

The Contradiction of Relativism

by

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Relativism reduces every element of absoluteness to relativity while making a completely illogical exception in favor of this reduction itself. Fundamentally it consists in propounding the claim that there is no truth as if this were truth or in declaring it to be absolutely true that there is nothing but the relatively true; one might just as well say that there is no language or write that there is no writing. In short, every idea is reduced to a relativity of some sort, whether psychological, historical, or social; but the assertion nullifies itself by the fact that it too presents itself as a psychological, historical, or social relativity. The assertion nullifies itself if it is true and by nullifying itself logically proves thereby that it is false; its initial absurdity lies in the implicit claim to be unique in escaping, as if by enchantment, from a relativity that is declared to be the only possibility.

The axiom of relativism is that “one can never escape from human subjectivity”; if this is the case, the statement itself possesses no objective value, but falls under its own verdict. It is abundantly evident that man can escape subjectivity, for otherwise he would not be man; and the proof of this possibility is that we are able to conceive of both the subjective and the surpassing of the subjective. This subjectivity would not even be conceivable for a man who was totally enclosed in his subjectivity; an animal lives its subjectivity but does not conceive it, for unlike man it does not possess the gift of objectivity.

Social relativism does not ask whether it is true that two and two make four but from what social background the man has come who declares this to be the case, and it does so without ever considering the fact that if the background determines the thought and takes precedence over truth, the same must apply in every case, which means that every background determines thought and every thought is determined by a background. If someone objects that such and such a particular background is favorable to the perception of truth, we could easily turn the argument around by referring to a different scale of values, which goes to show that this argument merely begs the question and that even on the most favorable showing it amounts to no more than an estimate of probabilities

without any concrete significance. The same applies to historical relativism: since every human thought necessarily occurs at a given moment in time—not with regard to its content but with regard to the mental process—every thought would have only a relative value and would be “outdated” and “obsolete” from the very moment of its birth; there would therefore be no point in thinking since man could never escape duration.

But the object of relativism—what is at stake in its claims—is not always truth as such; it can be any expression or modality of truth, especially a moral or aesthetic value; in this way all rectitude may be reduced to some contingent and more or less insignificant factor, and thus the door may be opened to all manner of misunderstandings, degradations, and deceptions. When applied to the facts of tradition, relativism is basically the error of confusing static and dynamic elements: one speaks about “epochs” or “styles” and forgets that what is in question here is the manifestation of objective and unwavering data, which are therefore definitive in their own way. In the growth of a tree, a given stage obviously corresponds to a given moment in time, but this does not prevent the trunk from being the trunk or branches from being branches or fruit from being fruit; the trunk of an apple tree is not simply one moment in relation to the apple, and the apple is not simply some other moment in relation to the trunk or the branch. The epoch referred to as “Gothic” had of its own nature the right to survive in its part of the world even to the end of time, for the ethnic givens that determined this epoch have not changed and cannot change—unless Latin-Germanic Christianity were to become Mongolian; Gothic, or Romano-Gothic, civilization was not left behind by “evolution” nor has it ceased to exist through some transmutation of itself; it was assassinated by an extra-Christian force, the neo-paganism of the Renaissance. Be that as it may, one of the noteworthy traits of the twentieth century is the confusion, now habitual, between evolution and decadence: there is no decadence, no impoverishment, no falsification that people do not try to excuse with the aid of the relativistic argument of “evolution”, reinforced as this is by the most inappropriate and erroneous associations. Thus relativism, cleverly instilled into public opinion, paves the way for all kinds of corruption while at the same time keeping watch lest any kind of healthy reaction might put the brakes on this slide toward the abyss.

While errors that tend to deny objective and intrinsic intelligence destroy themselves by propounding a thesis that is disproved by the very existence of the thesis itself, the fact that errors exist does not in itself prove the inevitable fallibility of the intelligence, for error is not derived from intelligence as such; on the contrary it is a privative phenomenon that causes the activity of the intelligence to deviate because of an element of passion or blindness, though without being able to invalidate the very nature of the cognitive faculty.

A patent example of the classic contradiction in question here—a contradiction characterizing for the most part all modern thought—is provided by existentialism, which

postulates a definition of the world that is impossible if existentialism itself is possible. There are only two alternatives: either objective knowledge—a knowledge that is therefore absolute in its own order—is possible, which proves that existentialism is false; or else existentialism is true, but then its own promulgation is impossible since in the existentialist universe there is no room for an objective and unwavering intellection.

