

# Relativism and Tolerance Revisited

Mark Ressler

September 6, 2008

## Abstract

This paper reviews arguments concerning the relation between relativism and tolerance, both whether tolerance entails relativism, and whether relativism entails tolerance. Two new arguments are offered to support the contention that there is no necessary relation between relativism and tolerance. In particular, building on the classic argument by Geoffrey Harrison, this paper argues that even if there is no strict dichotomy between facts and values, as Harrison had assumed, relativism still does not entail tolerance for every relativized perspective.

In a classic article on the relation between relativism and tolerance, Geoffrey Harrison argues that tolerance seems to follow from relativism only if the claim in relativism that one system is as good as another is given a moral interpretation (1976). In this article, I will review key arguments in the literature on relativism and tolerance to put Harrison's argument into context and will then expand on his argument to address a concern that it seems to rely on a strict dichotomy between facts and values that may not hold.

## 1 Two questions

What is especially curious about the question of the relation between relativism and tolerance is that the question can be asked in either direction, thus yielding two separate questions: Does tolerance entail relativism? Does relativism require tolerance? It seems that either question can be asked since both relativism and tolerance have been advocated at various times, and both have at times been perceived as pernicious in some way, leading to a concern that advocating one may lead to noxious results if the other follows as a consequence.

Furthermore, it seems that both questions can be asked in series: Does tolerance entail relativism, and does that further require tolerance? While apparently circular, this question can properly be asked if the two uses of tolerance at the beginning and end are different or if they emphasize different aspects of tolerance. For example, the first use may concern tolerance of persons, and the second tolerance of particular actions. However, in this case it seems that relativism as middle term can simply drop out, leaving a concern about the

nature and limits of tolerance,<sup>1</sup> namely, if I embrace tolerance of all people and all ways of life, do I have to tolerate everything that they do, particularly the really evil things? Relativism is not clearly part of this issue, so it may be that the concern over the relation between relativism and tolerance is fundamentally a concern over tolerance itself. It is not clear, though, that asking the two questions in series in the other order raises any comparably interesting concern: Does relativism require tolerance, and does that tolerance entail relativism?

In the following sections, I will examine each question separately, noting the arguments already offered in response to each question, and supplementing them with arguments of my own. I argue that both questions should be answered in the negative: Tolerance does not entail relativism, and relativism does not require tolerance.

## 2 Does tolerance entail relativism?

The question whether tolerance entails relativism was raised early in the history of the advocacy of tolerance, in response to John Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Locke 1823), which prompted a response from Jonas Proast charging that the religious tolerance for which Locke argued would lead to moral relativism. Here I rely primarily on Adam Wolfson's analysis of Locke's exchange with Proast through three subsequent (and increasingly lengthy) letters concerning toleration (Wolfson 1997).

As summarized by Wolfson, Locke's argument for religious tolerance is based on three considerations:

These are, first, what appears to be a theological or scriptural claim that there is no evidence that God anywhere committed the care of souls to the civil magistrate; second, what might be called a "psychological argument" that force cannot compel belief; and third, his argument that, "in the variety and contradiction of Opinions in Religion," where the princes of the world differ over which is the true religion, men have little hope of being led into it if they have no other rule but the religion of the court. (Wolfson 1997, 216; Locke 1823, 10–12)

Wolfson notes that Proast seems most concerned with the third consideration, "for it was this one, as Proast himself would note, that was most likely to lead either to unbelief and/or to toleration in matters beyond religion" (Wolfson 1997, 216), namely to tolerance with regard to morality that essentially becomes a form of moral relativism. Proast's concerns seem understandable, since some aspects of Locke's argument have a distinctly relativistic flavor, such as: "For every church is orthodox to itself; to others, erroneous or heretical" (Locke 1823, 18).

---

<sup>1</sup> For discussions of such concerns, see the contributions in (Heyd 1996).

Locke's response to Proast concerning the relation between religious tolerance and moral relativism is to distinguish between those aspects of religion that are subject to reason and those that are not. Tolerance is granted to those aspects of religion that extend beyond the powers of reason to determine and that are inconsequential for salvation. As Locke claims:

... why am I beaten and ill used by others, because, perhaps, I wear not buskins; because my hair is not of the right cut; because, perhaps, I have not been dipt in the right fashion; because I eat flesh upon the road, or some other food which agrees with my stomach. . . . Certainly, if we consider right, we shall find that for the most part they are such frivolous things as these, that, without any prejudice to religion or the salvation of souls, if not accompanied with superstition or hypocrisy, might either be observed or omitted. . . .  
(24)

Yet the aspects of religion that are subject to reason concern the nature of the good, and these are essential for salvation. What goes against reason seems not to be tolerated, however, so the rational search for what is good is therefore not subject to moral relativism.<sup>2</sup> There also seems to be a practical aspect to Locke's limitation of tolerance, since atheists are not to be tolerated on the grounds that promises and covenants are not binding on atheists, and such promises are what hold society together (47).

