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Purifying Relativism*

In this paper I wish to offer a new perspective on relativism. Although my arguments tend towards defending relativism against certain criticisms, the relativism that can survive the attack of non-relativism turns out to be radically different from what is generally implied by the term 'relativism.' This radically different relativism is not one which insists on "the relativity of truth for schemes, or systems," but rather one which expresses "the impossibility of eliminating asymmetric contingency."

My arguments proceed as follows. (I) I begin by specifying an allegedly decisive criticism for the self-refutation of relativism. (II) Then, after giving due attention to Meiland's "On the Paradox of Cognitive Relativism"¹ as a suggested objection to that criticism, (III) I analyze some contentious points of his argument, and highlight the insufficiencies of his description. (IV) Finally, in an attempt to develop his investigation beyond what he intended, I present purified relativism as "the realization of the finitude of a boundless thing."

I. Self-Refutation of Relativism

We should regard the term "relativism" as designating a family of beliefs and claims, rather than as designating a single doctrine. It is necessary and useful to analyze and distinguish between a number of relativisms from various different viewpoints. For example, we can distinguish between cognitive relativism and moral relativism, or discern semantic relativism, epistemic relativism, ontological relativism, and moral relativism. According to our fields or subjects, we can classify relativism into historical relativism, cultural relativism, linguistic relativism, paradigm relativism, theological relativism, aesthetic relativism and so forth. Furthermore, it is useful to discriminate between the features of positive and negative relativism, between strong and weak relativism, and to distinguish relativism from scepticism, pluralism and anarchism².

* This paper was written during my stay in CSLI, Stanford University, as visiting scholar (1995-1996). I wish to express my gratitude to CSLI, and to John Perry, Director of CSLI.

¹ [Meiland, 1980]

² See about classification, [Hareé and Krauz, 1996], [Edwards, 1990], [Krausz and Meiland ed.1982], [Hollis and Lukes ed., 1982].

But it is not my present purpose to make this kind of investigation. What I wish to show in this paper is the existence of a radically different relativism which can only emerge out of a different kind of investigation. So I will begin by considering the problem of the self-refutation of relativism, which is both a very well-known aporia and a common problem among various kinds of relativism³.

Let me signal another theme of this paper. An enormous amount of discussion has taken place about relativism since Protagoras, and particularly within the last thirty years, without coming to an end. In spite of this, we can say that, as is often the case with many problems, an intermediate position is being accepted as a valid solution. The intermediate position would be that we should avoid the extremes of relativism and absolutism (objectivism, universalism), while appreciating the advantages of both. To be sure, this moderate position, if successful, may give us an illuminating insight into the problem of relativism⁴.

But this is not the course I will pursue in this paper. I will adopt a course for radicalizing relativism in a sense, and for keeping track of the transformation of relativism itself. This is neither an attack on relativism, of course, nor a defense of so-called relativism as commonly understood. The aim of this paper is to illustrate that we must alter our understanding of relativism in the process of radicalizing it.

The objection that relativism is self-refuting is very well-known, and it can be formulated as follows. 3-1 and 3-2 (below) are two horns of a dilemma⁵.

1. The relativist insists on the thesis of relativism, and tries to persuade the non-relativist of its thesis.
2. The thesis of relativism is: "No beliefs and claims are absolutely true, or all beliefs and claims are only relatively true for X."⁶ (T)
3. (T) is either applied to relativism itself, or (T) is not applied to relativism itself. In other words, (T) itself is either included in "all beliefs and claims," or (T) itself, being an exception, is not included in "all beliefs and claims."

³ As a starting point this paper focuses on "relativism of truth", "cognitive relativism", or "framework relativism". But what I will call "Purified Relativism" cannot be placed into these categories.

⁴ See, for example, [Siegel, 1987], [Hareé and Krausz, 1996].

⁵ Meiland's expression of the dilemma is as follows [cf. Meiland, 1980] p.116:

(1) Either the relativist's thesis applies to itself, in which case it too is only "relative" and "subjective";
 (2) or it does not apply to itself, in which case there is something which is (according to the relativist) absolutely and objectively true. Either horn of this dilemma is supposed to be unacceptable to the relativist. See also [Mandelbaum, 1979].

