummings in

the rationalist terrain which hoot to us to hop into the relativist chariot. The relativist is like the warrior of a tribe who wounds himself before giving an ear to the babbles of battle, the wounds endowing him with strength to face and crush the creaking limbs of the enemy. He is hurt, yes, but by himself and as a battle ritual of his tribe. Mangled? NO: suicide is not his line.

It even occurs to me that, from the vista of critical rationalism, the refutation allegedly inflicted by relativism on itself is just a *potential* refutation. It is conjectured that relativism is objectively true; the relativist *does not say it is the objective truth itself. A conjecture is not the same as actual truth.* His arguments in favour of relativism are, thus, attempts to falsify it, and *the moment it is established as the objective truth, then the refutation or falsification is established* — self-refutation is established. But the relativist is thrilled by the critical rationalist belief in the impossibility of establishing the objective truth of any theory, of Newtonian theory, Einsteinian theory, atomic theory, kinetic theory, of relativism — pick the beast — and, yes, *of objectivism. Every theory remains, until the end of time or the end of whatever lies beyond time (if such exists), a conjecture and, hence, just a potential objective truth.*⁴² Consequently, the self-refutation of relativism forever remains a potential one. Added to this thrill is the nice thought that the relativist can hardly be accused of dogmatism, for he always tries to falsify his own theory: his attempts to show its truth are attempts to falsify it. A third thrill is from the angle of relativism-as-a-conjecture we no longer need the spurious services of realism to account for the behaviour of objectivist scientists. These scientists are simply trying to falsify or refute relativism. That is all we need to erase the ‘mystery’ of their behaviour.

Simple. However, this use of the conjectural method may make critical rationalists uneasy. In their view, their marriage to that method is necessarily a divorce from the infallible mind re-invented by Descartes, and is necessary to embrace fallibility. Any marriage to fallibility, finally, implies the existence of objective truths: “this very idea of error and human fallibility involves another one — the idea of *objective truth*: the standard which we may fall short of.”⁴³

In my view of this matter, once we abandon the divine in us — the infallible in us — objectivity and the search for it become words with little meaning. The judgement that we are fallible and that we, therefore, make mistakes and that we, therefore, fall short of the objective truths (in the sense that between Einstein and Newton there is an ‘objective fact of the matter’ of which the latter falls short whilst the former does not), could no longer have greater objective epistemic credibility (not to speak of the kind of logic or reasoning system that inferentially connects the components of the judgement) than alternative judgements. Of course, one can impute credibility to judgements, can assess them from the angle of a system of ideas; but not even an arch-objectivist like Popper is ready to claim that one of our systems is *the objectively true system*, or that we are likely to hit upon the one.⁴⁴ If we decide that we are fallible, then our self-image as fallible beings may be mistaken.⁴⁵ The possible mistake here does not necessarily mean that we may fall short of an objective fact of human infallibility: it may be that we fall short of what the relativist says. Fallibilism, in Popper’s sense, and infallibilism, in his sense, do not exhaust the possibilities. Beyond these senses is relativism. Relativists do not see cognitive beings as infallible knowers of objective truths, nor do they see Newtonians and others as fallible beings falling short of objective facts. A *mistake* does not objectively or necessarily imply a corresponding objective fact. It is the *judgement* of a system. A *fact* too is a judgement of a system. Relativism dawns as a *third choice*. Or do objectivists (given that the two ‘Popperian’ alternatives of fallibilism and infallibilism are both objectivisms, and given that objectivists think relativism *cannot* be true since, for them, it is inconsistent and anything inconsistent cannot be true) believe objectivism *cannot be mistaken*?

THE OBJECTIVIST ABUSE BOOMERANG

RELATIVISM OR RELATIVISMS NEED NOT SUBMIT THEMSELVES TO THE OBJECTIVIST RATIONALIST TRIBUNAL. The reason can be given.

Objectivists force on relativism an abusive ‘if-then’: if relativism is objectively true, then it is false. The present argument now proceeds to show the ‘boomerang’ nature of their abuse.

Objectivism is a theory. Is it objectively true or not? If it is not an objective truth itself, then it is either false or just a theory amongst others. On the other hand, if *objectivism is an objective itself*, and if one of the necessary standards of objectivism is the capability of being evaluated — a standard which does not mean a one-sided affair, that a cognitive product must necessarily come out without filth or dust, in short, come out clean, but which partly means that such a product be criticisable — then objectivism is no longer criticisable. If, however, objectivism is criticisable, then it is just a theory amongst others, one which is not an objective truth itself. A bit of this argument is this: if criticisability is *the objective standard itself*, then it is no longer criticisable — which is to say that it is not, notoriously, the objective standard itself.

So in all probability, objectivists deny they have considered the capability of being evaluated or the standard of criticisability as one of the sticks and stones in their *objectivist bag*. But which are the objective standards? (I am asking for objective standards — not standards of the objectivist.)

