

Relativism

Relativism

The Riddle of Reality

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Foreword

When I was a child I favored up as compared to down because I believed that heaven is up and hell is down. There came a time, however, when I realized that without a down there couldn't be an up and that there is no qualitative difference between up and down I could point to that would make one preferable to the other.

People sometimes favor one quality over an opposing quality, e.g., a warm versus a cold climate. Because one quality opposes or contradicts the other, to regard the qualities as equals allows a contradiction to stand. Nonetheless, one searches in vain for the basis of a preference. Each of two opposing qualities is valid in its own right. Is the person in favoring one rather than the other unconsciously doing so to avoid a contradiction?

Few people take the phrase *a compound in one* seriously because it involves a contradiction. It allows for both separability and inseparability at the same time. A compound consists of two separate or divisible entities. One constitutes one inseparable or indivisible entity. A compound in one consists of two separable entities and one inseparable entity at the same time.

I recall the time when it first occurred to me that the objects I experience are intangible images in my mind rather than tangible things in a tangible world. It came like a bolt out of the sky. The realization solved the problem of how I could compare things in my mind. To compare one object with another, the objects had to be in my mind rather than in the world because I made the comparison in my mind. This to me was an important discovery, but it left open the question of the relationship between what I experience in my mind and what is in the world. If what I experience is in my mind how does that relate to the world that is apart from my mind?

In time I began to realize that the problem with the notion that tangible things are really intangibles in my mind is

that what is in my mind and what is in the world can't be separated. To attempt to separate them would necessitate a line of separation between qualities like the tangible and the intangible. I looked to see if there was such a line. I discovered none. No line of demarcation that would separate the two existed. I therefore came to believe that experience is one continuous extension. It covers the gamut from the deep recesses of the intangible in my mind to the infinite expanses of the tangible in the world.

I concluded that qualities like tangible and intangible can't be separated, but no sooner had I done so than I realized this raised another problem. If the two can't be separated, what is there to say they are two as opposed to one? If one continuous line fairly represents the intangible on the one side and the tangible on the other then the intangible and the tangible are in fact continuous. If they are continuous they are not two but one. I struggled with the thought for considerable time before I looked back and realized what I was doing. When I first concluded that a tangible in the world could be an intangible in my mind I was looking at the two as separable qualities. I was seeing them as two separate qualities, each of which is absolute in its own right. Later, when I realized I experienced no dividing line between them I was seeing them as inseparable qualities that are relative to each other, each one being what it is in relation to the other. That's when I came to what was to me a revolutionary discovery: *it's both ways at once!* For experience to be possible, qualities have to be both separable and inseparable *at the same time*.

The more I thought about it the more obvious it became. Two things that relate to each other are of course relative to each other. They are what they are in relation to each other. Take away one and the other wouldn't be what it otherwise was. At the same time, things that relate to each other are separate from each other. Each one is absolute in its own right. If it weren't it couldn't relate to something else. One can see things from either a relative or an

absolute point of view. Both are correct, and yet each by itself leaves something essential out. Both the relative and the absolute are necessary. The one is experienced in the context of the other. A person experiences things in relation to each other, but if things were not individually separate to begin with, the relationship would not be possible.

Difference is the idea that makes qualities both relative and absolute. Difference is able to do that because it is both relative and absolute at the same time. As an absolute idea, it keeps qualities apart; as a relative idea, it keeps them together. Couples everywhere experience the necessity of maintaining their individual identity and maintaining their relationship at the same time. They experience the simultaneous separateness and togetherness that having a relationship requires.

Once one works one's way through these points, one begins to understand that the inherent contradiction in a compound in one is much more than a curiosity. One realizes that the contradiction is necessary for experience to be possible. One realizes that experience is itself a contradiction. It is a compound in one.