

HOW I SEE RELATIVISM FROM MY PERSPECTIVE EVERETT

In class we distinguished between:

- **Crude relativism**, the view that **anything-goes**
- The Jainist **Perspectivism**

Crude relativism is the view that **anything-goes**. The crude relativist thinks that any view is as good as any other view, that your views on a subject are as true as mine, and that I would be wrong to criticize what you think because, while it might be wrong from my perspective, it would be right from your perspective.

But crude relativism is a problematic position. For one thing, if we take it seriously, it seems we can never legitimately criticize another person for being wrong. And we surely want to say that Hitler and Bin Laden are morally wrong, that those who think the earth is flat are scientifically mistaken, and so on.

For another thing, crude relativism threatens to become self-defeating in the following sense. The crude relativist says “*there is no absolute truth.*” But now we can ask, well, is this claim itself supposed to be an absolute truth? If the relativist says “*yes*” then they have just contradicted themselves. But if they say “*no*” it is not clear why we should take what they say seriously or care about it.

Hindu philosophers typically understood the Jains to be advocating a form of crude relativism and we see them making just these sorts of objections to Jainism. But Jainism is a much more subtle and sophisticated view. It does not claim that “anything goes.” Rather it claims that there are a number of distinct standpoints. And from the perspective of each of these standpoints, (i.e. relative to that standpoint), it is an objective matter what is true and what is false. I looked at some simple examples of this idea in class.

Note that a Jain will want to say, for example, that there is no standpoint from which it is acceptable to gratuitously hurt others. Some people may claim it is acceptable from their standpoint. But it is not. We can be wrong about what is true from our standpoint.

Note too a contrast here between Jainism, Buddhism, and traditional Hinduism. The Buddhist will say that everything is in flux, there is no stable reality. The traditional Hindu will say that in some sense or other change is an illusion and there is a stable unchanging underlying reality. The Jain says that there is both change and an underlying reality. For underlying reality has many different aspects and can be grasped from many different perspectives. And when we perceive change we are simply perceiving this reality from a different perspective.