If objectivism is the objective truth itself, and if x, y, z, etc. are the objective standards or the objectively correct aims, purposes, values, etc. (which, of course, are a *part, a part, of the baggage of objectivism*), then the result is that there is no longer a higher authority than objectivism. As such, objectivists are absurdly reduced to dogmatism. *Objectivism ratifies itself.* (What else, indeed, can ratify it?) Could one still legitimately (i.e., from their point-of-view) revolt against objectivism if objectivism is an objective truth itself? NO. That is the source and chimney of my lamentations. Have not objectivists spoken ill of dogmatism? Objectivist dogmatism *may* be matched with the dogmatism of anybody else.

Often, notably in philosophy, answers in the form of satisfying directly some expressed questions are not forthcoming and are not surely the norm in philosophical disputes. Usually, a philosopher broods over a question and identifies its supporting assumptions with the purpose of either challenging them or denying them altogether. This adroit operation may catch the fancy of the objectivist. Feeling he has somehow been poisoning himself inadvertent-

ly, he may burst — as if in a nervous breakdown — and open his bag, turn it upside down to show there are no objective x's, y's and z's in it. But — poor objectivist! — this is to prefer denise over dogmatism. Vistas, visions, views and arguments in any area of concern, cognitive or otherwise, are supposed to be anchored on objective standards, values or on objectively right aims; otherwise these vistas 'lack force.'⁴⁶ From a confession that *no* person on earth (and beyond) wields the objectively correct system of standards, it follows (on account of the objectivist theorist's own doctrine) that no articulated argument ever has a force, arguments of the proponents of objectivist theory not exempted.

Humility in matters epistemological is a welcome development. Modern man is habituated to it. This impels the objectivists to humble themselves and forego the claim to the ownership of an objectively true system of thought. They thus convey that their objectivism is not objectively true. Consequently, when objectivists appeal to the so-called objective standards, etc., they are appealing to things which do not exist objectively (for if they exist objectively, then objectivism is an objectively correct or true system of thought).⁴⁷

There is another variation of the argument. *If objectivism is a theory and if, as objectivists always foist on the relativist, we cannot argue with 'force' without assuming objective standards, then any objectivist endeavour to argue in its favour equals to begging the problem, to presupposing what the objectivist wants to establish.* (This *petitio* is of singular seriousness in the context of the relativist-objectivist exchange. An emphasis on logical or epistemic or cognitive force may not be objectionable in itself. Such force is something felt by some; some do not feel it; or, more accurately, people feel it in varying degrees. Foulness looms somewhere else. It is when the critic presupposes an 'objective logico-epistemic or cognitive force.') The objectivist cannot really argue for his objectivism. *It is its own and only ratification.* The truth of objectivism — a theory underpropping a notion of cognitive force — entails that objectivism cannot be established objectively. One gets the feeling, in consequence, that in so far as it is viewed as established, it is *necessarily* so. Is it surprising then that if objectivism is to be refuted at all, the refutation must be

a kind of self-refutation? For, according to the objectivist, one can only argue forcefully and plausibly for the refutation of objectivism when one assumes its truth. (It is something like this: objectivism has to contain the seed of its own destruction, if it is destructible at all.) This is a manifestation of either a sort of self-refutation or an unspoken dogmatism of the prophets of objectivism (because by making arguments through fiat wholly dependent on objectivist assumptions, they may be telling us that *no conceivable, no possible argument can put them and their doctrine down.* Queer).

Thus, by and large, the way objectivists have bullied the relativists backfires. When one treats objectivism in the manner that the objectivists have treated relativism, monstrous problems and paradoxes comparable to, if not more disturbing and destructive than, those allegedly besetting relativism emerge from objectivism. Total obliviousness to this is a logical sequel to the subtle objectivist bad vice of shooting at relativism-as-a-theory at the height of forgetfulness about objectivism-as-a-theory. On a sickening lapse of memory sits the objectivist victory.

BEHIND THE ARGUMENT FROM SELF-REFUTATION AND OTHER OBJECTIVIST OBJECTIONS

The objectivists' proposal to *discard* relativism due to self-refutation, I think, gains much of its persuasiveness from logic. Self-refuting statements are a type of contradictions, so it can be thought. Classical logic tells us that contradictions entail any statement whatsoever. This renders self-refuting statements not just false but absurdly false. A famous philosopher even preached the *utter uselessness of all contradictions.*⁴⁸

Not all sympathies are with classical logic, nonetheless. It is true that in the past it was *the* logic, and professional philosophers could not even conceive of questioning, say, the law of bivalence. (Time was when people were less logically educated and more logically timid. The convulsions of thought did not yet touch our most cherished logical rules. Logic was the highest, most certain cognitive court of appeal in cases of dispute. But this happy holiday did not last too long — soon the revolutions raged and culminated in the Quinean attack on the synthetic-analytic divide, the

divide which shielded the impregnability of classical logic and wrought the awe we felt for it.) Things have changed. The republic of the mind is brimming with logic. Dummett has taught us how not to accept the law of bivalence. Others have constructed formal systems in which contradictions do not entail everything. We may continue the revolution. A relativist who is unimpressed by the law of non-contradiction and pursues the formation of a system which logically countenances some or all types of contradictions, cannot be shown to be making an objectively false system without begging the problem. It must be hard for the objectivists (and even frightened pseudo- or semi-relativists) to stomach the total relativist's unwavering application of his relativism to the law of non-contradiction or consistency. Historically, contradictions are the objects of their opprobrium. But that is all. It does not mean the objective truth of the law. They *believe* the law is objectively true.⁴⁹ However, there is a distinction between truth and belief, and so their ossified belief does not imply the law's actual objective truth. I have, doctrinally, no inclination to take the truth-belief distinction as objective.⁵⁰ It is a distinction fabricated in the objectivist and semi-objectivist traditions or frameworks – but not in others. So be it. Then why this dogmatic imposition of classical logic?

