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# The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Relativism

Edited by Martin Kusch

# THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELATIVISM

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- Relativism in other areas of philosophy

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# THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELATIVISM

*Edited by Martin Kusch*

First published 2020  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-48428-3 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-351-05230-6 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo  
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Work on this project was made possible by ERC Advanced Grant Project #339382 “The Emergence of Relativism: Historical, Philosophical and Sociological Issues.” I am grateful to all team members – Natalie Ashton, Katherina Kinzel, Robin McKenna, Katharina Sodoma, Johannes Steizinger, and Niels Wildschut – for numerous discussions, many of which have found their way into this volume.

In recent years my Viennese department has become something of a hub for research on relativism. This explains why many of my immediate colleagues were able to contribute. Several of them have also helped by suggesting topics or authors. I am particularly grateful to Delia Belleri, Dirk Kindermann, Anne-Kathrin Koch, Veli Mitova, and Herlinde Pauer-Studer. I also owe a great debt to Karoline Paier and Paul Tucek who acted as my research assistants and helped with the nitty-gritty of the editing process.

I thank the Routledge philosophy editors – Tony Bruce and Adam Johnson – for their wonderful support throughout. Four referees made a number of useful suggestions.

Last but not least I am grateful to my family for tolerating my working through (far too) many weekends. I dedicate this volume to my daughter Annabelle.

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# INTRODUCTION

## A primer on relativism

*Martin Kusch*

One could say of relativism what Hermann Ebbinghaus once observed with respect to psychology: to wit, that it has a “long past but a short history” (1908, 3). Although relativistic motifs have always played a significant role in philosophy, their systematic investigation – and thus the explicit formulation of different forms and strengths of relativism – is a child only of the twentieth century. Perhaps one could even maintain that most of the really important, detailed and systematic work on relativism was done by philosophers alive today. This volume documents both the long past and the short history of relativism.

The structure of the volume is straightforward. The first two parts cover relativistic motifs in Indian, Islamic, African and Western traditions. (Unfortunately, it proved impossible to secure chapters on relativistic motifs in Japanese and Chinese philosophy.) The following parts divide by subfields of philosophy: ethics (Part 3), political and legal philosophy (Part 4), epistemology (Part 5), metaphysics (Part 6), philosophy of science (Part 7), and philosophy of language and mind (Part 8). The last part (“Part 9: Relativism in Other Areas of Philosophy”) contains chapters on philosophy of religion and experimental philosophy. (An entry on aesthetics fell through too late for it to be re-assigned.)

As is to be expected, the authors of this volume take very different positions concerning the forms of relativism they discuss. Some *support* particular versions of relativism, others *oppose* it vigorously in some or all of its variants. Still, I like to think that all contributions assembled here investigate relativism in a scholarly and respectful manner. This confirms my belief that disagreements over relativism need not have the character of “wars.” Remember that, in the U.S., it is customary to speak of “wars” either when intellectual exchanges become acrimonious (“science wars”) or when one launches an intellectual campaign (“war on cancer”). I regret that, in the past, disputes over relativism have all too often had the feel of “relativism wars” or “wars on relativism.” Of course, in lamenting “relativism wars” I am not advocating a soggy attitude of “anything goes.” I am urging that in discussing relativism we rely on the same epistemic virtues of curiosity, open-mindedness, fairness and charity that serve us so well in other – less emotionally charged – areas of philosophy.

---

Relativism is not easy to define, and no definition has found general approval. Still, readers new to the area might profit from at least a rough characterization of the spectrum of views falling under the term.

To begin with, it is common to capture forms of relativism as different instantiations of the scheme “x is relative to y” (Haack 1998, 149). Here are some examples:

“x” stands for. . .		forms of relativism
objects, properties, facts, worlds	...	ontological
truth(s)	...	alethic or semantic
classifications, concepts, meanings	...	semantic
moral values, norms, commitments, justifications	...	moral
knowledge or epistemic justification	...	epistemic
tastes	...	gustatory
“y” stands for. . .		forms of relativism
individuals	...	Protagorean
cultures	...	cultural
scientific paradigms	...	Kuhnian
classes, religions, genders	...	standpoint

A further important divide is between *descriptive*, *normative*, and *methodological relativisms*. To facilitate the exposition, I shall use “culture” as the relevant “y” and “morals” as the relevant “x.” Forms of *descriptive* relativism claim that, as far as moral beliefs or standards are concerned, one finds fundamentally different standards in different cultures. Forms of *methodological* relativism insist that in investigating moralities we had better approach cultural differences in an “impartial” and “symmetrical” way. For instance, we had better be

. . . impartial with respect to truth and falsity, rationality or irrationality, success or failure. Both sides of these dichotomies . . . require explanation.

. . . symmetrical in [the] style of explanation. The same types of cause would explain say, true and false beliefs.

(Bloor 1991, 7)

Descriptive and methodological forms of relativism leave open the possibility that there are absolute norms or truths. As far as descriptive or methodological relativisms are concerned, one of the cultures might well be on the (absolutely) right track. *Normative* forms of relativism go further and deny that there are any absolutely true or absolutely correct beliefs or standards.

The last sentence gives only a very minimalist characterization of normative relativism. Although there are authors happy with this definition (Bloor 2011), others – friends and foes of relativism alike – go further and add various additional assumptions. A list of such assumptions follows. To be sure, I am not suggesting that these items constitute necessary and sufficient conditions for relativism. Different authors disagree over their importance and relevance. I am offering them here merely to give the (novice) reader a rough idea of the kinds of theses with which relativism is often associated. I am not addressing the question which combination of these theses leads to the most plausible version (by my lights). Note also that I have not aimed

for the smallest possible set of theses; a limited degree of redundancy has been accepted for the sake of greater clarity. I am using *epistemic* relativism as my example. It should be obvious how the key parameters need to be changed to arrive at moral or other forms of relativism.

I have collected these assumptions from both friends and foes of relativism, including Maria Baghramian (2019), Barry Barnes and David Bloor (1982), Simon Blackburn (2005), David Bloor (2011), Paul Boghossian (2006), Adam Carter (2016), Lorraine Code (1995), Annalisa Coliva (2010), Hartry Field (2009), Steven Hales (2014), Gilbert Harman (1996), Christopher Herbert (2001), Barbara Herrnstein Smith (2018), Max Kölbel (2004), John MacFarlane (2014), Duncan Pritchard (2009), Gideon Rosen (2001), Richard Rorty (1979), Carol Rovane (2013), F. F. Schmitt (2007), Markus Seidel (2014), Harvey Siegel (1987), Sharon Street (2011), David Velleman (2015), Bernard Williams (1981), Michael Williams (2007), Timothy Williamson (2015) and Crispin Wright (2008).

(DEPENDENCE) A belief has an epistemic status only relative to either. . .

- (a) system of epistemic principles (REGULARISM), or
- (b) a coherent bundle of precedents (or paradigms) (PARTICULARISM).

The distinction between (a) and (b) is meant to clarify that *what a belief is relative to* is different for different versions of relativism. Some make the “regularist” assumption that *what a belief is relative to* is a set of more or less fundamental rules (e.g. Boghossian 2006); others rely on the “particularist” thought that it is individual and concrete precedents that guide our epistemic life (Kuhn 1962). (I am here borrowing a conceptual distinction from Dancy 2017.)

(PLURALISM) There is (has been, or could be) more than one such system or bundle.

Given PLURALISM, relativism is compatible with the idea that our current system or bundle is without an *existing* alternative. Moreover, PLURALISM permits the relativist to be highly selective in choosing those systems or bundles with respect to which relativism applies. She might for example restrict her relativistic thesis to just two systems or bundles.

(NON-ABSOLUTISM) None of these systems or bundles is absolutely correct.

I already mentioned NON-ABSOLUTISM as the minimal characterization of normative relativism. It can of course be combined with the other assumptions listed here.

(CONFLICT) Some of these systems or bundles are such that their epistemic verdicts on the epistemic status of given beliefs exclude one another. This can happen either. . .

- (a) because the two systems or bundles give incompatible answers to the same question, or
- (b) because the advocates of one system or bundle find the answers suggested by the advocates of another system or bundle unintelligible.

(a) is an “ordinary” disagreement; (b) captures cases of “incommensurability”; that is, cases where the advocates of two different systems or bundles find the categories and values of the other side unintelligible (cf. Kuhn 1962; Feyerabend 1975; van Fraassen 2002).

(SYMMETRY) Different systems or bundles are symmetrical in that they all are. . .

- (a) based on nothing but local causes of credibility (LOCALITY); and/or
- (b) impossible to rank except on the basis of a specific system or bundle (NON-NEUTRALITY); and/or
- (c) equally true or valid (EQUAL VALIDITY); and/or
- (d) impossible to rank since the evaluative terms of one system or bundle seem not applicable to another system or bundle (NON-APPRAISAL).

(a) is central, e.g. in Barnes and Bloor (1982); (b) can be found in Field (2009); and (d) in B. Williams (1981). (c) is routinely attributed to relativism by its critics (e.g. Baghramian 2019; Boghossian 2006; Williamson 2015), but typically rejected by card-carrying relativists (cf. e.g. Bloor 2011; Field 2009; Herbert 2001).

(CONVERSION) For some pairs of systems or bundles it is true that switching from one to the other has the character of a “conversion.” “Conversion” stands for a switch (to new rules or precedents) that is not licensed by the rules or precedents of the old system or bundle.

This assumption plays of course a central role in relativism debates in the philosophy of science after Kuhn (Kuhn 1962; Feyerabend 1975; van Fraassen 2002).

(FAULTLESS DISAGREEMENT) If two epistemic subjects, committed to different epistemic systems or bundles, disagree over an epistemic issue, and if their differing views are based on their respective epistemic systems or bundles, then their disagreement is faultless: neither side can be faulted for their positions on the issue.

This assumption has played a crucial role in recent discussions in semantic relativism. A central paradigm has been questions of taste (Kölbel 2002; MacFarlane 2014).

(SEMANTIC RELATIVITY) An utterance of the form “Subject S is epistemically justified (unjustified) to believe that p” expresses a proposition of the following form:

- (a) *According to the epistemic system or bundle that I (the speaker) am committed to, S is epistemically justified (unjustified) to believe that p.* This proposition is absolutely true or false. (SEMANTIC CONTEXTUALISM)
- (b) *S is epistemically justified (unjustified) to believe that p.* This proposition is true or false relative to different systems or bundles. (SEMANTIC RELATIVISM)

The first option is formulated and criticized in Boghossian (2006). Wright (2008) defends (b) as dealing the relativist a better hand. Much contemporary debate concerns these two (as well as other, more complex) semantic options.

(METAPHYSICAL COMMITMENT)

- (a) (FACTUALISM) The property of *being epistemically justified* has as one of its relata (an element of) a system of rules or a bundle of precedents. This relatum is usually overlooked.

- (b) (NON-FACTUALISM) Epistemic relativism is not a claim about the property of *being epistemically justified*; it is a claim about the meaning of the term “justified.”

Here too Boghossian (2006) is to be credited with first having put this distinction on the table.

(CONTINGENCY) Which epistemic system or bundle a given group is committed to is a question of historical contingency.

If the history of the given group *g* had been different – for instance, if the members of *g* had had a different evolutionary or cultural history – *g*’s current system or bundle could be substantially, perhaps even radically, different from what it is now. The contingency might reach deep: even those beliefs that group members deem “self-evident” might be discovered to be contingent. Becoming aware of the contingency of one’s views in this sense can, but need not, undermine the strength of one’s conviction (cf. Rosen 2001; Street 2011; Kinzel and Kusch 2018).

(GROUNDLESSNESS) A given epistemic system or bundle cannot be justified in anything but a circular fashion.

GROUNDLESSNESS is rarely formulated as a distinct ingredient of epistemic relativism. But it is sometimes invoked in arguments meant to establish the truth of relativism. For instance, it is occasionally put forward that epistemic relativism results from the recognition that all systems or bundles are on a par insofar as none of them is able to justify itself without moving in an (illegitimate) circle (cf. Williams 2007, 95).

(UNDERDETERMINATION) Epistemic systems and practices are not determined by facts of nature or truths that “are there anyway.”

UNDERDETERMINATION is not to be confused with the thesis that the world has *no* causal impact on epistemic systems or bundles. Instead the relativist is committed to the view that more than one system or bundle is compatible with the given causal impact of the world (cf. Seidel 2014).

(SELF-VINDICATION) Every system or bundle is such that it vindicates as true or correct all beliefs formed by relying on its norms or precedents.