⁶ Depending on the relevant variety of relativism, "X" can be taken as an individual, a society, a culture, a language, a conceptual scheme, a form of life, and so forth. In this paper I shall leave untouched what particular problem each of the candidates expresses and what we should adopt as X.

3-1

If (T) is not applied to relativism itself (the latter choice), (T) itself is not "relatively true," but "absolutely true." Therefore, relativism must accept the "absolute truth" that it tries to deny.

3-2

(a) If (T) is applied to relativism itself (the former choice), (T) itself is not "absolutely true," but only "relatively true." If (T) is only relatively true for X (e.g. X = the relativist), the relativist must accept that not-(T) (approval of absolute truth) is true for X (e.g. X=the non-relativist). Therefore, relativism must accept the "absolute truth" that it tries to deny.

Or

(b) The key concept of (T) is the concept of relative truth: "true for" But the understanding of this concept presupposes that of the common, non-relativistic concept of truth: "true." We can only understand the phrase "true for ..." as a restriction or a variation of the non-relativistic, objective concept of truth: "true." Therefore relativism presupposes the non-relativistic concept of truth that it tries to deny.

Thus, in either of 3-1 or 3-2, because relativism must accept or presuppose the non-relativistic concept of truth that it tries to deny, it is self-refuting. This is a common and well-worn criticism for relativism⁷.

II. Meiland's Defense of Relativism

Is it really the case that 3-1 and 3-2 are self-refuting? Meiland replies in his "On the Paradox of Cognitive Relativism" ⁸ that they are not self-refuting.

First, let us focus on 3-1. In the case of 3-1, relativism makes the thesis (T) itself an exception. That is, relativism insists that no beliefs and claims except the thesis (T) itself are absolutely true, or all beliefs and claims except the thesis (T) itself are only relatively true for X.

It is true that there is a weakness in 3-1. In the case of 3-1, relativism should offer a reason why only relativism can make itself an exception. Or it might be objected that if the thesis of relativism is absolutely or objectively true, it is not clear why other theses cannot be

⁷ We can expect another charge that if relativism is itself only relatively true for the relativist, then others have no need to attend to the relativist. From this viewpoint relativism is quite impotent, if not self-refuting. However, as will be argued below in II, this criticism makes the non-relativistic assumption that only the absolutely or objectively true statement is worth listening to. Relativism rejects that non-relativistic assumption.

⁸ [Meiland, 1980]

absolutely or objectively true⁹. Furthermore, from the relativist's point of view, putting relativism itself at the second order of absolute or objective truth restricts the strong power of relativism only to the first order, and makes its thesis weaker and less interesting.

But this weak point teaches us that it is not because of its self-refutation that 3-1 should be given up, but because it makes the power of relativism decrease enormously, and because there remains a problem of two-order separation.

Second, let us focus on 3-2. Both (a) and (b) refer to the fact that relativism is inconsistent because it must accept the "absolute truth" that it tries to deny. While (a) refers to the inconsistency implied in the reflexivity of self-application of the concept, (b) refers to the inconsistency connected with the understanding of the concept of truth. Meiland's "On the Paradox of Cognitive Relativism" examines the inconsistency in (a)¹⁰. I will also focus on this inconsistency in this paper.

Meiland's reply is to the effect that relativism, being itself only relatively true, is not self-refuting, and so the only alternative for the relativist is to say that relativism itself is only relatively true. I am sure that this reply will reach a more significant conclusion than Meiland himself believes, which I will develop in section IV.

Why is it generally thought that if relativism itself is only relatively true, it is self-refuting? It is, according to 3-2 (a), because relativism must accept absolute truth. But is it really the case that relativism must accept absolute truth self-refutingly? We must notice that in 3-2 (a) it is for the non-relativist that absolute truth is true. What the relativist should accept is not absolute truth itself, but that it is only relatively true that absolute truth is true. Absolute truth is within the scope of relativity, that is, relativism and absolute truth cannot contradict each other on the same level. Hence even if relativism itself is only relatively true, it is not self-refuting. We see that whereas 3-1 puts absoluteness or objectivity on the second order, 3-2 puts relativity on the second order as well as on the first order.