The reason, or part of it, is not difficult to find. The critical rationalist Master supplies it: classical logic is the strongest logic, and, hence, it ensures severe criticism. We should value criticisability, he adds, because it aids us in our search for the objective truth.⁵¹

Without commenting on the problematic whiff of the postulated connexion between classical logic and criticisability and the search for objective truths, it is not to be forgotten that the search for objective truths may be of value to objectivists but not to others who may thus have no urgent need of classical logic. Or, does the objectivist *assume* such search to be the objectively correct value or aim? If he does not, why does he force it on the relativists? Whoever has told him that the relativists are out to find objective truths? If classical logic is preferable to the advocates of *objectivist theory*, so be it. Meanwhile, some other logics may be preferred by relativists.

All logical systems are not objectively true. So are statements about possibilities and impossibilities, about what can and cannot be done or understood, and about what is necessary and contingent,⁵² and what follows from what.

Hence, who can now say that as a matter of *objective fact*, all self-refuting sentences are objectively absurd?⁵³ We can go beyond the fallibilistic implication that there is no objective certainty in the precept declaring all self-refuting statements to be objectively unacceptable. Perhaps, it is a *rule* that all such statements are not acceptable or are absurdly false. Whose rule? The tortoise knows a good deal about the so-called logical rules. Logic is relative.⁵⁴ Relativism may be self-refuting. It may be a contradictory doctrine. On that ground, it is false, *relatively false*. It is false relative to a logical system which takes the law of noncontradiction as a part. It may be true relative to a system which does not recognise that law. One must not avert his gaze from one thing — that a particular doctrine which is self-refuting is relative.

Logic is relative. *So is the conclusion that solipsism follows from relativism.*

Moreover, what is so special about Truth, if we do not assume the search for it to be the objectively correct value or aim? Corollarily, what is so revolting about being false? Undoubtedly, abandoning a system of thought because it is false tacitly presupposes the overriding value of Truth. But what if one has other values? Feyerabend, for one, seems to value Democracy which is what he attaches to his relativism. He values it more than he values Truth. The boldness and beauty of relativism emerges in its facility or readiness to question the value traditionally accorded to Truth. This readiness is totally foreign to the hearts and minds of the Lovers of Objective Truth. A relativist asks: Can I not prefer ignorance over Truth? If science is identified with Truth, he asks: Can I not prefer a kind of mysticism over impersonal science? Scientific knowledge separates man (the subject) from the object.⁵⁵ It has enormous powers; control is its motive; but it has brought us to the brink of terrestrial annihilation.⁵⁶ There is such a thing as Oedipal tragedy. Mysticism is ignorance (again if we identify science with Truth — although no one has yet estab-

lished that mysticism *is* ignorance). It does not have the bifurcation between the subject and the object, and the mystic has no wish for it; but here in his mysticism he feels and gets something he values. May he not prefer mysticism? One may, unless we presuppose Truth to be the objectively correct value (which, of course, begs the problem). Let me repeat: relativism asserts the multiplicity of values and aims in thinking, in acting and in life; in short, the multiplicity of values and aims of beings. None has an objective status⁵⁷ – not even Truth.

The important consequence is this: falsity or even absurdity and abandonment or rejection are not related by an objectively necessary connexion. Values link them or tear them apart.

Does not relativism, then, teach the *arbitrariness* of all logical structures, of all thought?⁵⁸ This is at once an objection and an expression of exasperation. It also wallows behind the persuasiveness of the attack on relativism.

Does relativism, indeed, teach the *objective* arbitrariness of all thought? Not at all. That it does is a conclusion imputed by objectivists who pretend to have the Eyes of a God. They pretend to have *the* objectively true system; or if they concede that they do not have it, they assume that there *must* be such. Then they run over all cognitive structures and *tactically* sympathize with what the relativist says about these structures, without ridding themselves of the original pretension, and so they find, not surprisingly, all thought to be objectively arbitrary. The objective Eyes of the objectively true system see everything else as arbitrary or, otherwise, as plain muddle. But, for the relativist (and for the critical rationalist too), no one has these Eyes. Again, the objectivist cannot attack the relativist with the arbitrariness charge save through a *petitio* (“There *must* be an objectively true system – whether we know it or not – and so if a system *x* is not objectively true, it is either objectively arbitrary or objectively in error.”)

Whether something is arbitrary or not is determined by this or that system of beliefs.

The arbitrariness objection is often paired with a similar one. It sounds like this: ‘If relativism is true, then I can just concoct

any theory whatsoever. I can just theorize anything.' My retort is brief: *just do*. 'But they will *call* me irrational or, worse, mad!' They will or they will not, some will or some will not, or the question of madness may not even arise. Are *you* prepared to be called irrational by the rationalist community members?