This view is sometimes attributed to relativists by their absolutist critics (e.g. Baghramian 2019). Relativists might retort that they do not wish to rule out that systems or bundles might be self-correcting, or that advocates of a given system or bundle might recognize – by their own lights – that another system or bundle would serve them better (Kusch 2019).

(ARBITRARY CHOICE) Assume an epistemic subject *S*, information *I*, known to *S*, and a belief *B* that *S* would like to hold. *S* is epistemically blameless if *S* picks such epistemic norms or precedents (system or bundle) *E* as make holding *B* epistemically rational. The choice of *E* is unconstrained by other epistemic standards.

ARBITRARY CHOICE is in the vicinity of a wide-spread interpretation of Feyerabend’s formula “anything goes” (Feyerabend 1975; Boghossian 2001).

(TOLERANCE) Epistemic systems or practices other than one's own, must be tolerated.

Relativist views are often motivated by the wish or demand to be tolerant. But it is an open question whether one needs to be a relativist to be tolerant.

It is easy to appreciate that some of the preceding theses seem more important than others. For instance, to be counted a relativist, a philosopher must surely commit to (some version of) DEPENDENCE, PLURALISM, NON-ABSOLUTISM, CONFLICT or SYMMETRY. It is much less clear whether they would need to also adopt SELF-VINDICATION, FAULTLESS DISAGREEMENT, GROUNDLESSNESS, TOLERANCE or ARBITRARY CHOICE. Still, some relativists start from FAULTLESS DISAGREEMENT, TOLERANCE or GROUNDLESSNESS and then seek to argue in defense of, say, NON-ABSOLUTISM or CONFLICT on this basis.

Note also that arguments over epistemic relativism often take the form of a debate about which of the preceding the relativist is explicitly or implicitly committed to. For instance, few relativists endorse EQUAL VALIDITY or ARBITRARY CHOICE. Their critics aim to show that the counterintuitive assumptions EQUAL VALIDITY or ARBITRARY CHOICE follow from a combination of the other theses listed.

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I am delighted to have had the opportunity to edit the to-date most extensive handbook on relativism. Of course, no handbook can pretend to be 100% complete in its coverage of relevant issues, and there are bound to be some omissions that experts will quickly identify. Still, I hope this work will be useful to non-philosophers, philosophy students and professional philosophers alike.

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## PART 1

# Relativism in non-Western philosophical traditions



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# 1

## RELATIVISM IN THE INDIAN TRADITION

### Examining the viewpoints (dṛṣṭis)

*Sthaneshwar Timalsina*

Two birds, paired companions, occupy the same tree.

Of the two, one eats the sweet fig.

The other, not eating, looks on.

*(Rgveda I.164.20)*

#### 1. Introduction

Thinking about classical Indian philosophy in light of relativism is a challenging hermeneutic task. There are no readymade volumes in the classical literature that we can identify under this category. Siderits argues along these lines that “the cultural factors that make relativism a pressing issue for us were largely absent from the classical Indian context, so that the various forms of relativism do not receive philosophical scrutiny in the Indian tradition” (2016, 24). The fundamental problem in thinking about Indian philosophy through relativism is not that there are no readymade texts but that scholars refrain from engaging relativism, as if it is taboo or a disease that philosophers need to stay away from (e.g. Siderits 2016, 31, 35). My own approach to relativism is relativistic, as I believe that endorsing relativism in one respect does not require one to be relativistic in all accounts. Just like any other “ism,” relativism should be handled as a device to fathom human nature and to help humanity negotiate a perplexing, complex social reality. When we open ourselves to read classical Indian materials through the lens of relativism, we encounter a wealth of materials. Dialogues recorded in Vedic literature epitomize cultural fluidity, diversity and an openness to perspectives. Traditions have adopted perspectivism to make sense of an otherwise bewildering variety of commentarial literature with conflicting interpretations. The problem then is we encounter a semblance of relativism and can be easily misdirected. Before we assign epistemic relativism in the Jain “multiperspectivalism” (*anekāntavāda*) or moral relativism in the *Mahābhārata* or meaning relativism in Bhartṛhari’s philosophy of language, we need to carefully define the categories and explore the parameters.

Cultural pluralism was a norm in classical India and every region dealt with religious differences. Everyday society also incorporated linguistic differences and grammarians such as Patañjali were keenly aware of dialectical variations even within a single language. Combined with polytheism and panpsychism, India is founded upon the co-existence of different and

at times, conflicting viewpoints. Written in this cultural milieu, texts such as *Bhagavadgīta* endorsed different soteriological approaches by necessity, to combine multiple methods for liberation. It is not possible to address all these issues in a few pages. I therefore limit myself to re-examination of some of Nāgārjuna's claims, keeping in mind both classical and contemporary interpretations. I explore, in particular, the doctrine of "two truths" and Nāgārjuna's interpretation of the "viewpoints" (*dr̥ṣṭis*). In so doing, I am open to drawing parallels and initiating a cross-cultural dialogue on relativism. In conclusion, this conversation boils down to relativism leading to truth skepticism on the one hand and pluralism and hierarchical truth predication on the other.

## 2. Nāgārjuna on viewpoints (*dr̥ṣṭis*)

Nāgārjuna (150–250) is one of the major Buddhist philosophers and the founder of the Mādhyamika school. Scholars have primarily read his philosophy for its dialectical methods, rejection of substantialism, and interpretation of the doctrine of "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*). Most importantly, he is known for his pioneering doctrine of "two truths" (*dve satye*) and deconstruction of "viewpoints" (*dr̥ṣṭi*). Nāgārjuna introduces a unique logical method that reduces the opponent's viewpoints to absurdity (*reductio ad absurdum*) to defend his position that there is no inherent nature (*svabhāva*), whether by ontological truth claims regarding substance, or epistemic claims regarding reality – including the limits to human rationality. Nāgārjuna explores any proposition in terms of fourfold possible extremes (*koṭi*), eventually proving it absurd to adopt any one of those extremes.

Regarding the inherent nature (*svabhāva*) of being and things, Nāgārjuna posits and then refutes that:

- (1) Things have inherent nature ("is" thesis).
- (2) Things do not have inherent nature ("is not" thesis).
- (3) Things simultaneously possess and lack inherent nature ("is and is not" thesis).
- (4) Things lack both the inherent nature and the lack thereof (not – "is and is not" thesis).

Regarding causality, he likewise proposes as categories that:

- (1) Things emerge because of the internal factors ("*svataḥ*" or "from within" thesis).
- (2) Things emerge because of the external factors ("*parataḥ*" or "from without" thesis).
- (3) Things emerge due both to the internal as well as the external factors ("*dvābhyām*" or "from both" thesis).
- (4) Things emerge without any cause ("*ahetutaḥ*" or from "no cause" thesis).

In rendering this thesis of an "intrinsic nature" (*svabhāva*) absurd, Nāgārjuna establishes the doctrine of "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*). Examining this discussion historically, what he says is that, just like aggregates do not have their own intrinsic nature (the position that the Abhidharma school has endorsed), so also do the building blocks of the manifest reality, the so-called *dharma*s, not have any inherent nature. The tricky part is that he is not advocating this last statement as his thesis. The argument is if the emptiness of inherent nature were a thesis, this would be tantamount to endorsing absolutism by another name. Therefore, the negation of intrinsic nature is just a negation. The problem is that this understanding only partially captures the way Nāgārjuna has been historically understood. Reading Nāgārjuna

is perplexing for both the classical commentators and contemporary scholars alike. The following verse is ground-zero of our investigation:

The teaching of the dharma(s) by the Buddha relies on two truths: the limited conventional truth and the truth as it is.

(MMK XXIV:8)<sup>1</sup>

There are obviously two different ways to understand this passage. It can mean that phenomenal truth exists and only applies to conventional reality and that absolute truth transcends language and concepts. This understanding of a hierarchy of truth does not reject truth claims, and can be interpreted in two different ways: first, that there are two tiers of truth, or second, that there are different sets of truths. In another possible interpretation of “two truths,” this verse can also be explained by truth that is conceived of in the “covered” (*samvṛti*) state. For example, a truth such as seeing a sand dune as mirage or a rope as a snake, does not amount to actual truth due to its origination within a state of delusion. As a result, this view asserts that truth only exists corresponding to the way the entities are (*parama-artha-taḥ*). Therefore, a correspondence theory of truth underlies this interpretation. And if this position is followed, Nāgārjuna would not be making any anti-foundational claim in the exalted sense. This reading, however, would contradict Nāgārjuna’s own proclamation that there is no “inherent nature” (*svabhāva*), as this would simply be replacing one form of absolutism with another. This would also contradict Nāgārjuna’s direct statement that openly rejects absolutism regarding emptiness (*śūnyatā*):

It is not our fault that you resort to emptiness. No foundation (sa = *adhiḥ*) can be established on emptiness.

(MMK XXIV:13)

If what is described in terms of [the entities] lacking their inherent nature is the very being of the lack of the inherent nature, this would negate the lack of inherent nature and only the being of inherent nature would be established.

(VV 26, see Bhattacharya et al. 1978)<sup>2</sup>

Keeping these straightforward stanzas in mind, Siderits argues that the term *paramārtha* or “the way the things are” does not confirm any ultimate truth, but on the contrary, “the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth” (Siderits 1989, 231). Garfield confirms this same interpretation:

Suppose that we take a conventional entity, such as a table. We analyze it to demonstrate its emptiness, finding that there is no table apart from its parts. . . . So, we conclude that it is empty. But now let us analyze that emptiness. . . . What do we find? Nothing at all but the table’s lack of inherent existence. . . . To see the table as empty . . . is to see the table as conventional, as dependent.

(Garfield 2002, 38–39)

There are two possible responses to the preceding statements, and both were historically applied by Nāgārjuna. One response is to reject such a claim, demonstrating circularity in its logic, arguing that even this amounts to a truth claim. The other is to apply linguistic or conceptual tactics to interpret negation while keeping open the possibility of speaking about the truth. The current conversation on relativism claims a central place in this shift from a correspondence theory

of truth. Whether to understand Nāgārjunian claims as metaphysical or semantic is not a new quandary. So far, recent discussions and arguments are a flimsy replica of the debate between the Prāsaṅgika and the Svātantrika readings sustained over millennia.<sup>3</sup> The dilemma though is if this is a rejection of the absolute truth, and the conventional is not the “truth” per se, there is no truth to defend. With this view, the category “truth” would be fictitious, like rabbit-horn. And if this is only the rejection of absolute truth but not of relative truth and therefore interdependent truth, this would mean that truth is always relative, perspectival, and this position is not a rejection of “truth.”

### 3. Truth: metaphysical or semantic

If what Nāgārjuna meant is that there are two truths, this would be a metaphysical theory, a theory about the ultimate nature of reality. The semantic interpretation recognizes this proclamation as not about the nature of reality but about the nature of truth. Siderits explains that, “all things are empty [means] that the ultimate truth [has] no ultimate truth – there is only conventional truth” (Siderits 2003, 11). This would help to separate truth claims from metaphysical reality and we could say, the statement “Rāvaṇa had ten heads” is true based on narratives, irrespective of the possible existence of such a monster. Returning to the position of “two truths,” a semantic interpretation claims that no statement can be ultimately true. Siderits argues further, “Given that *dharma*s must be things with intrinsic natures, if nothing can bear an intrinsic nature, then there is nothing for ultimately true statements to be about; hence the very notion of ultimate truth is incoherent” (2003, 11–12). It appears Siderits draws from Hilary Putnam to develop a thesis that requires the rejection of any singular truth regarding the nature of reality that would presuppose a model of metaphysical realism. The target is to reject “emptiness” (*śūnyatā*) itself as a metaphysical claim. And this position omits the demolition of such a premise by the logical fallacy of circularity. To say that “there is no final truth about reality” would also apply to the claim that “all things are empty,” which of course one would expect the Mādhyamika philosophers to reject. And historically some have taken this route. Siderits, however, suggests that even the claim “all things are empty” is only conventionally true.

Re-contextualization of the claims is necessary to establish any form of relativism based on the aforementioned position. To say that truth is only conventional, the conclusion derived from Siderits’ reading, opens up a potential space for multiple perspectives in which all retain a degree of validity. This, however, is not what Siderits proposes and it deviates from Nāgārjuna’s position, as it yet again underlies a supposition on the truth per se; specifically that, in an underlying metaphysical claim, even absolute truth can only be relatively revealed. The rejection of absolute truth does not, however, confirm the validity of viewpoints (*dṛṣṭi*), as has already been argued. To assume all that can be spoken of truth are just viewpoints does not mean the same judgment can’t be true in one perspective while false in another. Nāgārjuna is not proposing that the human encounter with reality is mediated by language or culture. But if we were to read that “two truth” theory affirms perspectives, while not discrediting the category truth in the ultimate sense, we can derive that truth is relatively revealed in different modes. We can now engage G. Ferraro’s (2013) arguments with this new accommodation to address relativism.