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If everything that can rightfully be described as human rests on merely psychological causes, one can—and indeed must—explain everything by psychology, whence the “psychology of religion” and the supposedly psychological criticism of sacred texts; in every case of this kind, we are dealing with speculations in the void because of an absence of the indispensable objective data—data inaccessible to methods of investigation arbitrarily defined as normal and inappropriately extended to cover all possible knowledge.

On the slippery ground of psychologism, the logic of Kantian criticism is now “outmoded”, all things considered, for “critique” has readily assumed the guise of “analysis”, and this fact is indeed symptomatic since the very notion of “critique” is doubtless still too intellectual for the demolishers psychologists intend to be—demolishers who blithely reduce metaphysics and even simple logic to questions of grammar. People wish to “analyze” everything in a quasi-physical or quasi-chemical way, and they would even analyze God if this were possible; indeed this is done indirectly when an attack is made on the notion of God or the mental and moral concomitances of this notion, or on the expressions—altogether out of reach as these really are—of a genuine intellection.

If Freudianism declares that rationality is merely a hypocritical cloak for a repressed animality, this statement—seemingly rational—falls under the same verdict; if there were any logic to Freudianism, it would itself be nothing more than a symbolizing denaturation of psychophysical instincts. No doubt psychoanalysts will say that in their case reasoning is not a function of unacknowledged repressions; but we do not at all see why this exception should be admissible in terms of their own doctrine, nor why this law of exception should apply only in their favor and not in favor of the spiritual doctrines they reject with such animus and with so monstrous a lack of any sense of proportion. In any case, nothing can be more absurd than for a man to make himself not merely the accuser of some psychological accident but of man as such; whence comes this demigod who accuses, and whence his power to accuse? If the accuser himself is right, this must mean that man is not so bad and that there exists within him a capacity for adequation; otherwise it would be necessary to assume that the champions of psychoanalysis are

divine beings unpredictably fallen from heaven—a somewhat unlikely proposition, to say the least.

Psychoanalysis begins by eliminating the transcendent factors essential to man and then replaces complexes of inferiority or frustration with complexes of complacency and egotism; it allows one to sin calmly and with assurance and to damn oneself serenely. Like all philosophies of destruction—that of Nietzsche, for example—Freudianism attributes an absolute significance to a relative situation; like all modern thought, all it manages to do is to fall from one extreme into another, incapable as it is of realizing that the truth—and the solution—it seeks is to be found in man's deepest nature, of which the religions and traditional wisdoms are precisely the spokesmen, guardians, and guarantors.

The mentality created and disseminated by psychoanalysis consists in refusing to engage in a logical or intellectual dialogue—which is alone worthy of human beings—and in answering questions by means of insolent conjectures; instead of trying to find out whether an interlocutor is right or not, questions are asked about his parents or blood pressure—to confine ourselves to symbolic examples of a fairly innocuous kind—as if such procedures could not readily be turned against their authors or as if it were not easy, by changing the mode of argument, to refute one analysis by means of another. The pseudo-criteria of analysis are preferably physiological or sociological, depending upon the craze of the moment; it would not be difficult to find counter criteria and conduct a serious analysis of this imaginary analysis.

If man is a hypocrite, then one of two things: either he is so fundamentally, in which case no one could take note of the fact without passing miraculously, or divinely, beyond human nature; or his hypocrisy is only accidental and relative, in which case there was no need to wait for psychoanalysis to take this fact into account since health is more fundamental to the nature of man than illness and since, this being so, there have always been men who could recognize evil and knew the cure for it. Or again, if man is profoundly sick, it is impossible to see why psychoanalysis should alone have been able to notice this and why its explanation, which is perfectly arbitrary and indeed essentially perverse, should alone be the right one; of course, one could try to make sense of things with the idea of “evolution”, but in this case it would be necessary to blind oneself to the qualities of our ancestors and the vices of our contemporaries, and this is to say nothing of the impossibility of demonstrating—or the absurdity of even assuming—that a sudden burst of intellectual and moral objectivity could ever come about in a merely biological and quantitative development.

For if a natural development led to a reflexive intelligence—to an act of awareness that perceived the development for what it was—this outcome would be a reality falling entirely outside the realm of the evolutionary process; there would be no common measure between this act and the wholly contingent movement preceding it, and therefore this movement could under no circumstances be the cause of the awareness in question.