Rationalists have a slightly different formulation of the complaint: "How, if at all, can . . . people rationally decide to which culture they owe allegiance?"⁵⁹ Reply: Rationalism is just one amongst these cultures, traditions or thought systems. The complaint begs the question in that it assumes rationalism to be a tradition with supreme objective authority over and above others.⁶⁰

In the spirit of this unjustified authoritarianism, we are told:

. . . some ways are better (in a non-context-dependent sense of 'better') than others for arriving at truths – and, unless we assume this, we could not satisfactorily explain how belief systems hold together or how they change. Thus the web of Zande witchcraft beliefs holds together in part by shielding its adherents from the perception of falsification and contradiction ('. . . a Zande cannot get out of its meshes because it is the only world he knows. He cannot think that his thought is wrong'); likewise, superstitions have been abandoned and scientific theories superseded in consequence, at least in part, of confronting with evidence and logical criticism.⁶¹

Owing to the pervasiveness of this line of argument against relativism, I think it calls forth several comments. First, the objectivist may assume objectivism, but it does not objectively follow that objectivism *is* an or the objectively true system of thought.⁶² I do not rob the objectivist of his right to assume objectivism. Relativism simply does not consider the assumption to be objectively true. *It does not consider objectivism to be objectively true.* Objectivism is just a tradition amongst others. A system of thought amongst others. So we can say that the objectivists, relative to the theory of objectivism, cannot "satisfactorily explain how belief systems hold together or how they change" without assuming some of the doctrines which objectivists hold. Second, relativism does not deny the existence of falsification, contradiction or logical system (on the basis of which logical criticism is carried out) as having no overriding authority sanctioned by the status of objectivity.⁶³ Lastly, there is a comic side of the Zande image portrayed, for that image is the exact image of the proponents of objectivism. Consider the following lines:

... unless they [i.e., the members of a community] possess, say the concept of negation and the laws of identity and noncontradiction, we could never understand their putative beliefs, inferences or arguments. Indeed, we could not then even credit them with the possibility of holding beliefs, inferring or arguing, and we could never find their equivalents of 'and,' 'not,' 'or,' 'if . . . then,' etc., whose meaning is in part given by the logical truths. Of course, they may violate the logical laws with which they ordinarily operate, say in ritual contexts, but the special mystery or paradox of what they then say gains its force from that very fact; and there may be certain limited logical divergences (e.g. they may be intuitionists who reject $p \vee \neg p$ as a logical truth), but these cannot go too far without incomprehensibility setting in.⁶⁴

Accordingly, objectivists "cannot get out of its meshes" because objectivism is the only theory they know. Doctrines and beliefs beyond theirs (particularly the well-entrenched ones) they could not understand. Since the line "these cannot go too far without incomprehensibility setting in" has the force of a prohibition, it shields the objectivist adherents from the perception of falsification. They cannot -- relative to their framework -- think that their thought, i.e., their objectivism, is wrong. Objectivists are the Zande of the modern West.

THE GRAND *PETITIO* AND THE GRAND PERMISSION

Petitio rears its head in every point of the objectivist aggression.⁶⁵ No one can be so brutally puritan about rules of argumentation but those enamoured by the tradition of objectivism; most of them are rationalists. Regrettably, though they do not wish to be the last to scold people who violate, or are not enslaved by, these rules, they are the first to violate them at the first smell of what they regard as the most dangerous of enemies, the relativist. This is their forgetfulness and their inconsistency, and their sense or share of divine authoritarianism which makes them at ease in a position above their own law. There is an urge to infer that they ultimately do not prize consistency itself as much as they prize it as a propaganda article against their opposite numbers: consistency is renounced (behind our backs) as soon as it ceases to serve (or as soon as inconsistency suits) their aggressive maneuvers.

We can recast the *petitio* lesson into a grand argument. The proponents of the *theory of objectivism* argue. They assert. They criticise and defend. They report. Much has been said by them, yet still they are about to tell us much more, perhaps about to do

much, much more. The moment has come for the relativist to ask: DO THEY, IN SAYING SOMETHING -- ANYTHING (INCLUDING AND ESPECIALLY THEIR CRITICISMS AGAINST THE RELATIVIST, AND THEIR ACCOUNTS OF HIS POSITION, OF WHAT THEY HEAR FROM HIM, AND THEIR OWN STATEMENTS OF THEIR OWN THEORY) – PRESUPPOSE THAT SOMETHING IS OBJECTIVE? IF ANY ONE OF THE OBJECTIVISTS' STATEMENTS – WHETHER PREMISE, CONCLUSION OR WHATNOT – IS ASSUMED BY THEM TO BE OBJECTIVELY TRUE, THEN THEY BEG THE PROBLEM. BUT ONCE THEY INSINUATE THAT THEIR STATEMENTS ARE NOT OBJECTIVE, THE RELATIVIST WELCOMES THEM TO HIS CLUB. Q.E.D.