Ferraro argues against this semantic reading, maintaining that Nāgārjuna’s doctrine of “two truths” upholds “two visions of reality on which the Buddhas, for soteriological and pedagogical reasons, build teachings of two types” (2013, 563). Emptiness (*śūnyatā*), in this reading, is in fact

“equivalent to supreme truth.” To make his claim, Ferraro first divides the metaphysical claims into two groups:

- (1) a realistic metaphysical reading that considers “supreme truth an existing and somehow characterizable dimension,” and
- (2) an anti-realistic metaphysical reading that denies the “existence of supreme truth” and affirms “existence exclusively of ordinary reality” (2013, 566).

Now the argument is that whatever applies to our pedagogical approach also applies to the use of language: our use of language or words are relational, and while our objective may be to speak the “truth,” given that there are metaphysical truths to be conveyed by language, our approaches can vary. Consequently, we can derive that the conventional is a necessary step, that we can discuss truth only conventionally. And since it is counterintuitive to conceive of the “conventional” as being a single perspective, the discourse on truth automatically becomes perspectival and relational. This claim, therefore, could reject both the metaphysical claim, and the validity of the so-called supreme truth. The fundamental divergence in this interpretation with Siderits and Garfield (2013) arises due to confusion between metaphysical and semantic interpretations. Siderits and Garfield argue that semantic interpretation does not interpret “two truths,” but demonstrates that truth is a semantic property. In the Buddhist historical context, if reality is analyzed based on *dharma*s or essential factors, the emptiness doctrine says that even *dharma*s lack inherent characteristics and thus are devoid of intrinsic nature. In this sense, what Siderits and Garfield propose only negates the reality of what is proposed as a higher reality of *dharma*s.

There is not much new to add, except to point out that contemporary conversations are enriched with nuances borrowed from a global philosophical discourse. While we should persist in the hermeneutic task, our first loyalty goes to reading the texts the way that they are. One can be relative about different interpretations but not about the actual words. And when we look back to the texts themselves, we encounter that the term *satya* for example, is not just for the truth but also for reality. Derived from the Sanskrit verbal root *asa*, the term only describes the mode of *sat*, or that which is. Nāgārjunian terms for the so-called two truths are *saṃvṛti* and *paramārtha*, where the first does not translate to “relative” but “covered,” and it also means “covering.” There is nothing “supreme” in the *paramārtha* either, as the term is a compound of “*parama* + *artha*” with the first being in the superlative of *para* meaning the other, and thus meaning the last or the final, and *artha* referring to both “meaning” and “reality.”

Multiple interpretations of the same text lead to hermeneutic relativism. Even when we ignore the examples where the same commentator derives different meanings from the same passage, texts come with multiple commentaries with contrasting meanings. For a reader, there are always options in determining meaning. A *relativistic* hermeneutic approach, however, does not open a text to anarchy in meaning. Even the skeptics such as Jayarāśi were not skeptical about reason per se. And the openness of interpretation only meant that readers needed to be openminded about perspectives as far as the semantic power of words can accommodate. When we read Sanskrit literature, we not only come across multiple commentaries, we even encounter different interpretations in the commentary written by the same author who composed the original text. Buddhist literature is no exception to the phenomenon of different interpretations for the same passage or the same author composing the text and its commentary. All in all, there is no taboo for a multi-façade-interpretation as far as classical exegesis is concerned. If we give credit to Nāgārjuna for being the philosopher that he is, it is not hard to conceive that he is aware of both possibilities, and is leaving the text open-ended regarding



the ways it can be read. The interpretative prowess within the context of MMK is epitomized in the commentarial literature.

For our current purpose, let us say Nāgārjuna makes a realistic metaphysical claim that he considers a two-tier truth theory. Even if this does not directly confront relativism, we can accept that teaching methods and what is described are relative to the audience. In other words, our words can mean what they mean based on external factors. Accordingly, the teaching of the four noble truths (suffering, origination, cessation of suffering, and the means to end suffering) relates to “adopting the limited perspective”; while teaching emptiness relates to “following the supreme truth.” On the other hand, if we follow Siderits and Garfield (2013), we are left with just perspectives and can only confirm relativism. However, these are very different types of relativism. The relativism that fits better with perspectivism should not be conflated with relativism regarding rationality. Even following Siderits and Garfield in this regard, there is no need to confirm that all epistemic claims are equal or that knowledge is a norm of assertion governing rational inquiry (see Walsh 2015). Whichever position, reading Nāgārjuna in light of relativism remains valid. However, if we mean “hard” relativism, we can argue along the lines of what Siderits says:

The Prāsaṅgikas, with their no-theory approach to conventional truth, would be forced to accept the relativism about rationality that such evidence seems to suggest. But the Svātantrikas could, I think, be pluralists without being relativists: pluralists in admitting a plurality of possible canons of rationality, no single one of which is ideally suited to uncover the ultimate nature of reality; but they could not be considered relativists in that one such canon may quite straightforwardly be said to be better than another.

(Siderits 2016, 35)

#### 4. Moving beyond Nāgārjuna

Even more important than asking, “why did Nāgārjuna start with causation?” (Garfield 1994) would be to ask, “why did Nāgārjuna end his masterpiece with ‘viewpoints’ (*dṛṣṭi*)?” Rejection of causality grounds the Mādhyamika philosophy. Deconstruction of the “viewpoints,” on the other hand, destabilizes the entire philosophical enterprise. The imprints of Nāgārjuna are visible in the lines of Śrīharṣa, a prominent Advaita philosopher who lived one millennium after Nāgārjuna.<sup>4</sup> By critiquing other viewpoints, Nāgārjuna is not proposing his own thesis, which would be counterintuitive. He himself cautions, “the victorious ones have proclaimed that there is no foundation as there is emptiness of all views. However, to whom emptiness [itself] is a view, they are considered incorrigible” (MMK XIII.8). It is therefore not the case that Nāgārjuna is rejecting the theory of causality; he is rejecting the viewpoints, and the first among them happens to be the theory of causality. For him the fundamental human problem is not the lack of theories but our obsession with them

Another key position to derive relativism comes from Maṇḍana Miśra. For him, our everyday reality is composed of our own ignorance (*avidyā*) and the individual subjects are the locus of this metaphysical ignorance. This position results in saying that all we can encounter by means of our cognitive faculties and semantic analysis are just the perspectives, each conditioned by our own preconceived notions, and filtered by means of the habit patterns (*saṃskāras*). Every individual, in this paradigm, projects his own world. Accordingly, each has his own conceptualized truth, guided by one’s own presuppositions and misconceptions.<sup>5</sup> Since all that we can communicate regarding the nature of reality is mediated by our concepts, which in turn are the

conditions from our past experiences, this thesis does lead to some form of relativism. Expanding upon the philosophy of Maṇḍana, the non-dualist philosophers (Advaitins) argue that collectively shared experiences are what they are because subjects having homogenous experiences do share a common history. Borrowing their own example, this is similar to multiple subjects having the dream of a snakebite and coming to the conclusion that they all dreamt of the same snake. Just as dream experiences are subjectively circumscribed, so also are other experiences. Even our experiences of pain and pleasure corresponding to certain stimuli are rooted in habitual tendencies that constitute some experiences as painful and others as pleasant. This does involve bodily memory. This is to say that we are not able to escape our corporeal and psychological horizons in our pursuit for grounding our experience. What are we left with then? Just our “viewpoints” or “perspectives” (*dr̥ṣṭis*). However, this is as far as their agreement goes, as the Advaita philosophers are not relativistic with regard to the absolute reality of the being equated with consciousness (*sat-cit*). For them, every mode of experience and every perspective underlies the same principle of being and consciousness. For them, being and consciousness are a logical necessity for every affirmation or negation. They see this as something that cannot be rejected by means of negation, and for them, the foundational being and awareness is not yet another perspective but only the possibility for the perspectives to be, and not the truth of all the truths, but merely the categorical possibility that makes us think about truth in general. Our everyday modes of experience, accordingly, do not negate experience as a category. The argument here is that subjects can bracket the factors that condition experience, including the ego, and enable being in a mode that is not subject to conceptualization. This is not to say that there is nothing real; this is not surrender to any form of nihilism. This is a proclamation that any truth-claim is relative, or perspectival.

One may conflate this position with Kantian transcendental idealism. And some early scholars reading Nāgārjuna such as Tiruppattur R. Venkatachala Murti have found comfort in such a charge. Following this, just as the objects we intuit in space and time are appearances, the mental states that we intuit in introspection are likewise appearances. We can nevertheless think of things in themselves using categories, as they affect our sense faculties. This conflation, however, misses a major distinction whether it be a Nāgārjunian or Advaita position: the entire philosophical endeavor cannot be isolated from the goal of “apprehending the way things are” (*yathābhūtārtha-darśana*), or “direct apprehension” (*sākṣātkāra*). When scholars say that our experiences are shaped by our habit tendencies (*saṃskāra*) and that all we experience, conceptualize, and verbally express are mere copies of the way things are and that what it actually is cannot be expressed; this is never meant to conclude that we are incapable of overcoming our own subjectivity. The resultant position advocates some variations of semantic and epistemic relativisms, while retaining the possibility of different types of metaphysical realism.

In the discourse on relativism, the Jain “multiperspectivalism” (*anekāntavāda*) is sometimes imagined to be relativism itself. This, however, is not the case. In its most systematized form, this doctrine for any given situation consists of sevenfold possibilities:

- (1) It may be.
- (2) It may not be.
- (3) It may and may not be.
- (4) It may be but is not describable.
- (5) It may not be while being indescribable.
- (6) It may both be and not be while being indescribable.
- (7) It may simply be indescribable.

This is not a thesis that truth is relative to individual subjects, or that everyone has her own truth conditioned by her language and culture. Another way this has been confused is by equating it with perspectivism. “May be,” to begin with, is not proposed as yet another perspective, and none of these are individually circumscribed to be true. This is rather saying that truth is manifold, or that each of these constitutes a part of the truth that is revealed only globally when all aspects have been analyzed. Another way this has been understood, is as a form of pluralism. It seems appealing to argue that there are multiple perspectives to the truth, but in fact, what the doctrine is saying, is that while different doctrines make different truth-claims, none of these have the total picture of the reality when accepted individually. That is, there is a truth claim when the totality of the possibilities is accepted, but not that truth is only revealed as a perspective and that all of them have some sort of validity if taken individually. What this implies is that one who has all the perspectives has the truth. And this can be better explained as “mosaicism”: that each component of a mosaic comprises a necessary element for constituting the truth, but no single piece of the mosaic alone can reveal the truth the way it is.

## 5. Conclusion

It would be wrong to equate any of the aforementioned positions with relativism. But fortunately, there are many kinds of relativism and when engaging Sanskrit philosophical literature, we may have encountered a different variety, or varieties of relativism that are not just antecedent to contemporary forms of relativism. What applies to most Indian traditions, is that being relative about truth is not to deny the category “truth” but to assert that our rationality and comprehension of what is true is relative, and that there are external factors to underscore our ways of reasoning or our grasping of what we consider to be true. But in all accounts, truth as a category underpins this assumption. Different subjects from varied cultural backgrounds might share different values and different systems of judgment and from a meta-gaze we may see relativism in their perspectives. However, this does not apply, that subjects endorsing such views consider them as relative. Each and every cultural subject has their own unique experiential and epistemic horizon that is for them the only truth. Those who are capable of distinguishing their personal perspective from among other viewpoints, are subjects possessing a “meta-gaze” and in some regards, are the liberated (*mukta*) subject, able to transcend their own subjective horizon.

The preceding discussion provides a framework for re-contextualizing moral relativism in the *Mahābhārata*. Overall the text teaches non-violence (*ahimsā*) although every page of it is saturated with the blood of the antagonists and heroes. A small section from it, the *Bhagavadgītā*, epitomizes the tension between relative and absolute perspectives on morality, vividly portrayed as the clash between the individual duty of a warrior (Arjuna) to fight, and the universal *dharma* of non-violence. There is no relativism about non-violence: this is the single most absolute upon which the other absolutes such as truth (*satya*) and “not stealing” (*asteya*) are founded. In this tension between the universal and individual *dharma*s, Arjuna recognizes the necessity to perform his individual *dharma*. Is this a simple justification for a war? If the book is teaching anything, it is that individual perspectives or truths triumph over global perspectives, but this can be allowed when and only when the global perspective is at peril. *Ahimsā*, it seems, is not always capable of defending itself. Not by choice but as the final resort when all options have been exhausted, Arjuna is left to decide between a lesser evil of confronting violence with violence, or a greater evil of avoiding it. This isn’t because a warrior wants to kill or craves fame but because those being killed and raped are unable to defend themselves with a mere vow of non-violence. A warrior allows himself to act within the universal *dharma* so that the others can uphold it and Arjuna chooses his personal truth: as a warrior he has to fight. The difference in perspective is,

prior to the teachings, there is Arjuna a prince, a brother, and a husband deeply wounded by the atrocities of his enemies, while after the teachings, there is just a warrior who recognizes his role, his moral responsibility which makes the global sense of morality possible.