It is not clear, however, that Locke's arguments can be extended from religious tolerance to tolerance in general, particularly in a case in which what is at issue is precisely tolerance of alternate conceptions of morality. In such a case the distinction that Locke makes between what is subject to rational deliberation and what is not can no longer be made so easily, given the philosophical debate over cognitivist and noncognitivist moral theories, for example.

I am not aware of other literature addressing the question of whether tolerance entails relativism since the time of the debate between Locke and Proast.<sup>3</sup> Wolfson cites Michael Sandel's suspicions concerning the relativist defense of liberal tolerance (Wolfson 1997, 213; Sandel 1984, 1), but those concerns relate more properly to the question of whether relativism requires tolerance. When relativism is used as a defense for tolerance, the question of whether tolerance entails relativism is begged, and the adequacy of the relativist defence of tolerance becomes the key issue. Wolfson also cites Leo Strauss's explanation of the liberalist embrace of relativism (Wolfson 1997, 213–214; Strauss 1953, 5), but Strauss's explanation seems more like a psychological account of the history of the introduction of relativism into liberalism, in which impatience and choice play key roles, rather than an argument for whether tolerance entails relativism.

---

<sup>2</sup> This is of course a very brief summation of the argument, and perhaps overly simplistic. For details and references to the original sources, see Wolfson's analysis.

<sup>3</sup> There is an interview article, (Shayegan, Albaret, and Mongin 2001), but the interview is more concerned with tolerance in modernity and religion rather than with relativism specifically.

Perhaps the lack of literature on this question<sup>4</sup> indicates that it is considered obvious that tolerance does not entail relativism. If it is not obvious, then I offer the following argument based on the grounds for adopting tolerance, whether that tolerance is religious, moral, or otherwise. If the grounds for adopting tolerance are incompatible with relativism, then it seems that tolerance cannot entail relativism. These grounds need not be explicit reasons for adopting tolerance, but may rather form implicit assumptions or conditions underlying the adoption of tolerance.

I take the relevant grounds for adopting tolerance to be epistemological in nature, namely that tolerance is adopted either on the grounds of ignorance or knowledge. For example, I might be tolerant precisely when I am ignorant of what is correct in a given instance, and intolerance would run the risk of rejecting what is correct. Alternatively, I might be tolerant when I know what is correct, but such knowledge also requires tolerance by virtue of other constraints, such as respect for rational autonomy. The specifics or validity of such additional constraints are not important to the argument, only the knowledge or ignorance of what is correct.<sup>5</sup> Although these examples seem to represent my epistemological situation as an explicit reason for adopting tolerance, I suggest that even if my reasons for tolerance are not explicitly epistemological, those reasons can be understood to hold in an epistemological situation in which I either do or do not know what is correct in a given situation, which is sufficient for the following argument by cases.

Suppose that I am ignorant of what is correct in a given case. Then ignorance cannot support a claim of relativism, since relativism seems to represent a positive claim affirming a plurality of points of view.<sup>6</sup> My ignorance is merely a negative claim that I cannot determine what is correct, not a positive claim that each competing point of view is somehow equally valid.

Suppose then that I know what is correct in a given case. Then I know either: (1) that one position is correct and the others are incorrect, (2) that no position is correct, or (3) that several positions are correct. If only one position is correct, then my knowledge cannot support a claim of relativism, since relativism indicates a plurality of positions, not a single one. My tolerance in such a case would seem to represent tolerance for error, not relativism.

If, however, I know that no position is correct, my knowledge cannot support a claim of relativism either, since as already noted, relativism represents a positive claim affirming a plurality of positions, not a negative claim denying all positions. My tolerance in such a case would represent a kind of nihilism or

---

<sup>4</sup> Assuming naturally that I have not been negligent in my search of the literature and have missed something.

<sup>5</sup> Compare this strategy to Mill's arguments for liberty, in which the truth, partial truth, or falsity of an opinion proposed to be silenced are considered in turn (Mill 1989, 53). The grounds for liberty that Mill outlines might likewise have been considered, namely whether these grounds are compatible with relativism; however, I think an analysis in terms of knowledge rather than truth is clearer and stronger.

<sup>6</sup> My claims here concerning what should count as relativism are part of a more comprehensive study of the nature of relativism and its logic, currently in progress, in which I argue for these claims in much greater detail.

perhaps sympathy for the deluded, not relativism.

If I know that several positions are correct, then my tolerance does indeed seem to be compatible with relativism. However, my knowledge in such a case seems already to represent an acknowledgement of relativism or at least pluralism. Yet by hypothesis my tolerance in such a case was grounded precisely in this knowledge. Therefore, I conclude that tolerance entails relativism only when relativism or pluralism is presupposed, thus begging the question. The key question is therefore whether relativism requires tolerance, which I consider next.