Objectivists are quick to point out that the statements of the relativists are covered by relativism. In spite of this, when criticising relativism, they invariably forget its totality and proceed as though their statements are not covered by it. Their general strategy is to assume (for the sake of argument, they love to say) the truth of relativism whilst, at the same time, retaining some variables (particularly their doctrines and their statements) as not covered by relativism. And so, in fact, objectivists do not assume, for the sake of argument, the truth of relativism. Their offensive argument *already begs inconsistent premises*.⁶⁶ No wonder they have found relativism to be both objectively inconsistent and objectively non-total. They initially assume it to be not total (which is what they want to establish). Once they assume the truth of relativism, they have to accept that *nothing* is absolutely or objectively true (including statements that the form 'x is absolutely true'); once they assume it, *then nothing actually objectively true follows from it or from their premises*; and once they assume it, they are in. The *reductio* argument does not objectively work against relativism, because that argument itself is within the purview of relativism's area of application. A total relativism is at once total and consistent. It is total in the sense that nothing, but nothing, is immune from it or exempted from it; it is consistent in that even the law of consistency is not left untouched by it.

On second thought, this argument, I believe, is at best incomplete. The matter seems to be this: we have *two contending theo-*

ries in the field — on the one hand is the theory of relativism, on the other the theory of objectivism. The former submits that there are no objective truths (and standards, values, etc.), the latter that there are. Objectivists cannot debunk relativism without begging the problem. That is the kernel of our grand argument. But neither, it appears, can the relativist debunk objectivism without committing the same sin. Objectivists may concede that at present they do not have the objectively true system of thought. Nonetheless, that is consistent with the idea that the objectively true system exists *independently of our knowledge*. Whether or not we know it, it is there; and it is up to knowing beings to discover it. More extremely, even if we cannot know it, even if we cannot discover it, somehow it is there — as a World 3 object. Many a thinker are not likely to subscribe to this extreme doctrine — which is the essence of metaphysical realism — but it is difficult to imagine how a relativist can debunk it without begging the problem. (What and where, one is tempted to ask, is that which is *neutral* to objectivism and relativism?) Briefly, objectivists and relativists cannot establish their theories without initially assuming them. For the establishment of objectivism presumably signifies the destruction of relativism — and vice versa. (Who dreams of objective establishment anyhow?)

Thus nothing is objectively established. Nothing is objectively debunked. Not the theory of relativism and not the theory of objectivism.

Objectivist thought has no objective authority to the exclusion of all others. Relativism has no objective authority to the exclusion of all others.⁶⁷

Thus everything is permitted. 'Anything goes.' Which, of course, exuberantly includes the *theory* of objectivism, the *theory* of relativism, the *theory* that hardly anything goes, the *theory* that contradictions are not to be permitted, the theory that they are to be permitted, the *theories* of verisimilitude, of inductive support and of corroboration, the *theories* of absolutism, of fallibilism, of nihilism, metaphysical realism and idealism, and more. Proliferation continues.

So, relativism roars. It lies like water upon the earth. Life breathes itself into it. The death of relativism is not anywhere in the landscape of modern thought, nor does the horizon indicate such.

NOTES

* This paper is dedicated to Paul Feyerabend. His influence pervades the whole essay, and indebtedness to him goes far beyond my particular references to his works.

¹ For alternative formulations of the argument from self-refutation, see [4], p. 549; [24], p. 42; [37], p. 311; [38], p. 330; [39], pp. 606-07; [41], p. 116; [144], pp. 346-47; [50], p. 111; [53], p. 239; [55], pp. 115-16; [56], pp. 365-68; [57], pp. 225-31; [59], p. 460.

² See, for example, Rorty [54] p. 728.

³ This, by the way, is the prime reason why semantic ascent should have failed. But even if there is a virgin universal language, what is it for? As Wittgenstein would say: in so far as it is virgin, it is idle. Once it is *used*, it loses its purity. Virginity can be had at most only once.

⁴ See his [3].

⁵ [3], p. 402. See also p. 396.

⁶ [3], p. 406.

⁷ [3], p. 402.

⁸ [3], p. 407.

⁹ [3], p. 395.

¹⁰ [3], p. 407.

¹¹ [3], p. 406.

¹² [3], p. 405.

¹³ [3], p. 400.

¹⁴ On page 396 of his paper, he quotes and affirms Wittgenstein when in [63], p. 33, he says: "Our disease is one of wanting to explain."

¹⁵ [3], p. 399.

¹⁶ Dr. Beam appears to praise M. Foucault's endeavour to *explain* European cultural *raptures or discontinuities* ([3], pp. 407-08) despite the fact that he clearly rejects such an endeavour as a mistake ([3], p. 407).

¹⁷ They are now a common currency, and repeating them here is necessary only because Dr. Beam is repeating the mistakes against which they are directed.

¹⁸ [3], p. 402.

¹⁹ See Gellner's Introduction to [22], pp. 12, 19.

²⁰ [3], p. 406.

²¹ [3], p. 407.

²² [3], pp. 406-07.

²³ [3], p. 407.

²⁴ See [33], p. 168; [43], p. 1; [59], pp. 464-65.

²⁵ See [3], pp. 389-392.

Dr. Bearn says: "I am assuming that metaphysical realism is rejected: I am taking it for granted that a world we could not speak about would be as nothing to us (less even than a dream or a hope)" ([3], p. 400). This is arrested despite his belief that the 'transcendental limits' are somehow not nothing to us but which could not be spoken about. If there are transcendental limits, can't there be transcendental worlds? If one has license to postulate transcendental limits of some sort, hasn't another a license to postulate a transcendental world, a world which is not necessarily 'nothing to us'?"