## Notes

- 1 Refercens to Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamādhyamakakārikā* are cited using the abbreviation MMK, number of the chapter and verse or half-verse, e.g. "MMK XXIV.8." Please find the full reference in the bibliography under Kalupahana (ed.) (1986).
- 2 Refercens to Nāgārjuna's *Vigrahavyāvartanī* are cited using the abbreviation VV and the verse, e.g. "VV 26." Please find the full reference in the bibliography under Bhattacharya et al. (1978).
- 3 The classical analysis of "two truths" is complex. Candrakīrti, for example, divides *saṃvṛti* as real empirical and unreal empirical in order to make a distinction between the conventional and erroneous objects. Bhāvaviveka makes a distinction between the conceptualized and actual truths when addressing the *paramārtha*. For further analysis of the Prāsaṅgika-Svāntarika distinction, see Dreyfus and McClintock (2003).
- 4 For the convergence of the philosophy of Nāgārjuna with the Advaita of Śrīharṣa, see Timalina (2017).
- 5 For Maṇḍana's philosophy of *avidyā*, see Timalina (2009).

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## 2

# RELATIVISM IN THE ISLAMIC TRADITIONS

*Nader El-Bizri*

### 1. Sectarian factionalism

The differences in scriptural interpretation in Islam resulted in a relativizing sectarian pluralism despite the Muslim ecumenical monotheistic belief in the existence of a single divine absolute and universal truth (*al-ḥaqq*).<sup>1</sup> The principal doctrinal disputations in religious thinking emerged between *Sunnī* and *Shīʿī* factions (*madhāhib*) over the succession (*khilāfa*) in leadership following the death of the Prophet Muḥammad (632 CE), which continued to split the Muslim communities politically across various dynastic lines, with additional bifurcations arising due to polemics concerning jurisprudence, eschatology, hagiography, and heresiology. These disputes were also impacted by the dialectical interactions of Muslim scholars with their Arab Christian counterparts in the Fertile Crescent, in addition to the adaptive assimilation of ancient Greek knowledge. A relativizing current ran in concealment within the folds of scriptural exegesis and hermeneutics, as furthermore differentiated via individuated approaches in scholarship. Epistemic differences also emerged between the theologians (*mutakallimūn*), mystics (*ʿarifūn*), and philosophers (*falāsifa*) in terms of their distinct claims concerning the absolute truth in Islam. They all believed in its uniqueness while quarrelling over its meaning and the methods that disclose the essence of its truism. This translated into relativizing disputations and apologetics, in epistemic, cultural, and moral terms, over the religious law and lifestyles, as concretely influenced by political and societal undercurrents. Moreover, the methods of textual and linguistic interpretation differed in terms of adopting a literal (*ẓāhir*) exegesis (*tafsīr*) versus allegorical hermeneutics (*taʾwīl*) that disclose hidden (*bāṭin*) meanings.

The belief in an absolute (*muṭlaq*), universal (*kullī*), eternal (*azālī*), and unique (*wāḥid*) truth (*ḥaqq*) was relativized in interpretive acculturation and comportment. Relativism arose from polemics over the essence of monotheistic absolutism and monism. Moral factionalism translated into an epistemic relativism, as reflected in emic and etic dispositions. For instance, an emic insider is an agent within a faction who normatively affirms the group's doctrine with absolutism, and may charge co-religious opponents with heresy; while an etic observer pictures the claim concerning the absolute truth in factional disputes as being relativistic in its world view and lifestyle. The belief in an absolute truth in Islam is rendered relative (*nisbī*) and particular (*juẓʿī*) via Muslim sectarianism; albeit, without resulting in scepticism. Even if individual Islamic scholars battled with doubt, their sceptical stance is directed towards the closed belief systems

of Muslim factions and not Islam altogether. They would move away from philosophy towards mysticism, from theology to Sufism, without renouncing the Islam in the manner of an apostate (*murtadd*). Relativism in Islam is not declared as a doubt concerning the existence of the religious truth, but is instead directed at some Muslim sects. Islam is not relativistic *per se*; rather its competing factions (*firaq*) relativize the claim concerning the truth of the faith. Relativism emerges in such sectarian syncretic fissures, especially in epochs of strife.

Grasping what is alethic in Islam depends on the ontic and epistemic horizons within which it is disclosed. The disputations concerning the truth got exhausted when the orthodoxy closed the gateway to interpretation (*iqfāl bāb al-ijtihād*). How an opinion becomes more entrenched than another is dependent on historical, societal, political, and quotidian factors in praxis, as much as it rests on onto-theology, epistemology, and logic. When a doctrine imposes itself socially and becomes mainstream historically, it henceforth stands as a vocal tradition that ideologically judges other cults of the creed. The incongruent sects managed to coexist in *Realpolitik* pragmatic and apologetic terms, and yet during the episodes of oppression and conflict the divisions erupt with bellicosity and violence. These doctrines do not yield unanimity and consensus (*ijmā*), even if agreements may have been achievable by the first generation of the Prophet's companions (*ṣaḥāba*) in isolated devotional rites within a narrow societal milieu.

*Grosso modo*, all Muslims are expected to analogically differentiate their beliefs and comportments from those who are religiously described as being "liars" (*kāzibūn*), "deniers" (*munkirūn*), "deceitful hypocrites" (*munāfiqūn*), "treading the wrong path" (*fi ḍalāl*), "suppressing the truth" (*muktimūn*), or "doubting it" (*mushakkikūn*). An emphasis is placed on emulating (*tamaththul*) the prophetic sayings and doings (*al-qawl wa'l-'amal*) in accordance with the Islamic law (*al-shar'*), which ethically promotes honesty (*ṣidq*) and correctness (*ṣaḥīḥ*).<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Theology and mysticism

The theological conception of truth is mediated via the elucidation of the question of the divine essence and attributes (*al-dhāt wa'l-ṣifāt*) (El-Bizri 2008) in the disputations of Muslim theologians (*al-mutakallimūn*) amongst themselves, or in their quarrels with the philosophers, or in their dialectical argumentations with Arab Christian scholars. The question arises over the affirmation of divine transcendence (*tanzīh*) and unity (*tawḥīd*), while eschewing analogical anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*). This reduced the divine attributes to the divine essence by asserting absolute unity; even if this undermined the semantic character of the divine names in the ritual of worship. This eventually occasioned a schism within Muslim theology via the emergence of *Ash'arism* besides *Mu'tazilism*. The paradoxical nature of the question of the divine essence and attributes was veiled by accepting it "without how or why" (*bi-lā kayf wa lā limā*), and without showing how this would not entail pluralism instead of monism.

Some Muslim theologians advocated occasionalism under the influence of al-Ghazālī's (1058–1111 CE) (Al-Ghazālī 2000) doubts concerning the justification of induction, by arguing that *the connection between what is habitually taken to be a cause and what is taken by way of custom to be its effect is not necessary*. A cause, and what is posited as its effect, both are distinct *events* that coexist without cementing connections between them.<sup>3</sup> This undermined the belief in natural laws, by picturing natural phenomena as being occasional aggregations of atoms.<sup>4</sup>

Al-Ghazālī recounts in his *Deliverance from Error* (*al-Munqidh minā'l-ḍalāl*) (1951) the difficulties in attempting to extricate truth from the confusion of contending sects. The different religious observances, communities, systems of thought, modes of leadership and governance, along with the multiplicity of sects, all appeared to him as an ocean in which the majority of people drown and only a minority might reach safety. Each separate group thinks that it alone is saved,

and rejoices as such. On his view, this sense of perdition scatters the truth. Having scrutinized every creed, his aim was to distinguish truth, as a sound tradition, from falsity as heretic innovation. He sought a true comprehension of beings as they are, by drawing a distinction between opinions and the principles underpinning them. True knowledge necessitated that the phenomenon that is disclosed is knowable without doubts or illusions abiding besides it. He believed that the truth of Islam must be infallible and immune to scepticism. He thusly aimed at evaluating the truth-conditions of empirical sense-perception, necessity in mathematics, and reasoned logical demonstrations. He sought the truth of first principles, and wondered about what judges intellectual apprehension in a trustworthy manner beyond demonstration. This pointed him to the mystical experience as “an illumination that is cast into the heart” (Montgomery 1953, 25–26) by divine mercy, in a “withdrawal from the house of deception and a return to the mansion of eternity” (Montgomery 1953, 12), which is a cure from the disease of doubt.

Al-Ghazālī grasped theology (*kalām*) as an endeavour to defend orthodoxy against the heretics. In so doing, the theologians based their arguments on premises they affirmed with an unquestioning acceptance of scripture, and their dialectics were devoted to making explicit the contradictions of their opponents. Theology was not adequate for him in terms of arriving at results that were sufficient to universally dispel confusion. He then set study the philosophical legacies of materialists (*dahrīyyūn*), naturalists (*tabīʿīyyūn*), and theists (*ilāhīyyūn*). Nonetheless, he believed that these and their followers amongst Muslim philosophers, such as Ibn Sīna (Avicenna; 980–1037 CE) and al-Fārābī (872–95 CE), carried the residues of unbelief in their onto-theologies.

### 3. Mysticism

Despite being the most accomplished amongst the Muslim theologians of his era, al-Ghazālī recognized the dangers of blindly following authoritative instructions. He eventually turned his quest towards the experiential ways of mysticism (Sufism); to be in constant recollection of reflections on the divine presence; striving for immediate ecstatic experiences of *dhawq* (taste) in states akin to drunkenness within an ascetic life that forsakes worldly affairs. He walked the mystic path away from vain desires, and busied himself with spiritual exercises in retreats to improve his character and cleanse his heart for the solitary meditations on God. The anxieties about his family during his retirement, and the quotidian needs of livelihood, altered his purpose and impaired the quality of his solitude. He reports that phenomena were unveiled to him that he judged as being unfathomable. He learnt via experiential situations what he felt was the best life, namely of the mystic way (*ṭarīqa*) in its pure character through the purification of the heart from what is other than God in adoration and complete absorption (*fanāʾ*). The mystics in their waking state relate that they have visions and unveilings, which they achieve in their nearness to God; some conceive this as inheritance (*hulūl*), others as union (*ittiḥād*) or as a connection (*wuṣūl*) with divinity. Yet, as al-Ghazālī cautions, whomever has attained such mystic state need do no more than say: “Of the things I do not remember, what was, was; think it good; do not ask an account of it” (Montgomery 1953, 29). Al-Ghazālī eventually concedes that he came to truth partly through immediate experience, and in part via demonstrative knowledge, in addition to a leap of faith. The theological inclination towards argumentation contrasts as such with the situational lived experience of mysticism, gnosis, and theosophy. These pathways of spirituality rather accentuate the existential psychosomatic effects of the ecstatic disclosure of truth not by way of intellection but via *un-veiling the veiled* (*kashf al-mahjūb*), as driven by love (*ishq*), and morally aided by mentorship in spiritual exercises that assist in lifting the occultation (*satr*). This may point to epiphany (*tajallī*; ἐπιφάνεια) or παρουσία as a coming into presence of a disclosure



of the hidden truth via apparitions. Such conception of the un-concealment of the veiled (*kashf al-mahjūb*) as the happening of truth resonates with ἀλήθεια (*alētheia*) in lifting the forgetfulness of λήθη (*lēthē*). The happening of ἀλήθεια is a retrieval of what has been forgotten, retreated, withdrawn, by way of bringing it back into presence via remembrance (*dhikr*). This points to a return to things themselves via an experiential clearing *qua* opening (*fath*) that removes the occultation (*satr*).<sup>5</sup> An experiential situated un-veiling of truth in presence is implied herein rather than a logical demonstration. The happening of un-concealment in *gnosis* (γνῶσις) is a personal esoteric mode of knowing truth via divine revelation. The notion of un-veiling has a theological character in the manner God is described within the Islamic tradition as having seventy-thousand veils of light and darkness (Al-Majlisī 1983). The beatific vision (*mushāhada*) is sought through an intuitive lifting of the veil (*mukāshafa*). Truth is *kashf* as the un-veiling of what veils itself.<sup>6</sup> According to al-Ghazālī, the mystical truth cannot be experienced or taught to the majority of the people; rather a literal approach in following the directives of the legalistic rulings is more befitting to everydayness within a commonwealth.<sup>7</sup> Such gnostic attitudes are ultimately questioned by orthodoxy in Islam on the grounds that they purport knowing the unknowable.