### 3 Does relativism require tolerance?

The center of focus in the question of the relation between relativism and tolerance seems to have shifted in the early twentieth century, first because a number of anthropologists began to advocate cultural relativism in earnest, and second because the notion of tolerance began to be challenged, at least as far as its limits were concerned. In particular, Karl Popper argued for the paradox of tolerance:

Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them. (Popper 1966, 265)

Or consider the dilemma concerning tolerance more recently articulated by Bernard Williams:

The difficulty with toleration is that it seems to be at once necessary and impossible. It is necessary where different groups have conflicting beliefs — moral, political, or religious — and realize that there is no alternative to their living together, that is to say, no alternative except armed conflict, which will not resolve their disagreements and will impose continuous suffering. These are the circumstances in which toleration is necessary. Yet in those same circumstances it may well seem impossible. (Williams 1996, 18)

As already noted, there has been significant discussion concerning the nature and limits of tolerance,<sup>7</sup> but my concern here is with the relation between relativism and tolerance, in particular whether relativism requires tolerance.

This question arose in a rather pointed way following the publication of Edward Westermarck's defense of ethical relativity, in which he comments:

I think that ethical writers are often inclined to overrate the influence of moral theory upon moral practice, but if there is any such

---

<sup>7</sup> In addition to the articles in (Heyd 1996), see for example (Halberstam 1982).

influence at all, it seems to me that ethical subjectivism, instead of being a danger, is more likely to be an advantage to morality. Could it be brought home to people that there is no absolute standard in morality, they would perhaps be on the one hand more tolerant and on the other more critical in their judgments. (Westermarck 1932, 59)

In a response that has come to be known as an *argumentum ad Nazium*,<sup>8</sup> W. T. Stace counters:

Certainly, if we believe that any one moral standard is as good as any other, we are likely to be more tolerant. We shall tolerate widow-burning, human sacrifice, cannibalism, slavery, the infliction of physical torture, or any other of the thousand and one abominations which are, or have been, from time to time approved by one moral code or another. But this is not the kind of toleration that we want, and I do not think its cultivation will prove ‘an advantage to morality’. (Stace 1937, 58-59)

However, as William Swabey points out, the kind of tolerance that Westermarck has in mind “is by no means an indiscriminate toleration of all sorts of abominations but rather a critical sifting of our moral judgments, which leaves standing only those judgments which are sincere, only those which express our real feelings of approval and disapproval” (1942, 226). Indeed, the remainder of the paragraph by Westermarck previously cited is concerned not with tolerance, but with the development of a more critical attitude toward one’s judgments that would be cultivated by the adoption of ethical relativism and that would likewise apply to judgments of tolerance.

Still, the *argumentum ad Nazium* continues to be a challenge for advocates of relativism. For Stace, the tolerance of atrocities that seems to be required by relativism serves as an absurdity by which relativism can be refuted, but other philosophers argue that the supposed link between relativism and tolerance is overly hasty. Bernard Williams criticizes a kind of vulgar relativism in which tolerance of other cultures may seem to follow from the relativity of judgments about what is right, arguing that this supposed relation between relativism and tolerance involves a non-relative use of tolerance that is not warranted by the relativity of the notion of what is right from which is supposedly follows (1976, 34–39). Yet Thomas Bennigson suggests in response that the kind of tolerance that features in this sort of vulgar relativism need not be interpreted as relying on a non-relative sense of what is right, and that tolerance may indeed follow from relativism (1999, 272).<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Max Hocutt credits George Graham with this designation: (Hocutt 1986, 188). Obviously, though, Stace was writing prior to the advent of Nazi atrocities, so characterizing his argument as *argumentum ad Nazium* is somewhat anachronistic, but the pattern of argument is the same whether or not Nazis are used to illustrate the sort of evil things that might be tolerated.

<sup>9</sup> I refrain from analyzing this controversy further, since my main concern here will ultimately focus on Harrison’s argument.

In his defense of moral relativism, Gilbert Harman distinguishes between inner judgments and other sorts of moral judgments, namely “We make inner judgments about a person only if we suppose that he is capable of being motivated by the relevant moral considerations. We make other sorts of judgment about those who we suppose are not susceptible of such motivation” (1975, 4–5). Since Hitler was “beyond the motivational reach of the relevant moral considerations” (7), he is not subject to the kinds of inner judgments that constitute the moral relativism that Harman advocates. Yet Max Hocutt claims that Harman’s argument needs to be augmented since it doesn’t answer the charge that relativism seems to preclude external criticism and therefore doesn’t address the *argumentum ad Nazium*. Hocutt argues that the moral relativist can still argue against certain moral conventions by appealing to the interests of “the interests of the people involved” without thereby “appealing to transcendent standards of morality” (1986, 196). Thus it might be claimed that Nazi atrocities were ultimately contrary to the interest of Nazis themselves, and therefore should not be tolerated on such grounds.