This argument is the very negation of the theory of transformist evolutionism, hence of every notion of man as a “link” or a “chance”, and so also of every form of mysticism relating to a generative matter, a biosphere, a noosphere, or an “omega point”.¹ Man is what he is, or else he is nothing; the capacity for objectivity and absoluteness of thought proves the quasi-absolute—that is, the unwavering and irreplaceable—character of the creature that thinks; this is what is meant by the scriptural words “made in God’s image”.

This capacity for objectivity and absoluteness amounts to an existential—and “preventive”—refutation of the ideologies of doubt: if a man is able to doubt, it is because there is certainty; likewise the very notion of illusion proves that man has access to reality. It follows that there are necessarily some men who know reality and who therefore have certainty; and the great spokesmen of this knowledge and certainty are necessarily the best of men. For if truth were on the side of doubt, the individual who doubted would be superior not only to these spokesmen, who have not doubted, but also to the majority of normal men across the millennia of human existence. If doubt conformed to the real, human intelligence would be deprived of its sufficient reason, and man would be less than an animal, for the intelligence of animals does not doubt the reality to which it is proportioned.

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Every science of the soul should be a science of the various orders of limitation or infirmity; now there are four essential orders to consider: the universal, the general, the individual, and the accidental.

This means that every man contains a universal limitation or “infirmity” because he is creature and not Creator, manifestation and not Principle or Being; then a general limitation or “infirmity” because he is an earthly man and not an angel or one of the blessed in Heaven; next an individual infirmity because he is himself and not others; and finally an accidental infirmity because he is beneath himself, unless he is perfect.

There is no science of the soul without a metaphysical basis and spiritual remedies.

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¹Transformist evolutionism—let it be said once again—is simply a materialist substitute for the ancient concept of the solidifying and segmenting “materialization” of a subtle and supra-sensorial primordial substance, in which were prefigured all the diverse possibilities of the *a posteriori* material world; the answer to evolutionism is the doctrine of archetypes and “ideas”, with ideas relating to pure Being—or the divine Intellect—and archetypes to the primordial substance in which they are “incarnated” as it were by reverberation.

Thought of the psychological type is always rushing ahead of itself; it sets out to be dynamic and effective before being true and to be a solution or remedy before being a diagnosis; moreover it readily indulges in a duplicitous form of reasoning in order to evade its intellectual responsibility. Imagine someone saying that every man must die, to which he receives the reply that this is not true because it makes people feel sad or fatalistic or fills them with despair; and yet this is the way the man “of our time” likes to reason: his objections to truths he finds disagreeable are always beside the point and always involve evasions or confusions of level. If a man raises a fire alarm, it is said that he has no right to do so unless he knows how to extinguish the fire; and if someone maintains that two and two make four and thus disrupts certain prejudices or interests, it will be said that this calculation denotes not his ability to count but a complex of exactitude, contracted no doubt through an excessive attachment to “bygone days”, and so forth: if these metaphors appear to be caricatures, it is only because of their simplicity or outspokenness, for the reality is often no less absurd than our simplifications. Psychoanalysis has succeeded in perverting intelligence by giving rise to a “psychoanalytical complex” that corrupts everything; if it is possible to deny the absolute in many different ways, psychological and existentialist relativism denies it within intelligence itself: intelligence is practically set up as a god but at the price of all that constitutes its intrinsic nature, value, and effectiveness; intelligence becomes “adult” by destroying itself.

There is a moral relativism that is truly odious: if you say that God and the beyond are real, this shows you are cowardly, dishonest, infantile, shamefully abnormal; if you say that religion is just make-believe, this shows you are courageous, honest, sincere, adult, altogether normal. If all this were true, man would be nothing, possessing the capacity for neither truthfulness nor heroism; and there would be no one even to note the fact, for a hero cannot be extracted from a coward nor a sage from a man of feeble mind—not even by “evolution”. But this moralistic bias, ignoble or simply stupid as the case may be, is by no means something new: before it was applied to intellectual positions, it was used to discredit the contemplative life, which was described as an “escape”, as if a man did not have the right to flee from dangers concerning him alone and—more important—as though the contemplative life and withdrawal from the world were not instead a pilgrimage toward God; to flee God as do the worldly is far more senseless and irresponsible than fleeing the world. To run away from God is at the same time to run away from oneself, for when a man is alone with himself—even though he may be surrounded by others—he is always with his Creator, whom he encounters at the very root of his being.