#### 4. Philosophy

Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) held that true knowledge necessitates communion (*ittiṣāl*) with the cosmic Active Intellect (*al-‘aql al-fa‘āl*) that holds the Platonic forms (*ṣuwar*) and governs the sublunary realm. His ontological reflections on the question of being (*al-wujūd*) were mediated via the modalities of necessity (*al-wujūb*), contingency *qua* possibility (*al-imkān*), and impossibility (*al-imtinnā*).<sup>8</sup> Based on this, the impossible being (*mumtani‘ al-wujūd*) cannot exist, and the affirmation of its existence is a contradiction; as for the contingent *qua* possible being (*mumkin al-wujūd*), it is that whose existence or non-existence is neither impossible nor necessary; it is ontologically neutral in the sense that affirming its existence or negating it does not entail a contradiction. There is nothing inherent in the essence of the contingent *qua* possible that gives priority to its existence over its non-existence; it is essentially what exists or does not exist not due-to-itself, but due-to-what-is-other-than-itself (*bi-ghayrih*). The contingent is actualized due to what is other than itself, its existence is distinct from its essence; hence, its being happens to it from a source other than itself, which is its existential cause. As for necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*) it exists *per se* in such a way that it essentially cannot but exist, and the affirmation of its non-existence entails a contradiction, since it is impossible for it not to be. However, necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*) can be as such either *due-to-itself* (*bi-dhātih*) or *due-to-what-is-other-than-itself* (*bi-ghayrih*). The Necessary-Being-due-to-Itself (*wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātih*) is beyond the Aristotelian categories (*al-maqūlāt*); it is without definition or description, and its essence is none other than its existence. Necessary-Being-due-to-Itself is *one and only*, given that if there are two as such, then they are not each due-to-itself *per se*; since *differentia* (*faṣl*) is posited besides them to distinguish them from one another. Being as such, they are co-dependent, or require *differentia* as what is other than themselves beside themselves, while Necessary-Being-due-to-Itself need not other than itself for it to be.

Ibn Sīnā’s conception of the necessary being *per se* also resonated with the earlier ontology of al-Fārābī in *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* (*Virtuous City*); namely in how the necessary being *per se* is posited as a first existent (*mawajūd auwāl*) and a first cause (*sabab auwāl*) of all existents. It is perfect (*kāmil*); eternal (*sarmadī*); without material, formal, teleological, or efficient cause (*mādiyya, ṣuwariyya, ghā‘iyya, fā‘iliyya*); having no equal (*shabīh*), counterpart, or opponent (*ḍid*); and is without definition (*ḥadd*). Such negative onto-theology admits with it the affirmation of



the divine attributes of omniscience, sagacity, truth, and life (*'ālim, ḥakīm, ḥaqq, ḥayy*), as well as asserting the unicity of the divine intellect–intellection–intelligible (*'aql 'āqil ma'qūl*; νοῦς νόησις νοητόν) (Al-Fārābī 1968, §1–5).

Ibn Rushd (Averroes; 1126–1198) also reflected philosophically on the notion of truth but in a more direct engagement with the Islamic law. He held that Muslims are religiously urged to have demonstrative knowledge about God and all beings, and to consequently understand and apply demonstration in reasoning, which differs from dialectical, rhetorical, and fallacious approaches (Ibn Rushd 1961). He argued that demonstration leads to truth, and it thusly becomes an obligation in Islam to study philosophy and its instruments of syllogism, logic, and mathematics. Harm from philosophizing is as such accidental and not by essence. Demonstration and scripture do not conflict with one another in the quest to know the truth. If an apparent conflict arises, then allegorical interpretation comes close to bearing witness to the demonstration. If scriptural apparent literal meanings contradict each other in exegesis, then allegorical hermeneutics reconciles them. However, unanimity is never determined with certainty, but it can be achieved in practical selected issues within a delimited period. If scripture has both an apparent and a hidden meaning, then the latter should not be revealed to anyone who is incapable of understanding it. The situation is different in praxis, since the truth should be disclosed to all people, and consensus over it is easier in comportment than when dealing with doctrines.

## 5. Logic

The notion of truth necessitates (*awjab*) the use of a certified ascertained statement (*khabar yaqīn*) in the form of a meaningful proposition as supported by evidenced proven demonstration (*burhān*). This passes by way of a correspondence or correlation (*muwāfaqa* or *muṭābaqa*) between a factual state of affairs, as existing in the world, and what is said about it in affirming its existence. Such thesis is not simply upheld in epistemic and logical terms, but it also rests on a religious appeal to ethical correctness and honesty (*ṣiḥḥa wa ṣidq*), whereby the moral character of the speaker warrants also the trusting of the truthfulness of their sayings. This aspect was also affected by the care given by the logicians in judging the truth–value and structure of propositions and syllogism, given their disciplinary quarrels with the Arabic grammarians over the best rules that govern the sound use of language (Street 2004; Rescher 1964, 196–210). In view of these dimensions, the logicians scrutinized the sophists' attempts to entrap their adversaries in a debate through a false *qua* liar genre of paradoxes, (ἐπὶ ὁ σοφιστικὸς λόγος [ψευδόμενος] ἀπορία) wherein the syllogistic chain of reasoning ends in perplexity (Aristotle 1926, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Z.2, 1146a). If a sophist states that “all sophists are liars,” then to assert the truth of this statement becomes paradoxical. If it were true then it is possible that it is false as well, since it is stated by a liar. The paradox emerges over the veracity of the declarative statement (*khabar*) (Alwishah and Sanson 2009; Al-Baghdādī 1981, 13, 217), wherein an un-satisfied truth-condition is embedded in the pseudo sentence as a genre of *insolubilia* (Crivelli 2004).

A declarative statement is true if it agrees with the subject about which it is declared, and is false in the opposite case; it cannot be true and false at the same time. A statement is false when made by an honest person who never lies who says “I am a liar”; and a statement is true when made by a dishonest person who always lies when saying “I am a liar.” The same declarative sentence “I am a liar” can respectively be false and true. An exclusive bivalence entails that “there is no declarative sentence that is both true and false together, except one,” namely the liar paradox (Alwishah and Sanson 2009, 100–104). It is ambiguous to have together two contradictories (*jam 'al-naqīdayn*), wherein no declarative sentence can be both true and false, whether affirmative or negative. However, the declaration: “all that I say at this moment is false,” is a saying (*qawl*)

that is either true or false. If it is true, then it must be true and false; and if it is un-true, then it is necessary that one of the sentences said at the moment is true, as long as the one saying it utters something. Albeit, saying nothing other than this sentence, would entail that what is said is true and false. If the liar's proposition declares itself to be false, then what it declares about itself, namely that it is false, is true, and thus the paradox due to a misuse of predication (Alwishah and Sanson 2009, 99, 107, 112, 120–125; Ibn Sīnā 1958, 98; Ibn Rushd 1972, 157).

The imagined representation (*taṣawwūr*) has to have a certified verification of its truthfulness (*taṣdīq*). The veracity of knowing a given state of affairs proceeds in propositional terms through affirmation (*ithbāt*) and negation (*naḡy*) in a logical syllogism (*qiyās*). The starting point rests on *a priori* first principles of the intellect (*al-awā'il al-aqliyya*).

Logic is a canonical Ὀργάνον (*āla qānūniyya*) that measures the veracity of thinking and how what is in the mind corresponds with what it denotes as being present there as an existent fact in the world (Ibn Sīnā 1958, 167–180). This resonates with Aristotle's *Metaphysics*; namely,

to say that *what is* is not, or that *what is not* is, is false; but to say that “*what is*” is, and “*what is not*” is not, is true; and therefore also he who says that a thing *is*, or *is not*, will say either what is true or what is false. But neither “*what is*” nor “*what is not*” is said *not to be* or *to be*.

(Aristotle 1924, *Metaphysics*, Γ. 7, 1011b; Θ. 10, 1051b)

Moreover, in the *Sophist* Platonic dialogue of Theaetetus with a *stranger* around the correspondence thesis of truth (Plato 1921, *Sophist* 262e–263d), the *stranger* brings Theaetetus to agree that every sentence must have some truth or falsity by which it is qualified. The true one states a fact, and the false states what is other than a fact, since the false sentence speaks of things that are not as if they were.

## 6. Science

Besides the deliberations in philosophy, the mathematical disciplines offered their own methods of demonstration and hypothetical-deductive reasoning via experimental controlled testing (*al-i'tibār, al-tajriba*) as structured through geometrical modelling. This was embodied in the procedures of Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen; 965–1041) as set in his *Book of Optics* (*Kitāb al-manāẓir, De aspectibus* or *Perspectiva*).<sup>9</sup> His research belonged to the Archimedean-Apollonian mathematical “school of Baghdad” (9th–10th centuries CE) (El-Bizri 2007). His optics was based on mathematizing physics and offering a geometrical critique of Aristotelian natural philosophy. This necessitated the devising of geometrically modelled experimentations as controlled methods of proof, which transcended the mere reliance on logical forms of demonstration.

Ibn al-Haytham investigated the optimal conditions under which vision can be a reliable source of observational data in controlled experiments. He distinguished pure sensation (*mujarad al-ḥiss*), which only senses physical light *qua* light, and colour *qua* colour, from the psychological workings in vision in terms of recognition (*ma'rifa*), judging discernment (*tamyīz*), comparative inferential measure (*qiyās*), as aided by imagination (*takhayyul*), memory (*dhikr*), and at times by acquired prior knowledge. He argued that sensation in connection with vision was ultimately effected by “the last sentient” (*al-ḥāss al-akhīr*) in the anterior part of the brain (*muqaddam al-dimāgh*). Vision is as such a physiological-neurological nested cluster of physical phenomena that pertain to the material effect of physical light on the anatomy of healthy eyes, and through them passes as sensations that are transmitted through properly functioning optical nerves to the last sentient at the front of the brain. Vision was not merely a phenomenon that

resulted from the ocular functioning of the eyes as photoreceptors. Accordingly, the analysis of visual perception could not have rested only on geometric or physiological optics, but it would have required the cognitive psychological analysis of consciousness via embodied experiential situations.

In delineating the optimal conditions of vision, Ibn al-Haytham stressed that the viewed object must be bright enough and positioned at a moderate distance from the perceiver's eyes in a clear and homogeneous transparent medium (*shaff*). Moreover, the visible object must be in a plane shared with the eyes, and its body should have a proper volume, not too small or too large, as well as allowing the trapping of some light rays, given that a highly transparent body is virtually invisible. In addition, the observer should have sufficient time to see the object with two healthy eyes that are able to perform effective concentrations in scrutiny and contemplation, and within experiments to isolate the variables. He argued that when sight perceives individuals of the same species repeatedly, a universal form (*ṣūra kulliyya*) of that species takes shape in the imagination and is recollected by recognition, while consequently assisting in grasping the quiddity (*māhiyya*) of the corresponding visible object and its inspected seen properties; hence resulting in prior knowledge that aids imagination and memory. He also presented detailed phenomenological observations in experimental contexts regarding the role of embodied experiencing in vision, whereby the proper body of the observer contributes to estimating the visible distances and sizes of objects in the perceptual field when sharing a common spatial terrain with them. His experiential analysis showed how the manifestation of a thing in its plenitude through its visible aspects, as detected in a continuum of manifold appearances, occurs via contemplation and bodily spatial-temporal displacements. This is illustrated through perspective, whereby a thing is never seen in its entirety, since the appearing of some of its sides entails that its remaining surfaces are unseen. Hence, a partial un-concealment of an opaque object in vision is always associated with the concealment of some of its visual aspects. A stereoscopic distinction is posited here between authentic *qua* proper appearances (relating to a concrete act of seeing where the sides of the visible object are perceived immediately) and the inauthentic *qua* imagined appearances (designating the imaginary surplus accompanying the authentic appearances in the constitutive perception of the object of vision in its totality). The full silhouette of a thing is constituted via spatial-temporal bodily displacement in verifying the essential unity of its authentic and inauthentic appearances. It is with such exactitude in observations, controlled experimentation, and geometric modelling that the truth of visible attributes are verified, in the epistemic aim of overcoming the relativizing of knowledge.