In spite of this, why does relativism appear to be self-refuting or inconsistent in 3-2? According to the spirit of Meiland's argument, it is because a non-relativistic assumption is already made in the interpretation of 3-2. On the assumption that absolute or objective truth

⁹ This type of objection can be found, according to [Meiland, 1980, footnotes 3], in Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1961), p.500. Of course, "absoluteness", "objectivity", "universality" etc., as opposed to "relativity", have different meanings respectively. cf. [Hareé and Krausz, 1996]. For the present purpose, a discussion of the distinction is unnecessary.

¹⁰ Meiland examines the type of (b) in [Meiland, 1977]. He rejects Husserl's discussion of relativism, which assumes that "relative truth is either nothing at all or else a variety of absolute truth (p.572)", and investigates the relativistic truth of a statement as a three-term relation. [Davson-Galle, 1994] develops this line of Meiland's thought into a Neo-Meilandian Truth-Relativism of a Weak Sort. Also on this subject see [Swoyer, 1982], where the notion of "true for" is scrutinized. I think it especially significant that, depending on his suggestive claim of weak relativism, we can detach relativistic truth from the problem of the plurality of truth, and of the impossibility of translation.

is not relative, the non-relativist blames relativism for its self-refutation. This is a kind of question-begging: the non-relativist's argument that because relativism must accept absolute or objective truth, relativism is self-refuting, is based on the ground that absolute or objective truth is outside the scope of relativity. But relativism rejects the ground of absolute truth itself. Only those who can neglect this question-begging, namely, non-relativists, regard relativism's being only relatively true as self-refuting, while those who don't share the ground, namely, relativists, don't regard it as self-refuting. In a word, it is due to non-relativism, not to relativism, that relativism appears to be self-refuting.

In addition to the self-refutation argument, non-relativism may blame relativism for its 'self-vitiation.' Meiland means by this word that the doctrine prevents itself from achieving its purpose. That is, the non-relativist insists that relativism is self-vitiating because it cannot convince the non-relativist to adopt its doctrine. Meiland distinguishes self-vitiation criticisms into the three kinds.

- (1) There is no possibility of a non-relativist accepting relativism.
- (2) The non-relativist can have no reason — can have no rational basis — for accepting relativism.
- (3) The relativist can have no motive in uttering the doctrine of relativism, particularly in uttering it to a non-relativist.

I mention only the core of Meiland's objections, though he deals with each of these in detail. The critique offered in (1) - (3) can be put, briefly, as follows: if relativism is itself only relatively true for the relativist, others have no need to listen to the relativist seriously. Here again, just as in the self-refutation criticism, so a non-relativistic assumption is already made in the formulation of the self-vitiation criticism. The assumption is that only the absolutely or objectively true statement is worth listening to, and that a doctrine must be based on the rational or objective persuasion and argument that a non-relativist can accept. Therefore, all that the self-vitiation criticism tells is that it is impossible for the relativist to non-relativistically convince a non-relativist to adopt relativism. This is also a kind of question-begging.

As Meiland puts it, there is a possibility against (1) that a non-relativist might find a new way of seeing things, and become a relativist by conversion. Against (2), a relativist can use reason, or rationality shared with a non-relativist — in another way and for different purposes. And (3) shows that a non-relativist has a narrow-minded assumption that "only that which is purely objective or absolute is worth expressing and communicating."

What is revealed by the self-refutation/self-vitiation criticism is not that relativism is self-refuting/self-vitiating, but the very unconscious presupposition of non-relativism itself.

Looking back to the formulation of 1.: we see that the relativist insists on the thesis of relativism, on persuading the non-relativist of its thesis, and we can also find the unconscious presupposition of the non-relativism: the relativist convinces/must convince a non-relativist non-relativistically of relativism. What appeared to be a paradox in relativism functions as a mirror, in fact, which reflects the invisible presupposition of non-relativism itself. In my view, Meiland is successful in showing this kind of inversion of perspective.