²⁶ He must have been vaguely aware of this, for he finally calls the doctrine that he has presented *critical realism* ([3], p. 407).

²⁷ See [41], p. 119.

²⁸ See [40] and [41].

²⁹ [40], p. 571.

³⁰ Harvey Siegel apparently has arrived at this result ([57], pp. 234-35). However, he fails to notice clearly that the Meilandian terms 'statements,' 'persons,' 'world views,' 'historical and cultural situations,' and 'three-term relations,' must also be construed in a solipsistic fashion, i.e., as not independent of Jack Meiland's framework. This failure has led Siegel to conclude that "Meiland's three-term relation collapses into a two-term relation . . ." In fact, in a significant sense, there is no relation involved: only Meiland's solipsistic baggage.

That Meiland's relative relativism boils down to solipsism was already declared earlier by Steven Lukes in [32], pp. 237-38; [33], p. 172; by Keith Dixon in [8], p. 87.

³¹ [59], pp. 462-63.

³² [59], p. 464.

³³ If a Newtonian *decides* to accept a counter-instance to his Newtonian framework, then he need not abandon that framework — although this makes his *total* cognitive corpus contradictory.

There is no suggestion that the cases of Newtonianism and relativism are exactly parallel. The latter, unlike the former, is self-refuting. But what is peculiar in relativism is the relativist *decision* to include *logic* (and, therefore, the law of noncontradiction) within its area of application and within its truth content. (More on this particular question of logic later.)

It must be emphasized that the framework of critical rationalism or the whole of objectivist thought (with its logical preferences) is as much under trial as relativism in a kind of metacritical rationalist tribunal. This must be so if critical rationalism is to be criticisable at all (i.e., criticisable from the standpoint of its own standards). Besides, this approach is an application of the critical rationalist Master's explicit precept of criticising his doctrines from the standpoint of meta-critical rationalism (See Popper's [49], pp. 1010, 1196).

³⁴ It must be clear, then, that the relativist need not say that relativism follows from cognitive and cultural diversity. On the contrary, relativism tries to explain such diversity. Let me also remark that objectivism does not follow from diversity either. Nor is it entailed by cognitive and cultural homogeneity.

³⁵ This is the objectivism developed by I.C. Jarvie in [28].

³⁶ This objectivism is quite bold, for in a sense, it identifies the objectively true system of thought, standards and values with contemporary science.

³⁷ For a strong case against convergent realism, see [30]. The last two quotations are taken from this essay, pp. 42 and 43, respectively.

³⁸ Several years ago Feyerabend raised questions like these, and he challenged the assumption of the objective superiority of science over other systems of thought or world-views (see [18], ch. 18; [19], pp. 73-76, 98-107, 212; [20], pp. 13, 16-17; [21], pp. 142-43). However objectivists continue to preach the objective superiority of science without facing the challenge that he has posed. (See [23]; [8], p. 83; [34], pp. 297-98). For instance, when they explain the transition from the 'traditional' world-views to scientific ones, they simply ignore Feyerabend's point that gun-boat diplomacy and other forms of bullying have a lot to do with it.

³⁹ How can a Popperian rationally argue with someone who does not do, and believe in, argument and debate. For these two people to have a rational argument, there must be a *prior* abandonment of the brigand's methodology by the person who has initially accepted such a methodology.

⁴⁰ See [9], [10], [11], [12], [13], [14], [15], [16], [17]. The relativistic nature of Dummett's framework is recognized by Putnam in his [51], p. 84.

⁴¹ See note 42.

⁴² If *every* thought system or contention is *sub-judice*, including objectivism and contentions to the effect that this or that is a set of objective standards, then who or what is the judge? There is no objectively overriding judge to the exclusion of others. NO highest court of appeal: not even objectivism. Naturally, one can say that we can only judge one at a time. But that means that any judgement announced at any time is

dependent on, and relative to, the system of thought one happens to be currently holding.

Now if one's knowledge-claim is the objective truth itself, then it is no longer *sub-judice*. The fact that something is *sub-judice* means that it is not the objective truth itself. But one may retort as follows: "The situation is only that we are not, or cannot be, certain whether we have hit upon the objective truth; and that is why our thought systems are always *sub-judice*. (It does not follow that all knowledge-claims are not objective truths. Some of them may actually be objectively true, but the point is that we are not certain whether they actually are objectively true even if they in fact are. Objective truths exist. We try to grasp them although there cannot be any certainty in that grasping." Unfortunately, this retort presumes the *non-sub-judice* status of objectivism (or the theory of objectivism). It presumes that objectivism is an objectively true system of thought itself. Yet in the confrontation between relativism and objectivism, objectivism precisely is *sub-judice*. And once *everybody* abandons relativism, *nobody* would be left to criticise objectivism. So declaring the *sub-judice* character of objectivism would be reduced to a mere grunt. Therefore, to allow for the *sub-judice* – or conjectural – character of objectivism without precluding the possibility of its being an objectively true system of thought, relativists must not abandon their creed. How, indeed, can an objectivist (who believes that criticism must be made in accordance with objectivism) criticise his own objectivism?