## Notes

- 1 The Arabic term for "truth" is "*al-haqq*." Its etymology refers to *what prescribes* in the form of a law or ordinance. It is also one of God's ninety-nine beautiful names (*asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*) as noted in the *Qur'ān* (6:62, 22:6, 23:116, 24:25). See MacDonald and Calverley (2012) and the entries "*al-haqq*" and "*al-ḥaqīqa*" in Ibn Manẓūr (1955–1956a, 1995b).
- 2 The *Shī'ī* traditions emulate the hereditary imamate in the lineage of Prophet Muḥammad's household (*ahl al-bayt*) (Kirmānī 2007).
- 3 This resonates with the maxim of Protagoras: ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὥς ἔστι, τῶν δὲ μὴ ὄντων ὥς οὐκ ἔστιν (*man is the measure of all things, of the existence of the things that are and the non-existence of the things that are not*) (Diels and Kranz 1910, 80 B 1). See Plato (1921, *Theaetetus* 152a); Sextus Empiricus (2005, MVII); Burnyeat (1997).
- 4 This rested on atomist physics (the atom conceived as "*the part that cannot be partitioned*" (*al-juz' al-ladhī lā yatajazza*)). See Alnoor Dhanani (1994). The *kalām* physical theory pictures the invisible atoms (akin to Epicurean "minimal-parts") as discrete "space-occupying" entities that have miniscule magnitudes, in a non-Aristotelian rejection of αἰτιολογία.

- 5 Resonating with Heraclitus' fragment: φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ (*nature loves to hide*) (Diels and Kranz 1910, B123).
- 6 Ibn Ṭufayl (1105–1185 CE) offered an auto-didactic unveiling of truth via storytelling (Ibn Ṭufayl 2003).
- 7 Al-Suhrawardī's (1154–1191 CE) *illuminationism* (*ishrāq*) advocated *true witnessing* (*mushāhada ḥaqiqiyya*). Al-Suhrawardī (1952, 18, 85–87, 104).
- 8 Ibn Sīnā (1874, 262–263; 1960, 65; 1975, 35, 36–39, 43–47, 350–355; 1978, I.5–7, 110–122; 1985, 255, 261–265, 272–275, 283–285). I investigated Ibn Sīnā's ontology in some of my other publications (El-Bizri 2001, 2006, 2014b, 2016, 2018).
- 9 Ibn al-Haytham (1972, 1983, 1989, 2002); see especially Ibn al-Haytham (1983 §I.2 [1–26], I.8 [1–11]; §II.3 [67–126]). I also investigated related aspects (El-Bizri (2005, 189–218; 2014a, 25–47).

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# 3

## AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

*Anke Graness*

### 1. Introduction

This chapter will not be able to describe all allegedly relativistic theories produced on the African continent. Instead, it focusses on relativism in the philosophy of Africa south of the Sahara in the twentieth century. The long-time of slavery and colonial subjugation, and the mythification of racist ideas of the superiority of the white race that went with them, has shaped all discourse in Africa in the twentieth century and up to the present, and is the background against which these theories are to be understood. The starting point of African philosophy in the twentieth century is the confrontation with the claim that Africans have no philosophy and even lack the capacity to think rationally, logically, and critically; and that African cultures are “traditional,” “pre-reflective,” “pre-scientific,” or “emotive.” Famous historical instances of such claims can be found in Kant (1775), Hegel (1837), Evans-Pritchard (1937), or Hollis and Lukes (1982). Numerous works of modern African philosophy attempt to correct such prejudices.

### 2. Ontological relativism

The debate about the nature of the African person, culture, and philosophy, and particularly the nature of rationality has shaped the discourse of African academic philosophy since the 1920s. Many scholars consider the debate between representatives who regard rationality as culturally universal and those who regard rationality as culturally relative as the core issue of modern African philosophy (Masolo 1994; Hallen 2009). A famous example of the latter approach is the literary-philosophical movement “Négritude,” which was established in European metropolises in the 1920s and 30s by academically trained African philosophers who began to reassert their rationality and their right to describe and to represent their continent. They refused to be defined and represented by “Westerners” through an anthropological, colonial gaze. Of particular importance were such influential representatives of Négritude as Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906–2001) from Senegal, as well as the Caribbean writers Aimé Césaire (1913–2008), Léon-Gontran Damas (1912–1978), and Paulette Nardal (1896–1985). The movement was decisively influenced by, and closely intertwined with, the work of authors in the African diaspora, including such Haitian Renaissance authors as Jacques Roumain (1907–1944), and such African-American Harlem Renaissance authors as the philosophers Alain LeRoy Locke (1886–1954)

and W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), the poets Langston Hughes (1902–1967) and Claude McKay (1890–1948), and the anthropologist and novelist Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960). The close intellectual cooperation was primarily due to the prominence and wide-ranging influence of Pan-African ideals and shared ideas of Black pride, a consciousness of an African culture, and an affirmation of a distinct Black identity (Vaillant 1990, 93–94).

Léopold Sédar Senghor, philosopher, poet, and the first president of independent Senegal, is one of the most important African personalities of the twentieth century and one of the fathers of Négritude. He defines Négritude as “the sum total of the values of the civilization of the African world” (Senghor 1965, 97), a metaphysics of a Black identity and African personality. For him, Négritude was a weapon of defence, a reaction to the colonial and historical denigration of African culture and personality. Particularly in his poetry, Senghor praises everything Black and African; he praises the African woman, African metaphysics and African ways of apprehending reality. The primary task of Négritude was to revive Africans’ consciousness of their personal and cultural worth, that is, the movement’s central issue is identity. At the same time, Senghor elaborates Négritude as a philosophy of culture, implying that it embraces an ontology, an aesthetics, an epistemology, and a politics. Ontologically, it is founded on the notion of “vital force” or “*élan vital*” (and not of “being” as in European philosophy): The African universe is a hierarchy of forces organised according to their strengths; it starts from God and includes the ancestors, living humans, the not-yet-born, animals, plants, and minerals. According to Senghor, in contrast to European epistemology, African epistemology draws no line between the self and the object. Senghor writes,

[the African] is moved, going centrifugally from subject to object on the waves of the Other. . . . Thus the Negro African . . . abandons his personality to become identified with the Other, dies to be reborn in the Other. He does not assimilate. He is assimilated. . . . Subject and object are face to face in the very act of knowledge.

(1964a, 72–73)

Instead of Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am,” the Negro-African could say “I feel, I dance the Other, I am” (1964a, 73). Senghor asserts that the African does not analyse the object in the same manner as the European would do; rather, he touches it, feels it, smells it. Senghor famously declared: “Classical European reason is analytical and makes use of the object; African reason is intuitive and participates in the object” (1965, 33–34). In Senghor’s view, the African conceptualises, interprets, and apprehends reality in a different way than the European; an African epistemology, or way of knowing, flows from African ontology. Senghor argues that modes of knowledge or forms of thought as constituted by each race are different since they are rooted in the psycho-physiological make-up of each race. For him each race is unique and has a unique contribution to make to the evolution of humanity. Accordingly, while seeking to preserve and proclaim the value of African culture, Senghor aims to highlight what this culture has to contribute to the assembly of humanity: “Every ethnic group possesses different aspects of reason and all the virtues of man, but each has stressed only one aspect of reason, only certain virtues” (1964a, 75). All aspects have to come together in what he termed the “Civilization of the Universal,” a synthesis of the contributions of all the cultures of the earth (Senghor 1964b, 9). He conceives a future of humankind determined by a sort of *métissage* in which everyone is enriched by the mutuality of the positive contributions of all. But this will be achieved in such a way that no one culture loses its specificity, while giving to and accepting from other cultures.

Despite its claim of universalism, Négritude remains essentially an ahistorical, particularistic or relativistic cultural and philosophical conception, a point that was criticised early on by



universalists such as Frantz Fanon. Négritude's return to a pre-colonial past for the development of a Black self-confidence cannot be used as a model for future social change, argues Fanon. Instead of showing the social reality and changing it for the better, Négritude naturalises differences and concentrates on looking into a mythical past and glorifying its own culture (Fanon 1952). The Nigerian poet and Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka offers an even more strident critique in a 1962 speech: "A tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, he pounces" (Jahn 1968, 265–266). In other words, when you pass where the tiger has walked before, and you see the skeleton of an antelope, you know that some "tigritude" once existed there.

An ontological approach to African culture and "being African" in this world is also characteristic of so-called ethnophilosophy, a strongly ethnographic approach to philosophy. Like Négritude, ethnophilosophers claim that African thought and African philosophy possess a nature utterly different than the thought and philosophy of other cultures. Moreover, they assume that all of Africa's cultures share certain core concepts, values, and beliefs. Ethnophilosophy encompasses all those theories that deal with the reconstruction of a so-called traditional African philosophy on the basis of proverbs, grammars, and social institutions and assume that the Africans (or the Bantu, the Akan, the Yoruba, the Wolof, etc.) have a collective, immutable philosophy. The main points of reference of such theories are "traditional" African societies and "traditional" African values – both of which are of course empirically hard to verify. Ethnophilosophy's sources are proverbs, studies of African oral literature, language analysis, and the beliefs and values enshrined in such African institutions as religions, political systems, and law. The ethnophilosophical approach presents an unchanging African philosophy free from historical and socio-political contexts, a genuinely once-for-all, given entity. Interestingly, one of the most influential examples of ethnophilosophy is a book by a white Belgian Franciscan priest and missionary, Placide Frans Tempels (1906–1977): *La philosophie bantou* (1945; English translation, 1959). In his work, he tries to reconstruct an "African or Bantu philosophy" based on the language, grammar and proverbs of the Baluba. He concludes essentially that there is a kind of collective, traditional "Bantu philosophy" inherent in the eternal immutable soul of the African (chapter 4 of the book "4. Bantu ontology" (see Tempels 1959)), an ontology that equates the concept of being with the concept of life-force. Tempels states that the idea of life-force is central to the life and world view of the Bantu, for whom reality is not static nor objective, but a dynamic network of "living forces." However, while Tempels, contrary to colonial prejudices, grants the Bantu a philosophy, he states on a most paternalistic vein that Africans are themselves incapable of articulating it – unless they first encounter European philosophy.

Tempels' propositions have been challenged by the Rwandan philosopher Alexis Kagame (1912–1981), who set out critically to verify and reformulate Tempels' claims concerning Bantu ontology. According to Kagame, Bantu philosophy differs from European philosophy in that it relies on a concept of "élan vital," taking vital force as the essence of being. Kagame outlines four fundamental categories of Bantu thought, namely *muntu* or human being (i.e. conscious being); *kinu* or animals, plants (i.e. unconscious being); *hantu* or space and time; and *kuntu* or modality. Kagame argues that those terms are indicative of implicit thought processes and vehicles of an explicitly philosophical discourse based upon terms in the Rwandan oral tradition. His initial consideration is that in an oral culture, such as the Bantu, philosophical concepts are reflected in the structure of words, in proverbs or other literary genres such as fairy tales, narratives, and poems, or in religion and social and cultural institutions. From his reflections, he then derives a Bantu cosmology, a Bantu psychology, a Bantu theology and a Bantu ethics. As with Tempels, for Kagame Bantu philosophy is philosophy without philosophers, the collective philosophy of an entire ethnic group (Kagame 1976, 7, 286).



Two further seminal works which offer an essentialist interpretation of African culture and philosophy are *The Mind of Africa* (1962) by Ghanaian philosopher W. E. Abraham (1934–) and *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969) by Kenyan philosopher John S. Mbiti (1931–). Mbiti argues that African philosophy consists of certain beliefs and values that all African people share. According to Mbiti, “Africans are notoriously religious” (Mbiti 1969, 1), and every important element of African culture is inextricably bound up with religion. Mbiti coined a well-known maxim to express the shared African value of relationality, which is the cardinal concept in the African view of what it means to be human: “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am” (1969, 108–109). Moreover, his concept of “African time” was the source of controversy, since he makes the remarkable claim that African languages generally have no term for the distant future. Basing his discussion on analyses of African languages, Mbiti tries to show that the African concept of “future” encompasses a period no longer than two years, a claim which was strongly rejected by numerous African philosophers (e.g. Masolo 1994, 111–119). For many critics, such theories unwittingly justify the alleged difference between Europeans and Africans stated by earlier European anthropologists. Nevertheless, such relativistic, ontological theories exert a strong influence in African philosophical debates even today (e.g. Kasozi 2011).