III. Some Questions of Meilandian Relativism

Meiland's argument is a radical and suggestive one that defends relativism without any qualification for it. But it doesn't yet exhibit its potential ability sufficiently. I think that his argument has the means to not only defend but also to revise relativism itself¹¹. As a preparation for developing its potentiality in the form of "Purified Relativism," let me point out some questions of Meiland's argument.

We can easily expect the following objections to Meiland's argument. These types of objections can be found, for example, in Beach¹² and Siegel¹³:

1. Meilandian relativism avoids polemical arguments against non-relativism, and is only in its defensive posture without any offense, and so escapes contradiction. As it were, Meilandian relativism is self-enclosed. But "the combative dimension, the pretension-deflating quality of relativism is essential to it,"¹⁴ and "relativism cannot represent itself as a self-contained system, because its sole original motive and continuing justification is to attack the ideal of objective truth."¹⁵ To repeat, if relativism doesn't get involved with other possible systems or perspectives, it cannot be represented as relativism.

On the other hand, if relativism begins to attack non-relativism, it cannot but refer to truths beyond or outside itself. That is to say, if relativism gets involved with other possible systems or perspectives, it must accept "intersystematic truths."¹⁶ "Each system transcends its own limits and implicitly points to another."¹⁷

¹¹ [Wainwright, 1986] regards Meilandian relativism as practicing philosophy and rational inquiry in a different way, as well as looking at them differently. According to [Wainwright, 1986], Meilandian relativism involves a commitment to a very different conception of philosophy.

¹² [Beach, 1984].

¹³ [Siegel, 1987].

¹⁴ [Beach, 1984].

¹⁵ [Beach, 1984] p.7.

¹⁶ [Beach, 1984] p.11.

¹⁷ [Beach, 1984] p.15.

Thus, a dilemma returns to relativism, and Meilandian relativism also cannot eschew self-refutation¹⁸.

2. In spite of Meiland's remarks that the purposes of relativistic arguments are different from those of the non-relativist's "non-relativistic rational persuasion," his own arguments for relativism share rationality with non-relativistic arguments, and he tries to persuade non-relativists of relativism by means of his non-relativistic rational arguments.

Moreover, because arguments must "involve the effort to establish a conclusion on the basis of reasons —which is to say, to make a persuasive case for the rightness of some conclusion,"¹⁹ Meilandean relativism, if it goes so far as to reject its rational activity, cannot "be regarded as arguments at all"²⁰ and "simply is not engaging the issue."²¹

After all, if relativism is separated so far from rational argument, it becomes quite impotent as a doctrine, whereas if relativism is dependent upon rational arguments, it cannot defend itself by using its peculiar persuasiveness other than non-relativistically. Thus, Meiland fails in his attempt to defend relativism.

To put both objections in a word, they insist that Meilandian relativism also falls into self-refutation, or self-contradiction.

The reason why I mentioned these objections is, not that they are successful objections, but rather that they arise from overlooking the potential of Meiland's argument. In my view, what is most important is that Meiland makes us aware of the elusive silhouette of non-relativism by retrieving certain gaps, namely, possibilities of relativism. Meiland does this all through his cases, as with "the diversion of the alleged paradox of relativism into unconscious presuppositions of non-relativism;" "possibilities of conversion from non-relativism to relativism;" and "the relativist's different ways and purposes of using rational arguments." If we miss such dynamics of Meiland's argument, we cannot develop its potential.

My own reply to these objections is as follows. Against objection 1.: Meilandian relativism, if even more radicalized, doesn't fall into such a dilemma. This is because relativism is never a problem with the relationship between systems nor a problem with one enclosed system, both of which possibilities presuppose a plurality of systems. Against objection 2.: Meilandian relativism, if even more radicalized, doesn't fall into such a

¹⁸ To put this dilemma simply, relativism must have and must not have a relation to non-relativism. Or relativism must be intersystematic and must be autistic.

¹⁹ [Siegel, 1987] p.23.

²⁰ [Siegel, 1987] p.23.

²¹ [Siegel, 1987] p.23.

dilemma. This is because relativism is not distanced from rational argument, and because relativism takes a profoundly different point of view to rational arguments from non-relativism. In order to make such a reply, we must investigate, in advance, the transformation of relativism itself by pushing Meiland's argument even further.