⁴³ [47], p. 16.

⁴⁴ See next section.

⁴⁵ This may be called the paradox of fallibilism.

⁴⁶ This supposition is repeatedly stated by Harvey Siegel. See [56], p. 374n20; [57], pp. 240, 242-43, 249, 258n62. See also [8], p. 80. In the language of Ruth Garrett Millikan: "When one has evidence it is *always* evidence, precisely, concerning theory-independent objects, concerning objects not simply *constituted* by, or as a correlate of, one's thought or awareness of them." ([42], p. 430).

⁴⁷ It is now understandable why some objectivists, like Steven Lukes (see [34], pp. 275, 298), are at present shrinking back to the old talk of *final judgement* and the *indubitable*. The fallibilist conjectural method cannot help them. But who or what is the *final judge*? The objectivists? Lukes? Which is the final judgement – final in the absolute sense? The absolute standpoint? But which is the absolute standpoint? *Objectivism*? Science? Steven Lukes ([34] p. 299) insinuates that we still have to hit on the absolute standpoint, but he asserts that science is the route to it. Notoriously if he does not have the absolute standpoint, then his proposition about that route is not objectively true. If he does not have the absolute standpoint, then his whole set of propositions and judgements (known as the theory of objectivism) is not objectively true. An objectivist who adopts the talk of final judgement and the indubitable but who, at the same time, takes his own theories, assertions, doctrines, etc. as not absolutely final, is bound to condemn himself. However, it is extremely difficult for Lukes and other objectivists to claim that, as a matter of actual objective fact, their doctrines (including their objectivism), propositions, assertions, etc. are now final judgements.

⁴⁸ See [45], p. 319. For my part, I do not see all contradictions as on a par with each other. A theory which incorporates Newton's theory and its denial (call it ND)

suggests something which the statement (C) "My shirt is white and it is no" does not. Someone who had heard of (C) but not of ND would not get some scientific suggestion which he would get were he someone who had heard of ND but not of (C). If I were a scientist, I would regard the theory ND more useful than (C). I would even think it more useful than the *non-contradictory* statement, "My shirt is white."

⁴⁹ Most objectivist attacks on relativism rely heavily on the law of non-contradiction. This is very conspicuous and it is most glaring in the paper of W.F. Vallicella ([59]). (See also [53], p. 239.) I take this to be symptomatic of their firm belief in the objective truth of the law. Some, like Hollis (see his [25], p. 74), say that all *rational men* subscribe to it. (So what if all rational men subscribe to it? See my later remarks on the rationalist tradition.) Others go further: "if one rejects the formal principle of non-contradiction (A cannot be both B and not B simultaneously), then one denies the applicability of logical discourse" ([8], p. 86). It is presupposed or implied that logical frameworks which incorporate the law of non-contradiction are the only possible ones (i.e., objectively, they are the only possible ones). (One must be reminded that, for the relativist, when someone (who may be a relativist or not) accepts the law of non-contradiction, he is not accepting an objectively true or correct law; and when someone rejects it, he is not rejecting an objectively false or incorrect law.)

Many people accept the law. Its tenure in the hearts and minds of men is rather different from that of the law of excluded middle. I am aware of only one objectivist who uses the law of excluded middle against relativism: Dr. Edward Beach (see [21], p. 169n). Steven Lukes is quite sympathetic to those who reject it (see [33], p. 170). It is no longer as firmly entrenched as it was in the recent past. Is this phenomenon the unspoken retreat of objectivists in logic and semantics? I will not be surprised if many objectivists will relax, if not completely drop, their commitment to the law of non-contradiction or consistency.

⁵⁰ Hilary Putnam misses this point (see [53], p. 238). When somebody (relativist or not), according to the relativists, accepts the truth-belief distinction, he is not accepting an objectively incorrect distinction. And the statement that there is an objective difference between what is true and what is believed to be true is relatively true or relatively false or relatively nonsense or relatively . . .

⁵¹ See [48], pp. 139-40, 305-06.

⁵² William F. Vallicella claims that "a consistent and total relativism is possible only if necessarily but relatively true statements are possible" ([59], p. 465). Although the relativist does not take this claim to be objectively true, I can take the challenge. A statement S is necessarily true in the sense that it is a truth of a particular logical framework or system. S, at the same time, is relatively true, i.e., true relative to the logical system of which it is a part. Since the logical system *in* which S is a logical truth, is relative, S, therefore, is a necessarily but relatively true statement. A thought system may have necessary (or logical) and contingent statements. According to relativists, statements of both types are *not* objectively true.

⁵³ One *can* say it, of course, but that does not objectively mean that what is said is really objectively true.

⁵⁴ I agree with Barnes and Bloor's inclusion of logic into relativism's area of application (see [1], pp. 40-46).

⁵⁵ See [34], pp. 295-96, 299.

⁵⁶ See [23], p. 191.

⁵⁷ I deem it necessary to emphasize this because many critics of relativism use arguments which hinge on the value of survival (see, for example, Lukes [34], p. 269 and n). Here, Lukes quotes E.E. Evans-Pritchard as saying that observation, experiment and reason enhance survival. (Now I understand why paradigm deaths or shifts are not caused by observation, experiment and reason!)