### 3. Language and alternative epistemologies

In contrast to an ontological and essentialising relativism, which proposes that there is a way of knowing that is uniquely African and maintains that rationality is culturally bound, authors like Paulin Hountondji (1942–), Marcien Towa (1931–2014), Peter Bodunrin (1936–1997), and Kwame Anthony Appiah (1954–) argue that rationality is universal across cultures. The most famous representative of this approach is the Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu (1931–). Wiredu explicitly rejects relativism (Wiredu 1980, 176–177). A critic of the ethnophilosophical approach, he argues that rationality is an anthropological constant. He upholds the universalist claim that all human beings share the same cognitive capabilities and basic rational attributes. His argument is based on the fact that all humans possess language, that is, a system of rules whose adherence presupposes rationality, and that even simple actions presuppose a certain amount of rational thinking. The principles of induction and non-contradiction are exemplary of the logical universals inherent in the use of language (1996, 21–33, 85–87). However, in his essay collection *Cultural Universals and Particulars* (1996), Wiredu also points out linguistic contrasts between Akan and English which lead to, among other conclusions, the idea that the correspondence theory of truth cannot be expressed in the Akan language (Wiredu 1996, 107). He argues that there is no word in Akan equivalent to the English word “fact,” and, moreover, that there is no one word in Akan for “truth.” “To say that something is true the Akans say simply that it is so, and truth is rendered as what is so. . . . This concept they express by the phrase *nea ete saa* . . . ‘a proposition which is so’” (1996, 107). Here the word *saa* means “so.” Whereas in English one has the word “true” and the word “so,” in Akan one has only *saa* (is so). And the English word “fact” is in Akan also simply expressed by the phrase *nea ete saa* (what is so). Consequently, the correspondence theory of truth leads to a tautology in Akan. Wiredu argues that this does not indicate any insufficiency in the Akan language, but rather points to the fact that in Akan the correspondence theory does not offer any enlightenment about the notion of “being so.” He reasons therefore that the Akan language enables us to see “that a certain theory of truth is not of any real universal significance unless it offers some account of the notion of being so” (1996, 111). Moreover, Wiredu states, this trait of the Akan language shows that there are some philosophical issues which can be formulated in English but not in Akan. Wiredu concludes that the problem of the relation between truth and fact arises out of the nature of a language

(1996, 108) and, consequently, that some philosophical problems are not universal (1996, 109). What follows, he maintains, is that such intercultural or inter-linguistic comparisons should be made more frequently in philosophy. Another example to illustrate linguistic differences and their consequences for philosophical problems is Descartes' *cogito, ergo sum* (1996, 140–141). Wiredu argues that in Akan the concept of existence is intrinsically spatial: “to exist is to be there, at some place” (1996, 141). This is diametrically opposed to Descartes' concept, in which the ego exists as a spiritual, non-spatial, immaterial entity, and the mind is the entity responsible for thinking. Wiredu shows that *cogito, ergo sum* cannot be expressed properly in Akan (even though it can be paraphrased and also be understood), because Akan has an exclusively spatial-naturalistic understanding of “existent.” He states that it is not possible in Akan to use the word “being” without any further determination. In addition, Akan has an exclusively processual or functional understanding of “mind” in the sense of the thought process itself. For this reason, the body-mind separation in the Akan world view makes no sense.

Wiredu concludes that there is a need for in-depth study of everyday as well as scientific and literary usages of African languages. African philosophers in particular should use their own African languages to think through concepts such as Being, God, Truth, etc. He explicitly demands:

Try to think them through in your own African language and, on the basis of the results, review the intelligibility of the associated problems or the plausibility of the apparent solutions that have tempted you when you have pondered them in some metropolitan language.

(1996, 137)

Another contribution to the literature on African epistemology is the classic book *Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft* (1986/1997) by the American philosopher Barry Hallen (1941–) and the Nigerian philosopher Olubi Sodipo (1935–1999). In this work, they attempt to conceptually analyse three key words or concepts central to Yoruba thought, namely *aje*, *mò*, and *gbàgbó*, which putatively translate in English to “witchcraft,” “knowledge,” and “belief” respectively. On the basis of their conversations with Yoruba *onísègùn* (sages who are specialists in traditional medicine), they come to the conclusion that the Yoruba expressions *mò* and *gbàgbó*, which are usually translated “to know” and “to believe,” occupy a significantly different semantic field in Yoruba than their English equivalents, knowledge and to believe (Hallen and Olubi Sodipo 1986/1997, 40–85). Hallen and Sodipo, following W.V. O. Quine's distinction between observation sentences and standing sentences, argue that the Yoruba make a distinction between knowledge and belief or opinion. According to them, whereas *mò* is derived from first-hand information, observation, and sense-experience which may be verified or falsified, *gbàgbó* is got through second-hand information, though *gbàgbó* could later become *mò* after rigorous empirical testing and verification. Hallen and Sodipo conclude that propositional attitudes are not universal, and that different languages imply alternative epistemological, metaphysical, and moral systems.

#### 4. Truth as opinion

Of interest in respect of the concept of relativism is Wiredu's own theory of truth, as formulated in his book *Philosophy and an African Culture* (1980), which sometimes earned him the charge of relativism. In his book, Wiredu states that there is no difference between truth and opinion (“truth as opinion,” 1980, 124). Wiredu argues that whatever is referred to as “truth” is more correctly interpreted as opinion or point of view, since history shows that what human beings

consider to be “true” can be argued to be false from an alternative perspective. By asserting that “truth” is opinion, Wiredu rejects what is referred to in academic philosophical circles as the “objectivist theory” of truth, which he describes as holding that “once a proposition is true, it is true in itself and for ever. Truth, in other words, is timeless, eternal” (1980, 114). And yet, according to Wiredu (1980, 115), such an objectivist theory of truth implies that truth is “categorically distinct” from opinion. However, he argues, truth arises from human agency: from perception and rational inquiry, as opposed to deriving from some transcendent reality. Thus, whatever is called “the truth” is necessarily *someone’s* truth. For an item of information to be considered “true,” it must be discovered, defended, and known by human beings in a particular place, at a particular time. “We must recognize the cognitive element of point of view as intrinsic to the concept of truth” (1980, 115). However, the fact that truth arises from human endeavour and effort does not mean knowledge will reduce to the merely subjective or relative. “What I mean by opinion is a firm rather than an uncertain thought. I mean what is called a considered opinion” (1980, 115–116). This notion of “considered opinion” is of fundamental significance in Wiredu’s overall understanding of truth.

That there can be no truth separate from considered opinion is certainly a problematic statement. By using the statement “to be true is to be opined” (1980, 114f.), Wiredu seeks to overcome the distinction between the object of knowledge and the knowing subject in the sense of Berkeley’s *esse est percipi*. This puts him in dangerous proximity to subjective relativism, especially when he states: “There are as many truths as there are points of view” (1980, 115). However, Wiredu does not want to slip into subjective relativism and argues against it:

It is the insistence on the need for belief to be in accordance with the canons of rational investigation which distinguishes my view from relativism. Truth is not relative to point of view. It is, in one sense, a point of view . . . born out of rational inquiry, and the canons of rational inquiry have a universal application.

(1980, 176–177)

For Wiredu truth is dependent on the process of rational inquiry, and rational inquiry depends on circumstances. According to his theory, there are many different truths for different societies as well as for different generations of a society. In order to further distinguish his definition of truth from subjective relativism, Wiredu also calls opinion “rationally warranted belief” (1980, 216–232), that is, truth becomes rational opinion or functional feasibility. In this view, individual opinion is not arbitrary, but rationally grounded, and rationality is an anthropological constant common to all human beings. “Truth” – which he also defines as “what is the case” – refers to a human conception confirmed by a current perception in the real world. It says something about whether human ideas can explain the phenomena of the real world of perception or not. Therefore, it is always bound to the particular perspective from which the world is perceived.

Besides Wiredu, so also Nigerian philosopher Theophilus Okere (1935–) and Eritrean philosopher Tsenay Serequeberhan (1952–) refer to the “historicity and relativity of truth,” which “always means truth as we can and do attain it” (Serequeberhan 1994, 118; see also Okere 1983). South African philosopher Mogobe B. Ramose offers a similar argument: truth may be defined as “the contemporaneous convergence of perception and action. Human beings are not made by the truth. They are the makers of truth” (Ramose 1999, 44). And he continues: “Seen from this perspective, truth is simultaneously participatory and interactive. It is active, continual, and discerning perception leading to action. As such, it is distinctly relative rather than absolute” (1999, 45).

## 5. African feminist theory and cultural relativism

Apart from epistemological considerations, one can also find relativism in a rather ontological or cultural sense in African feminist theory. Nigerian anthropologist Ifi Amadiume argues that Africa had a unique matriarchal system of social values that also had an effect of neutralising biological gendering. She characterises the gender system of the pre-colonial Nnobi culture (part of the Igbo in Nigeria) as flexible or neutered, that is, social roles were not rigidly masculinised or feminised (Amadiume 1987, 185). And Nigerian writer and feminist Catherine Achonolu conceptualises a specific African “Motherism” as an alternative to Western feminism (1995). The Nigerian philosopher Nkiru Nzegwu criticises such generalisations about Africa, which in her view do not do justice to the cultural diversity of the continent. She develops a non-matriarchal, non-gendered portrait of Igbo society, where seniority and lineage are more fundamental determinants of social status than gender (Nzegwu 2006). Nzegwu argues that pre-colonial Igbo society was a genderless society that was displaced by Western colonial powers who introduced gender roles and gender discrimination where previously none had existed. Prior to colonial rule, Igbo society was characterised by a dual-sex system based on separate male and female lines of government (2006, 15, 192ff.), in which political, economic, and social relations were distinct but interdependent and balanced in power (2006, 15, 192ff.). From this social system, Nzegwu derives a concept of complementary equality. In contrast to the Western feminist model of gender equality, which defines equality as equal rights for men and women (men’s rights being the yardstick), the complementary model of equality is oriented towards the universal equality of all humans but at the same time takes biological differences between men and women into consideration. Out of respect for those differences, a society that embraces complementary equality must create conditions for men and women that meet the specific interests and needs of both sexes (2006, 199ff.).

## 6. Ubuntu

Recently, the broad academic discourse on the South African concept of *ubuntu* tends to drift towards (ontological) cultural relativism. *Ubuntu*, currently one of the best-known African indigenous concepts, has benefitted from increasing discussion and awareness, even outside the African continent, since the 1990s. In South Africa, it is a central concept not only in current academic discourse but in the public sphere as well. After the end of apartheid, *ubuntu* became a key abstract term used to frame the process of transition from an apartheid regime to a new “rainbow nation” and an African renaissance. There is no consensus on what *ubuntu* actually means, and the precise content of the concept is still contested. The translations range from “humanity” and “charity” to “common sense” and “generosity.” Often *ubuntu* is seen as a concept enshrined in a traditional philosophy of life, although one needs to further differentiate between *ubuntu* as a moral quality of a person or as a way of living. The core meaning of the concept *ubuntu* is frequently expressed using the Zulu-Xhosa aphorism “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” – “A human being is a human being through other people.” meaning that every human being needs other people in order to be human; every person is part of a whole, integrated into a comprehensive network of mutual dependencies. The aphorism expresses “the African idea of persons: persons exist only in relation to other persons. The human self . . . only exists in relationship to its surroundings; these relationships are what it is. And the most important of these are the relationships we have with other persons” (Shutte 2001, 23). Thus, the aphorism refers to the deep relational character of *ubuntu* and underlines at the same time that human beings (*umuntu*) are a “being

becoming” (Ramose 1999, 36–37) in an already existing community. The human being is seen as an organic part of a community and the community as the necessary precondition for any human being. Two interrelated central aspects of *ubuntu*, which are widely accepted by many authors, are expressed here, namely the non-static and evolving nature of human beings, and the importance of the community. A widespread general view considers *ubuntu* to express a uniquely African world view or ethics. Here, *ubuntu* is usually described as an ethics or a philosophical concept rooted in the pre-colonial knowledge systems of Africa, a concept which belongs to the “essence” of a specific African mode of being, which, in contrast to the individualistic world view of “the West,”<sup>1</sup> is described as being more community oriented. The South African philosophers Augustine Shutte and Mogobe B. Ramose explicitly refer to an *ubuntu* ethics (Shutte 2001; Ramose 2003b, 324–330). Thaddeus Metz uses features of *ubuntu* ethics to work out an African moral theory worth taking seriously as a rival to dominant Western ethical conceptions (Metz 2007; Metz and Gaie 2010; for a recent attempt in this direction, see Chuwa 2014). Characteristic features of *ubuntu* ethics are compassion towards others, respect for the rights of minorities, conduct that aims at consensus and understanding, a spirit of mutual support and cooperation, hospitality, generosity, and selflessness. Ramose attributes these standards to the linguistic peculiarities and the epistemological structures of the Bantu language. In accordance with the approach of Placide Tempels (1945) and Alexis Kagame (1956, 1976), neither of whom explored the concept of *ubuntu* deeply in their analysis, Ramose describes the Bantu terms *muntu* (human), *kintu* (thing), *hantu* (space and time), and *kuntu* (modality) as the four basic categories of African philosophy. He adds a fifth: *ubuntu*. For him, *ubuntu* is a normative ethical category that defines the relationship between the other four categories. Moreover, it is the fundamental ontological and epistemological category in the “African thought of the Bantu-speaking people,” which expresses the indivisible unity and totality of ontology and epistemology (Ramose 2003b, 324–325). For these reasons, he calls *ubuntu* “the root of African philosophy. The being of an African in the universe is inseparably anchored upon *ubuntu*” (2003a, 230).