Besides these two objections, let me add five concerns about which Meilandian relativism is not yet satisfactorily articulate, and because of which its potential is overlooked.

1. The relation between Meiland's argument and the relativism advocated by his argument is not sufficiently obvious.
2. The relation between Meilandian relativism and its opponent is not sufficiently obvious.
3. It is not sufficiently obvious what kind of shift "a conversion" or "a new way of seeing things" is.
4. Does relativism presuppose or lead to plurality of systems (perspectives, or conceptual schemes ...)?
5. Is relativism one position or doctrine opposed to non-relativism?

In answering these concerns, relativism will transform itself into what I will call Purified Relativism (PR).

IV. Purified Relativism

What I want to emphasize first is that the assertion of Meilandian relativism has no positive or autonomous content. In my view, this shows that purified relativism is never a system or a theory, and does not advocate a doctrine.

To this view, it may be objected that the assertion of relativism, as opposed to non-relativism, has the following content: "No beliefs and claims are absolutely true, or all beliefs and claims are only relatively true for X" (T).

To this objection, I reply that (T) is just a provisional formulation, the starting point of a series of arguments, and that (T) is placed in the context of a refutation of relativism by non-relativism.²² So (T) cannot be the purified assertion of relativism, and is, as it were, simply the tentative figure as reflected in the mirror of non-relativism.

Furthermore, I reply that although the self-application of (T), namely, "(T) is also only relatively true" (T'), might be a little closer to the purified assertion of relativism, the precise

²² To be precise, (T) is reconstructed for the purpose of argument, and Meiland himself doesn't stipulate the definition of relativism in his paper. The absence of a definition of relativism is significant, I suppose, from the view that Meiland's argument has the power to not only defend but also revise relativism.

meaning of (T') cannot yet be shown in a positive form, but only shown as a negative of non-relativism. In other words, the assertion of relativism isn't (T') itself, but it is what isn't (T') as interpreted by non-relativism. So (T') too, in itself, cannot be the purified assertion of relativism. Thus, Meilandian relativism, without a fixed content, appears only as a continuing lapse of non-relativistic criticism, that is, as the negation of non-relativism.

Besides, although "a conversion," "an alternative way," and "different purposes" are important concepts to Meilandian relativism, what is given in them is nothing but a conversion from non-relativism to relativism, an alternative way of seeing things, and different purposes from non-relativistic ones. It is essential here that nothing positive or substantive is given. To repeat, relativism can be only shown as what is not what is not relativism. This is the "double negativity" of relativism.

Because of "double negativity," relativism never presents itself in the form of a self-expression. Relativism is neither reflected in the self-expression of (T), nor in the meta-self-expression (T'). For both (T) and (T') can be always interpreted as showing the self-contradiction of relativism, and consequently as showing the truth of non-relativism. Rather than (T) and (T') themselves, we can always see criticisms for (T) and (T'). It is only in the realization of a lapse of those criticisms that relativism can present itself. After all, double negativity doesn't change into positivity, and relativism presents itself only as what is not reflected in the mirror of non-relativism. This is the "negative reflexiveness" of relativism.

Accordingly, Meiland's argument itself, in so far as it is successful, cannot be the self-expression of relativism. Meiland's argument is neither the self-expression of non-relativism, of course, nor the self-expression of relativism, but a field in which the very contrast of relativism and non-relativism is formed. More important, Meiland's argument cannot but share with non-relativism a sort of logic and rationality without which communication and argument are impossible. Simultaneously, Meiland's argument should contrast a relativism which may not be comprehended in our common scheme, with a non-relativism which represents its scheme. This is the "asymmetric triad" of relativism.

We have the following three factors here²³.

- (A) Non-relativism
- (B) Relativism

²³ Similar to these three factors are Achilles, the Tortoise, and Carroll's description. cf.[Carroll, 1895]. Firstly, Achilles corresponds with non-relativism, the Tortoise with relativism, and Meiland's description with Carroll's. Secondly, as the Tortoise cannot enter the "logic" of Achilles, so relativism cannot enter the "logic" of the self-refutation criticism by non-relativism. But, thirdly, while Achilles is related to finitude and the Tortoise to infinity, non-relativism is related to boundlessness and relativism to finitude.