The prejudice for reducing religious attitudes to reflexes of fear or servility, hence of childishness and baseness, is completely in line with this intrusive and simplifying psy-

chologism; one should begin by proving that religious fears are really ill founded and then, failing that, seek to understand the real meaning and inward consequences of devotional attitudes.² We would point out first that it is not debasing to humble oneself before the Absolute, neither objectively nor therefore subjectively; but it is also important to address the issue of “who” prostrates or humbles himself: obviously it is not our transpersonal nucleus, the mysterious seat of the divine Immanence. In reality it is a question here of the relative being—the “creature”, if one prefers—becoming aware of its ontological dependence in relation to that One Being from whom it is derived and whom it manifests in its own way; this act of awareness will accidentally seem like a humiliation because of the congenital decadence of man, but this makes the awareness all the more effective. It is obvious that our deiform and immortal personality includes an aspect of majesty—quite visible already in the very form of the human body—and the religions have been the first to call attention to this fact, though they have been no more pardoned for this than for fostering the opposite attitude; but it is equally obvious that there is something in man that merits constraint and abasement. It is impossible for the ego, such as it is in its human animality, to be immune from all celestial reproof; disequilibrium and fragmentation have a debt to pay to Equilibrium and Totality, and not the other way round. To be conscious of this state of affairs is the first requirement of human dignity, which is little understood at a time when demagogy has become a “categorical imperative” in all spheres of thought.

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Relativism engenders a spirit of rebellion and is at the same time its fruit. The spirit of rebellion, unlike holy anger, is not a passing state, nor is it directed against some worldly abuse; on the contrary it is a chronic malady directed against Heaven and against everything that represents Heaven or is a reminder of it. When Lao Tzu said that “in the latter days the man of virtue appears vile”, he had in mind the rebellious spirit that characterizes our time; but for psychological and existentialist relativism, which by definition always seeks to justify the crude ego, this spiritual state is normal, and it is its absence that amounts to disease, whence the abolition of the sense of sin. The sense of sin is the consciousness of an equilibrium surpassing our personal will and operating ultimately for the benefit of our integral personality and that of the human collectivity, even though occasionally wounding us; this sense of sin goes hand in hand with a sense of the sacred, which is an instinct for what surpasses us—for what should therefore not be touched by ignorant and iconoclastic hands.

² The association of ideas that links childhood with fear overlooks the fact that there are fears peculiar to adulthood and conversely that there are illusions of safety belonging to childhood.

Of course, the idea that one may merit damnation by “offending the divine majesty” is acceptable only if one feels what is at stake or knows it: Divinity is impersonal before determining itself as divine Person in relation to the human person, and on the plane of impersonality there is only an ontological and logical relationship of cause to effect between God and man; on this plane there can be no question of “goodness”, for absolute Reality is what it is, and pure causality has nothing specifically moral about it. But it is on the plane of revelation as divine Person that Mercy can intervene, the Mercy that is the most marvelous of all the mysteries; it is precisely this intervention that shows us that the Absolute is not a blind power. Given their indolence of spirit and lack of imagination, it is true that men are only too ready to prescribe a stupid kind of humility, but this is no reason for believing that God requires it and that there is no possibility of manifesting our consciousness of causality and equilibrium in an intelligent way; nonetheless God prefers a stupid humility to an intelligent pride—a pride nourished, in other words, on an abuse of intelligence.

As limited and degraded as man undeniably is, he yet remains “the proof by contraries” of the divine Prototype and of all that this Prototype implies and determines in relation to man. Not to acknowledge what surpasses us and not to wish to surpass ourselves: this in fact is the whole program of psychologism, and it is the very definition of Lucifer. The opposite, or rather the primordial and normative, attitude is this: to think only in reference to what surpasses us and to live for the sake of surpassing ourselves; to seek greatness where this is to be found and not on the plane of the individual and his rebellious pettiness. In order to return to true greatness, man must first of all agree to pay the debt of his pettiness and to remain small on the plane where he cannot help being small; the sense of what is objective on the one hand and of the absolute on the other does not go without a certain abnegation, and it is this abnegation precisely that allows us to be completely faithful to our human vocation.