In addition to its usage as an ontological concept, *ubuntu* recently has been conceptualised both as a postcolonial theory or “critical humanism” (Praeg 2014). Representatives of such an approach explicitly criticise an essentialising understanding of *ubuntu* and consider the concept to be a glocal phenomenon. Thus, the debate over relativistic and universalistic approaches in African philosophy continues.

## Note

- 1 The opposition between Africa and “the West,” which is a common feature of various discourses, is usually used to highlight a presupposed (cultural) difference. However, the concept of “the West” is very problematic because it denotes a compass direction, not a geographical entity. Usually the concept of “the West” is used to refer geographically to Europe and North America and to associate these geographical entities with a certain enlightened, secular, and idealised “scientific” mode of thought. Furthermore, it is presupposed that individual freedom is the central ethical idea of “the West,” whereas the key ethical idea of Africa is communitarianism. The inner plurality of these geographical entities (Africa, Europe, and North America) in terms of culture, religion, world view, historical development, philosophical schools, etc., is totally neglected in such an approach.

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## PART 2

# Relativism in Western philosophical traditions





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# 4

## RELATIVISM IN ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHY

*Tamer Nawar*

### 1. Introduction

“Relativism” is said in many ways and there are several ancient views which might be regarded as being relativistic, such as that for certain Fs nothing is F simpliciter, but only relatively to something else; that apparently conflicting judgements may be correct simultaneously; that truth-bearers may have different truth-values at different times (sometimes called “temporal relativism”); and that there are no objective perspectives. I discuss these strands of thought, and some others, in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy.

### 2. Plato and Protagorean relativism(s)

Several early Greek philosophers seem to have been concerned with relativity. Thus, for instance, Heraclitus might be taken to suggest that apparently monadic predicates are better regarded as relational (so that “ $\alpha$  is F” is elliptical for something like “ $\alpha$  is F relative to  $\beta$ ”; cf. Heraclitus DK B61). Moreover, some conventionalist ethical views that took normative properties to be relative to certain local conventions (cf. Bett 1989; Nawar 2018) come close to the kind of view described as “moral relativism” by Gilbert Harman (1975),<sup>1</sup> and several early puzzles concerning the impossibility of falsehood and contradiction (e.g. Euthydemus 286a1–287b1; cf. Denyer 1991) seem to indicate that apparently conflicting judgements may be correct simultaneously. However, the ancient figure most regularly described as a relativist is Protagoras of Abdera who famously claimed:

(MEASURE DOCTRINE) Man is the measure of all things, of those that are that they are and of those that are not that they are not.

*(Plato, Theaetetus 152a2–4)*

This claim is often taken to articulate Protagoras’ relativism. However, what Protagoras himself might have meant by these remarks and whether Protagoras should be viewed as a relativist is difficult to determine.<sup>2</sup> While some are optimistic that Plato’s Protagoras gives us insight into the historical figure, it often seems that we are limited to making sense of Plato’s Protagoras, Aristotle’s Protagoras, or the (MEASURE DOCTRINE) as it appears in some particular work(s).

Plato's *Theaetetus* offers arguably the most detailed and influential extant ancient discussion of the (MEASURE DOCTRINE). There, the (MEASURE DOCTRINE) is initially elucidated by appealing to cases wherein the same wind seems cold to one person but not another, and yet it is plausible that the wind is neither cold nor not-cold in itself and that both parties are correct (cf. *Theaetetus* 152b1–c4). Discerning precisely which views Plato attributes to Protagoras is difficult, and modern readers of the *Theaetetus* have given significant attention to the following three questions:

- (1) How, precisely, should the (MEASURE DOCTRINE) be understood in the *Theaetetus*?
- (2) How should the argument(s) raised against the (MEASURE DOCTRINE) by Plato's Socrates at *Theaetetus* 170a–171d be understood?
- (3) What is the relation between the (MEASURE DOCTRINE) and the so-called Secret Doctrine in the *Theaetetus*?<sup>3</sup>

Concerning (1), Plato offers a number of glosses on the (MEASURE DOCTRINE) that give some indication as to how it should be understood but which do not seem to be equivalent (e.g. *Theaetetus* 152a6–8, 152c2–3, 160c7–9, 161d3–e3, 170d4–6, e4–6, 171d9–e8; cf. *Cratylus* 385e4–386d2). Some possible ways of understanding the (MEASURE DOCTRINE) in the *Theaetetus* are as follows:

- (MD<sub>1</sub>)  $\forall x \forall y \forall F$  ( $y$  appears  $F$  to  $x$  iff  $y$  is  $F$  for  $x$ )  
 (MD<sub>2</sub>)  $\forall x \forall y \forall F$  ( $x$  judges  $y$  to be  $F$  iff  $y$  is  $F$  for  $x$ )  
 (MD<sub>3</sub>)  $\forall x \forall p$  ( $x$  judges that  $p$  iff  $p$  is true for  $x$ )  
 (MD<sub>4</sub>)  $\forall x \forall p$  ( $x$  judges that  $p$  iff  $p$  is true)

MD<sub>1</sub> and MD<sub>2</sub> (which many readers take to be equivalent in the *Theaetetus*) do not explicitly invoke truth (but might nonetheless be regarded as instances of some kind of relativistic view(s); cf. Waterlow 1977; Ketchum 1992). MD<sub>3</sub> explicitly invokes *relative truth* while MD<sub>4</sub> explicitly invokes *non-relative truth* and the term “infallibilism” seems to be the most appropriate label for views like MD<sub>4</sub> (Fine 1994, 1996).<sup>4</sup> How one understands the (MEASURE DOCTRINE) has implications for how one answers (2) and (3) (and vice versa) and there are several further interpretative options beyond those just mentioned.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, each of MD<sub>1</sub>–MD<sub>4</sub> can be understood more narrowly or more broadly. For instance, if one takes MD<sub>1</sub> or MD<sub>2</sub> to quantify only over so-called perceptual properties, then one will understand the (MEASURE DOCTRINE) more narrowly.

Concerning (2), much discussion has focused on one particular argument at *Theaetetus* 171a6–c9 (often called the “*peritropē*” or “self-refutation” argument). There, Plato's Socrates argues that because there are people who judge that the (MEASURE DOCTRINE) is not true, Protagoras himself must agree that the (MEASURE DOCTRINE) is not true. Some (e.g. Fine 1994, 1998a) have taken the argument to be directed against MD<sub>4</sub>. If the (MEASURE DOCTRINE) is construed as per MD<sub>4</sub> (i.e. as a kind of infallibilism according to which every judgement is true) and one allows that there are judgements that MD<sub>4</sub> is not true, then accepting MD<sub>4</sub> seems to lead to a contradiction. When the argument at *Theaetetus* 171a6–c9 is construed in this way, it has often been thought that the argument is straightforwardly successful (cf. Fine 1994, 1998a).

Others have thought that the argument at *Theaetetus* 171a6–c9 should not be construed as an argument against MD<sub>4</sub>, but as an argument against MD<sub>3</sub> (or something like MD<sub>3</sub>). When construed that way there is less agreement as to how the argument proceeds and whether it is successful, but any discussion of these issues should engage with the highly influential work of

Myles Burnyeat on this topic (1976a, 1976b; cf. Nawar 2013b). Burnyeat thinks the (MEASURE DOCTRINE) articulates a claim about relative truth (as per  $MD_3$ ) and glosses such talk of relative truth in terms of private worlds in such a way that “ $p$  is true for  $x$ ” seemingly has the same meaning as “ $p$  is true in  $x$ ’s (private) world” (precisely what this amounts to and whether it offers a substantive form of relativism requires discussion).

Precisely how Burnyeat’s own construal of the self-refutation argument should be understood is not always entirely clear, but it seems to proceed roughly as follows (cf. Wedin 2005). Suppose that a proponent of  $MD_3$  recognises that there are those who do not judge that  $MD_3$  is true. Now, if there are those who do not judge that  $MD_3$  is true, then (as per Burnyeat’s “world’s gloss”) there are worlds in which it is not true that  $\forall x \forall p (x \text{ judges that } p \text{ iff } p \text{ is true in } x\text{'s world})$ . That being so, there are worlds in which or individuals of whom  $\forall x \forall p (x \text{ judges that } p \text{ iff } p \text{ is true in } x\text{'s world})$  does not hold and who are thereby not Protagorean measures. Thus, from accepting  $MD_3$ , i.e.  $\forall x \forall p (x \text{ judges that } p \text{ iff } p \text{ is true for } x)$ , and the fact that some do not judge  $MD_3$  to be true, it seems to follow that  $\exists x \exists p \neg (x \text{ judges that } p \text{ iff } p \text{ is true in } x\text{'s world})$ , i.e. that  $\neg \forall x \forall p (x \text{ judges that } p \text{ iff } p \text{ is true in } x\text{'s world})$ , i.e. that  $\neg \forall x \forall p (x \text{ judges that } p \text{ iff } p \text{ is true for } x)$ .

Many readers are inclined to think that Burnyeat’s reconstruction of the argument takes some illicit step or makes certain dubious assumptions (Fine 1998b; Castagnoli 2004; Wedin 2005; Chappell 2006; cf. Erginel 2009). As Gary Matthews (perhaps the first to notice the problem) puts it in an unpublished paper: “isn’t Burnyeat slipping from the idea of something’s not being true *in* Socrates’ world to the idea of something’s not being true *of* it?” (Matthews cited in Fine 1998b, 152). While there is extensive literature on the topic, there is still room for significant work on these issues and several others in the *Theaetetus* (cf. McDowell 1973; Burnyeat 1990; Nawar 2013a) as well as in other dialogues that touch upon pertinent issues, such as the *Sophist* (cf. Notomi 1999; Crivelli 2012), the *Cratylus* (cf. Sedley 2003; Ademollo 2011), and the *Euthydemus* (cf. Nawar 2017).

### 3. Aristotle: Protagorean measures, virtue, and temporalism

Aristotle’s thought concerning relativistic issues has various strands. In discussing Protagoras (or Plato’s Protagoras as he appears in the *Theaetetus*; cf. McCready-Flora 2015), Aristotle typically takes the (MEASURE DOCTRINE) to articulate a kind of *infallibilism* as per  $MD_{4*}$ , i.e. as the claim that  $\forall x \forall p (x \text{ judges that } p, \text{ then } p \text{ is true})$  (e.g. *Metaphysics* 1009a6–1009a9, 1062b12–1062b15). Given that there are frequently contradictory appearances and judgements, Aristotle points out that Protagoras is thereby committed to embracing contradictions and criticises those attracted to claims like  $MD_{4*}$  accordingly (*Metaphysics* Γ.4–6; cf. Gottlieb 1994; Wedin 2004a, 2004b; Priest 2006, 7–42).

Aristotle takes Protagoras to be wrong in claiming that *any person or appearance whatsoever* is a measure. However, while mere appearance is not *factive* (i.e. it is not the case that if it appears to  $x$  that  $p$ , then  $p$  is true), genuine perception is *factive* (i.e. if  $x$  perceives that  $p$ , then  $p$  is true) (*Metaphysics* 1010b1–3). Accordingly, if claims like  $MD_{4*}$  are taken to include within their domain only those who have genuine *perception* or *scientific understanding* (making accurate judgements about those matters that they genuinely perceive and scientifically understand), then the claims turn out to be true and perhaps even trivially true. One might thereby be inclined to see *some grain* of truth in Protagoras’ claims (*Metaphysics* 1053a35–b3).

In his ethical writings, Aristotle has sometimes been thought to hold that the ethically excellent person is a measure in some substantive sense (e.g. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1113a22–1113b2, 1166a11–13, 1176a10–1176a19). Precisely how this should be understood requires