(C) Meiland's argument in which the asymmetric contrast of relativism and non-relativism is formed

(C) plays a twofold role. First, (C) as an argument reveals our common logic and rationality which is always and already presupposed even if we try to distance relativism far from non-relativism. This common scheme is impossible to transcend, not because it is too firm to break out of, but because it has no boundary — no bottom to dig. To describe this with another metaphor, consider the scheme impossible to transcend as a horizon. No matter how far we move toward the horizon, we cannot stand on the other side beyond it, because the earth is a globe and we on the earth necessarily exist inside a horizon. A horizon, however, is not a line of demarcation which encloses us within. It is oneness beyond which we cannot stand, yet it is not a boundary. I will call this first roll the "oneness (agreement) without any boundary" of a field of argument, (C). By examining the seeming self-refutation and self-vitiation of relativism, we should grasp this "oneness without any boundary," and not the simple victory of non-relativism.

What I call "oneness without any boundary" is exactly the Williams-Wittgensteinian 'we'²⁴ to whom there can be no other alternative 'we.' 'We' are neither a specific group nor universal human beings, but "Ur-übereinstimmung" which has always and already been achieved, no matter how different other beings are imagined, in the very setting up of the other beings. As Wittgenstein would say, 'we' agree at the level of the application of rules, or

²⁴ What I mean by the Williams-Wittgensteinian 'we', is Wittgenstein's "agreement in judgment (ein Übereinstimmung in den Urteilen)", and William's transcendental 'we'.cf. [Wittgenstein, 1958],[Williams, 1981]. According to Wittgenstein, a level of practice must exist: "we do it this way, anyway", where agreement as to how we follow a rule has been obtained even if very different rules and widely different interpretations of a rule are imagined. In this sense, it is impossible to go outside this language game. [Williams, 1981] expresses this insight of Wittgenstein as "the limits of our language mean the limits of our world". Of course, this expression is compared to "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world (Tractatus 5.6)". It is NOT that "the limits of each person's language mean the limits of each person's language". Besides Wittgenstein and Williams, we can interpret a certain insight of [Davidson, 1973-74] as implying this 'we'. If, according to Davidson, the idea of an alternate conceptual scheme is incoherent, and yet we cannot intelligibly say that all conceptual schemes are one, then there appears to be a peculiar kind of agreement between 'us' which it is meaningless to delineate in the form of a scheme. We must notice the following. (1) "Our language" is neither a particular language nor a universal set of grammar rules, but it is a transcendental practice that makes it possible to follow a rule. (2) "Our limits" are shown, at the place where justifications are exhausted, as a 'proto-phenomenon'(Urphänomen): this language-game is played or we do it this way, anyway. And limits are never conceptual schemes. (3) "Our limits" belong to our natural history, and so are contingent. Although it is impossible for us to follow another way, it does happen that we follow this way. What I call "oneness without any boundary" is 'we' in the sense above. But there is a difference between William's notion of 'us' and the "oneness without any boundary" of mine. William's notion of 'us' is an expression of the truth of transcendental idealism (which rejects empirical relativism), whereas my emphasis is on the contingency of such a truth and on the transformation of relativism. On this subject, namely the transcendental 'we', see also [Lear, 1982, 1985], [Straud, 1985] and [Bearn, 1985].

the way we follow the rules, no matter how different the rules or the interpretation of the rules may be. As for 'us,' no sense can be made of an alternative 'we,' in the nature of the thing. "The imagined alternatives are not alternatives to us: they are alternatives for us,"²⁵ or 'we' are nothing but a horizon impossible to transcend.

Secondly, (C) should regard relativism as something which may not be comprehended in that oneness without any boundary. This is shown in the fact that the seeming self-refutation and self-vitiation of relativism is not, in fact, a defect of relativism, but a product of the mirror which reflects the unconscious presuppositions of non-relativism. Here the self-reflexiveness of oneness without any boundary and the possibility of relativism are the same thing. In the field of (C), when the unconscious presuppositions of non-relativism are revealed as oneness without any boundary, the finitude of boundless oneness is revealed at the same time. In other words, (C) plays the twofold role of showing both the necessity of "fundamental agreement" even between opposites, and the contingency of the very necessity of fundamental agreement. "Our oneness" is necessary because it is impossible for there to be any other alternative, whereas this oneness is finite or contingent because the non-existence of the oneness itself is possible.