For a beautiful account of how the different levels of empirical beliefs or theories, of methodological rules and scientific aims breed relativism, see Doppelt, G.: 1986, "Relativism and the Reticulational Model of Scientific Rationality," *Synthese* 69, especially pp. 228-29. The relative status of the value, aim or end of survival seems to have been realised also by P.E. Divine (see [7], p. 413).

⁵⁸ This charge against relativism has been aired by a number of philosophers. See for instance H. Siegel, [57], pp. 232, 243.

⁵⁹ [29], p. 372.

⁶⁰ Paul Feyerabend has expressed the same reply more than ten years ago. Why then the repetition of the *petitio*?

To have a feel of the enormous popularity of this specific *petitio* amongst objectivists, see [57], pp. 230-31, 255 (n17), 257 (n53); see also [2], pp. 167-68, 170n15; [39], p. 606. Their point appears to be that a given doctrine (like relativism) is not *rationaly* defensible. So what?

⁶¹ [33], pp. 170-71.

⁶² One may assume that a statement is objectively true, but it does not objectively follow that it is *actually* objectively true.

⁶³ In another paper, Lukes also considers *direct verificationism* as an objectively correct framework (see [31], p. 211).

I must mention here the rumour spinned by I. C. Jarvie ([28], p. 44): "cognitive relativism, by denying absolute truth even as a regulative idea, evacuates the possibility of criticism, and hence the project of co-operative, progressive learning from experience." Underlying this is a royal objectivist hubris. Does Jarvie mean to undermine the possibility of denying or criticising objectivism? Yes. He amplifies defiance against evacuating the possibility of criticising other doctrines, but it is he who does evacuate the possibility of criticising or denying objectivism for he equates denying or criticising objectivism with evacuating the possibility of criticism.

⁶⁴ [33], p. 170. Lukes is here reaffirming something that he already stipulated in his [31], p. 209.

⁶⁵ Several objectivist writers are aware of their own *petitio*, but they seem to downplay its significance. Among them are K. Dixon ([8], p. 80), Gellner ([23], p. 188) and Steven Lukes ([33], p. 172).

⁶⁶The point has been discussed in detail; however, it may be instructive to quote one of its most conspicuous exemplifications. Siegel writes:

The *reductio* can be generalized as follows: *Assume (radical) relativism correct*. Then the relativist position has strong, indeed compelling justification – it is a rationally justifiable position. Justification involves good reasons. But good reasons cannot be biased or non-neutral or arbitrary or framework-bound (*by definition of "good reasons"*). Therefore, if we are justified in holding that relativism is correct, there must be some non-arbitrary, neutral, "absolute" framework or ground from which we can make that judgement. Thus relativism, which denies the possibility of such a framework, is incorrect. In short, if relativism is true, it must have a non-relativistic ground, which possibility it denies. Thus relativism, if true, is false. Thus relativism is false. ([56], p. 366) (Italics mine).

The first premise of Siegel is the theory of radical relativism. Another premise denies this. It presumes that there are absolutely correct theories, absolute justifications, absolutely good reasons, etc. Surprisingly, in a note (p. 374 n20) for the quoted passage, he claims that: "the *reductio* does not unfairly assume the existence of absolute criteria." Then he continues: "It rather points out that the relativist must appeal to such criteria in order to make the case for relativism." But does he not simply foist such assumption on the relativists by means of a definition? He does. (It must again be remarked that, as we have seen, if he foists the same thing on his making a case for his own objectivism, he ends up assuming what he wants to establish.) What puzzles me more is his awareness of the "quick and dirty" nature of his argument (see p. 374n20). Why, then, did he publish his argument? Does he believe in the objective, compelling force (or the objectively justificatory role) of "quick and dirty" arguments? His other paper (namely, [57]), intimates, in the same note, that he provides a non-dirty formulation of his *reductio* argument. There is nothing of that sort in it, however. It is just an amusing collection of question-begging demands, arguments and assertions.

Now, it may be worthwhile to ask oneself why an inconsistent argument – an argument with inconsistent premises (such as Siegel's) – which is normally easily recognized as such, can easily pass unnoticed by philosopher-editors and by objectivists (who always preach that inconsistent reasoning is bad). Quite trivially, the phenomenon is just a manifestation of the relativity of seeing. Many philosophers have a deep hatred of relativism so much so that what is easily seen in other circumstances as a kind of inconsistent reasoning cannot be seen in the context of the relativist-objectivist controversy.

It is, of course, possible that the premises of Siegel are not inconsistent. Since he assumes radical relativism (which is his first premise), he, perhaps, considers his other premises (which talk of objective justification, etc.) as relatively true.

⁶⁷Thus, strictly speaking, the radical or total relativist does not yearn to guarantee any such thing as actual objective cognitive superiority of relativism or any other 'ism' – contrary to what Siegel thinks (see his [57], p. 246). Nor does he de-radicalise his relativism by drenching the objectively-equal-cognitive-legitimacy-of-all-thought doctrine with objective status – again contrary to what Siegel thinks (see his [57], p. 246).

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