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"There are no absolutes." "The truth is relative." Each phrase implies and necessitates the truth of the other. An absolute is something that is universally true, that is, its truth is independent of all other factors or contexts.[1] To say, "there are no absolutes," is to say that there are no independent universal truths. All truths are therefore *dependent*. "The truth is relative" makes exactly this claim. Philosophically speaking, that which is relative "is dependent on something else."[2] But the concepts of relativity and dependence do not exist in a vacuum. For something to be relative it must be relative *to something*. For something to be dependent it must be dependent *on something*. What that something is depends on the external factor or context being referenced. Thus, both phrases boil down to the same basic premise: the truth is entirely dependent.

These phrases may function well in conjunction, but the same cannot be said about their validity as independent statements. In fact, such phrases are self-contradictory. Each phrase, if assumed to be true, negates itself. "There are no absolutes" is, in and of itself, an absolute. The phrase posits that there are no absolutes by establishing the existence of one. The phrase could be modified to, "There are no absolutes except this one," yet this necessities a standard by which this statement can be claimed as an absolute while other statements cannot. At least one defining characteristic must be identified as that which makes something an absolute, or prevents something from being one ("This characteristic makes something an absolute," or "This characteristic makes it impossible for something to be an absolute").

Such reasoning, however, proliferates the number of absolutes in existence. The phrase could be modified once again to, "There are no absolutes except this one and those that are necessary to support this conclusion," but that simply restarts the cycle, forcing the existence of more absolutes to be accommodated, and ultimately presents further problems

1 "Absolute," *New Oxford American Dictionary*.

2 "Relative," *New Oxford American Dictionary*.

for those who attempt to deny the existence of absolutes.

If "the truth is relative," so is the truth of the claim itself. Thus, it is not always true that "the truth is relative." Further, it is not hard to imagine contexts in which the truth is not relative to or dependent on any circumstance, standard, fact, or idea. The truth that man needs oxygen, water, and food to survive does not depend on his social upbringing. Nor does the fact that everything is made of matter depend on to the continent, planet, or even solar system that those things inhabit. "2+2" does not cease to equal "4" if the year changes or eons have passed.

The utterance of such phrases is self-defeating, and obviously so. This, however, is simply the tip of the iceberg. Further analysis of these phrases, and their most prevalent manifestations, will help to unearth their core meanings. "The truth is relative" often takes the interpersonal form of, "That may be true for you, but not for me." There are many different situations in which this phrase may be used. Primarily, these uses will be in response to something. For example, if Leonard tells the dishonest David that, "Honesty is the best policy," David may retort, "That may be true for you, but not for me." David responds in the way he does because he is dishonest and sees the statement as an affront to his character. Surely, if David was honest, or at least recognized the validity of honesty as the best policy, he would not feel the need to dismiss the applicability of the claim to himself.

This may simply be a hypothetical example, but it demonstrates the motive behind the use of such a phrase, and the way in which the phrase functions to achieve the desired motive. Declaring that something is true for one person, but not for another, is to claim that the truth is relative to or dependent on the subject being considered. Therefore, there is no universal truth applicable to all men, making the judgment of others futile. Thus, the endgame of this phrase becomes quite clear. To claim, "That may be true for you, but not for me" is to deny any objective and universally applicable standard by which men can be judged. Consequently, it outright denies and stymies the possibility of judgment.

Another common use of the phrase, "The truth is relative," is that, "What is true today may not be true tomorrow." In concrete applications, this phrase is completely acceptable. For example, if someone were to say, "It may be true that I have a cake today, but that may not be true tomor-

row," there would be nothing wrong with such a statement. That person may very well have eaten the cake, given it away, or thrown it out. However, it is the use of the phrase in a philosophic context, i.e. in regard to fundamental principles and issues of metaphysics, epistemology and ethics, that remains troubling. Consider the practical consequence of such a use.

For a man to plan long-term, he must choose an end that he wishes to achieve. He must also choose a set of actions that will garner him the end he desires. In a world in which, "What is true today may not be true tomorrow," however, the achievability of all ends and the efficacy of all actions become suspect. No man can be certain that his actions and ends will matter after the immediate moment, nor can he know that the principles he utilized in making the relevant evaluations will remain true. The long-term costs and benefits to any action or end would necessarily be ruled out of cost-benefit analysis as such.

If a rational man holds a premise such as, "The truth is relative; what is true today may not be true tomorrow," only one thing is possible to him: paralysis. The consistently capricious man lives his life in accord with the principle: the rational man cannot. The rational man needs to think long-term, make value judgments, and act on his judgment to the best of his abilities. He requires that the universe is stable, knowable, and livable, but the phrase at hand posits the universe as a state of a sporadic metaphysical flux. There can be no certainty achievable to the rational man in this universe, and as such, he becomes paralyzed. His ability and need to think long-term, to weigh consequences, to gather evidence, to make informed decisions, and to live outside of the immediate moment become crushed under the unbearable weight of permanent uncertainty.

There are myriad alternate contexts to which, "The truth is relative," can be applied. Regardless, the basic philosophical principles remain the same. Metaphysically, anything can happen. Epistemologically, certainty is impossible. The notion that, "There are no absolutes," relies on these same philosophical principles and in the same manner. To claim there are no absolutes is to claim that everything is mutable; that there is, and yet cannot be, an unchanging and independent fact. As such, certainty in epistemic terms is unpalatable. Knowledge concerns a subject and what we know to be true about it. If there are no things that can be known to be true and remain so, then there can be no certainty in knowledge, at least outside

of the immediate moment. If psychological paralysis is not the result of such a view, then hedonic whim-worship most certainty is.

These phrases are not just self-destructive; they are wholly destructive, and are so for the sake of destruction. Man's mind is his means of survival; it provides him the ability to evaluate, reason, judge, determine, and pursue values. Accepting such phrases along with their unchecked philosophical meanings would act as a direct negation of the mind. Obviously, then, the sheer utterance of these phrases is not the problem.

Self-destructive and egregious phrases do no harm on their own. The problem with them lies in the ideas that these phrases embody and promulgate. In part, the fact that many people often do not take ideas seriously has helped slow the acceptance of dangerous ideas. This "they did not really mean that" mentality is pervasive, with the plethora of so-called gaffes in the 2012 elections serving as the latest example of it.[3] Yet, taking ideas seriously is exactly what is needed to challenge them. If men started to take ideas seriously, they would stop themselves before declaring that there are absolutely "no absolutes," or asserting as a universal truth that, "the truth is relative." But it is exactly these phrases that routinely appear in our discourse. This need not be so. In concrete terms, if there is anything that is to be true today but not tomorrow, have it be that these phrases and the ideas they embody still prevail.

3 Completely emblematic of the "they did not really mean that" mentality is the fact that unmistakable comments are labeled as gaffes, i.e. unintentional mistakes in speaking. There are no reasonable means by which direct statements such as, "They're going to put y'all back in chains," said by Vice President Joe Biden; "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste," said by President Obama's chief of staff Rahm Emanuel; "You didn't build that," said by President Obama; and "Even when life begins in that horrible situation of rape, that is something that God intended to happen," said by Senator Richard Mourdock, can be considered a mistake or unintentional. While the true intent, meaning, and context of these comments are hotly contested; each reveals deep philosophical convictions that warrant serious discussion.