Let us now consider this latter role which is closely related to contingency. This role represents the core of radicalized relativism, the "finitude of a boundless thing." The point here is that 'we' have no boundary, but nevertheless 'we' are finite because of the contingency of 'us'. The contingency of 'us' derives from the following two factors: the existence of 'us' hinges on the possibility of the non-existence of 'us' itself, and 'we' are encountered as the affirmation of 'us' in the negation of 'us'.(Consider whether or not the double negation is necessarily the affirmation.)

It is true that 'we,' without being limited by an alternative 'we,' have no boundary whatsoever. But the problem is how indeed 'we' can be spoken of as 'us' without completely disappearing. If 'we' have no boundary at all and 'we' have always and already reached a necessary agreement, are 'we' not in an important sense vacant, and is it not impossible to speak of more than the things being as they are? In other words, if 'we' are oneness without any boundary, isn't there neither need nor even possibility that 'we' are thematized as such? 'Our' having no boundary or demarcation whatsoever is verging on the non-existence of 'us'.

Hence, in so far as 'we' are referred to as such, in an important sense it is impossible that 'we' disappear completely. If 'we' disappear without leaving any trace, and if things are just as they are, then there is no difference at all between being prior to a distinction of agreement / disagreement and there being nothing other than agreement, between things being just as they

²⁵ [Williams, 1981], p.160, italics mine.

are, irrespective of boundary, and there being no boundary. After all, unless 'we' are referred to as such (even if as 'disappearing'), we cannot so much as look at what happens as a 'proto-phenomenon (Urphänomen)' : 'we' have no boundary at all and 'we' have always and already reached a necessary agreement. Thus the difference between the existence and the non-existence of 'us' is extremely subtle (but decisive). This is the first factor from which the contingency of 'us' derives.

Although 'we' must be referred to as what is necessary oneness without any boundary, 'we' cannot possibly be delineated by being contrasted with other alternatives. Therefore, the way 'we' are referred to as such ought to be that 'we' can be encountered even in the refusing of "no boundary" and "a necessary agreement." This is the indirect way of finding 'us' via the negation of 'us.' The self-refutation criticism of relativism takes this form or direction, because the criticism finds an absolute truth even in the negation of an absolute truth by relativism.

To be sure, in this indirect way 'we' can be presented as necessary oneness without any boundary. But it does happen that 'we' can be encountered even in the negation of 'us.' At this bedrock, all we can say is that this (=the affirmation of 'us') is simply what we do, anyway. It is not necessary that the double negation of 'us' is equivalent to the affirmation of 'us'. This is the second factor from which the contingency of 'us' derives.

Therefore, once 'we' can be encountered, an agreement between 'us' is necessary, whereas the very fact of our doing this remains contingent. In the field of (C), relativism functions as a factor of this contingency. This contingency is not opposed to necessity, but rather it is the contingency of necessity itself, and the relation between contingency and necessity is asymmetric. Here necessity is the impossibility of 'our' being otherwise, whereas contingency is the possibility of non-existence of 'us' (or nothingness) and is the groundlessness of finding out the affirmation of 'us' even in the negation of 'us'. In so far as 'we' are referred to as such without disappearing into nothingness, it is impossible to eliminate this asymmetric contingency.

To sum up. On one hand, 'we' have no boundary in the sense that, even if we try to go far away from 'us,' we are always and already inside 'us' vis-a-vis a fundamental agreement. On the other hand, 'we' are finite in the sense that if 'we' are not referred to as such, 'we,' left in nothingness, can't even be expressed, and that if 'we' are referred to as such, an encounter with 'us' in the negation of 'us' is contingent. In the end, radicalized relativism is no other than the realization of this "finitude of a boundless thing." And the "asymmetric triad" extracted from Meiland's argument is a device for realizing it. Obviously the relation of three factors is neither a relation within different systems, nor a symmetric conflict among opposing positions.

Let us now return to three factors of Meiland's argument. By finding (A) itself even in the negation of (A) by (B), (A) corresponds to "oneness without any boundary." And (B) shows that the very finding of (A) itself in (B) is finite in terms of nothingness and contingency. The relation between (A) and (B) is the asymmetric one between "a boundless thing" and "nothingness and contingency of it." And (C) is the field which actualizes this asymmetric relation.

Grasping the relation of three factors in this way, "a conversion" is found never to be a change of position from non-relativism to relativism, because relativism is not a position or a doctrine as opposed to non-relativism. "A conversion" or coming to "a new way of seeing things" is to realize the finitude of 'us' without any boundary. Regarding "an alternative way" and "different purposes" as well, these don't mean the movement from one system (perspective) to another at all. They mean that our common logic and rationality, which doesn't have alternatives, can be at once a means (we have no other means) and an object (contingency of what?) of "a conversion."

"A conversion" is both the change of grasping 'us' and viewing relativism. At its starting point, it might seem that relativism is a doctrine that truths are plural and relative to systems (paradigms, conceptual schemes, frameworks and so on), and that relativism is opposed to non-relativism (absolutism, objectivism, universalism, and so on). But this way of viewing relativism changes into the following. Relativism is not a doctrine suggesting a plurality of systems (paradigms, conceptual schemes and so on), but the realization of the finitude of a boundless thing, and doesn't insist on the relativity of truth for systems (paradigms, conceptual schemes and so on), but expresses the impossibility of eliminating asymmetric contingency. Relativism interpreted as above is Purified Relativism (PR).

Finally, let us look back to some questions posed in section III.

The objection to Meilandian relativism by Beach was that it is thrown either into self-enclosed isolation without any offensive power, or into acknowledgment of intersystematic non-relativistic truth. It is obvious that this objection presupposes that relativism cannot be separated from a plurality of systems (paradigms, conceptual schemes and so on). According to this objection, relativism, when it is completely isolated or when it denies intersystematic non-relativistic truth, contradicts its own assumption of pluralism.

But, as stated above, PR is not a matter of a plurality of systems, but of agreement without any boundary and its finitude. If intersystematic objectivity or universality is tracked down to the utmost limit, it ought to end in the oneness of 'us' that doesn't presuppose a plurality of systems and that doesn't have an alternative 'us' or an outside. And relativism is the realization of the contingency of the oneness, so relativism is not a matter of a plurality

of systems. In PR, the view of relativism shown in Beach's objection is itself transformed.

The objection to Meilandian relativism by Siegel was that it is either completely impotent from a rational point of view, or dependent upon non-relativistic rationality. In this objection, it is thought that relativism and rationality conflict with each other.

But in PR, relativism and rationality has an asymmetric relation, which is shown in the field of the "asymmetric triad." In PR, relativism cannot be an alternative rationality outside our boundless rationality, but must be the finitude of our boundless rationality itself. Its finitude equals a possibility of the nothingness of 'us' and a contingency of the affirmation of 'us,' intimately connected with the very presence of a boundless rationality. Therefore, it is not that relativism and rationality conflict with each other, but that the difference between relativism and rationality corresponds to that of two sides of 'us' (contingency and boundlessness). Rational arguments can be also used in order to help change our understanding of relativism, and relativism cannot and need not exclude rational arguments.

My answers to the five points at issue about which Meilandian relativism is not satisfactorily articulate are already obvious at this stage.

1. Meiland' s argument is not the self-expression of relativism. It is a device for showing the asymmetric relation of relativism and non-relativism.
2. Relativism and non-relativism are not two opposing positions. The relationship between them is an asymmetric one between oneness without any boundary and its finitude or contingency.
3. "A conversion" is the realization of the finitude of a boundless thing, and the change of the way of viewing relativism
4. Because relativism is a matter of the contingency of oneness, a plurality of systems (paradigms, conceptual schemes and so on) doesn't follow from relativism and isn't presupposed by relativism.
5. Relativism is neither a doctrine nor a position, but it is the otherness involved in the presence of 'us.'

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