I mention these disputes over the *argumentum ad Nazium* primarily to review one focus of concern with regard to the question of the relation between relativism and tolerance. However, I do not think that it is the best way to approach the question. Rather, I think Geoffrey Harrison makes a stronger attempt to understand the relation in question, relying on a more detailed analysis of what precisely is claimed in instances of tolerance and relativism.

Harrison approaches the question of the relation between relativism and tolerance from a somewhat less emotionally charged point of view, without explicit reference to any *argumentum ad Nazium*. After analyzing the nature of tolerance, Harrison argues that whereas it might be thought that the question of what one should do is subordinate to the question of who is to decide what to do, the second question is actually part of the first (1976, 130–131). The key example for Harrison is the case of a doctor deciding whether to give a blood transfusion to a child whose parents disapprove of transfusions on religious grounds. The doctor’s decision whether to give the transfusion or not includes a decision whether to subordinate his decision to the decision of the parents in this case. This point is particularly relevant to the issue of tolerance in relativism, since it might be thought that in a case of relativism, no one can rightly decide between the competing options, so tolerance follows as a consequence. Harrison essentially argues that ultimately each of us must decide in some way.

After distinguishing between participants in a moral system and observers of moral systems, Harrison claims:

Relativism is a metaethical theory, and its truth or falsity is a question for an outside observer. Advocating tolerance or being tolerant are activities which are internal to particular moral systems — the activities of participants. There is nothing that the relativist, qua relativist, can say either for or against tolerance from a moral point of view. The moment he does this he ceases to be an observer of morality and becomes a user of a moral system. (131–132)

The shift from an observer to a participant does not entail any specific obligations, since Harrison rejects attempts to bridge the distinction between facts and values. Since relativism is a descriptive claim about moral systems from an observer point of view, there are no normative consequences when the observer becomes a participant in a particular moral system. Therefore, relativism does not require tolerance.

Having made this argument, Harrison further diagnoses the tendency to link tolerance to relativism in an ambiguity. Relativism is typically characterized in part by the claim that one system is as good as another. Harrison notes that the phrase “as good as” can be given either a non-moral or a moral interpretation (132). A non-moral interpretation would describe only formal or logical features like consistency, coherence, or deducibility from factual premises, but these features do not entail any moral obligation of tolerance. Yet the presence of the word ‘good’ may provide a temptation to adopt a moral interpretation and therefore to adopt a position of tolerance. However, not only is a moral interpretation not necessary to understanding this aspect of relativism, it is a problematic interpretation. Once someone adopts a position of tolerance, one shifts from being an observer of moral systems to a participant in one of them, and “adopting a morality will necessarily involve rejecting at least some aspects of any rival doctrine which is not compatible with one’s own” (133), thus suggesting a version of the paradox of tolerance.

Therefore, for Harrison, the conclusion that relativism requires tolerance is based on faulty reasoning grounded in ambiguity on the phrase “as good as,” and when this phrase is disambiguated, tolerance clearly does not follow from relativism as a consequence.

Subsequent writers have relied on similar distinctions and disambiguations to Harrison’s to argue against a requirement for tolerance in relativism. John Tilley locates a case of ambiguity in the word ‘impose’ as used in a claim that we cannot impose our own system of morals on others, and argues that the only interpretation of the word ‘impose’ that makes sense with regard to tolerance leads to an invalid argument (1994, 6-8). Michael Wreen identifies a case of equivocation on the phrase “no one has a right to interfere”, which is further complicated in contexts where multiple moral truths exists (2001, 334), a point he reiterates in a later article with Hye-Kyung Kim (Kim and Wreen 2003, 454).

Other writers acknowledge that that relativism alone does not require tolerance, but that tolerance can be derived from relativism with the addition of auxiliary premises. David Wong, for example, uses an auxiliary premise derived from Kant’s principle of respect for rational autonomy, and argues that the resulting form of tolerance overcomes problems raised by Harrison and Williams (Wong 1984).<sup>10</sup> Thomas Bennigson criticizes Wong’s derivation, claiming, “Only some types of relativism provide particular grounds for tolerance, and Wong’s own brand of relativism does not belong to those types” (1999, 269–270). Bennigson relies on a distinction between agent relativism and appraiser relativism borrowed from David Lyons (Lyons 1976), and argues that

---

<sup>10</sup> Wong’s views are criticized in (Devine 1987).



agent relativism can provide an argument for relativism with suitable auxiliary principles that are already plausibly held concerning when it is permissible to interfere with the actions of others (Bennigson 1999, 273). Of course, if additional principles are required to derive tolerance from relativism, it may be wondered whether it is primarily the auxiliary principles that lead to tolerance rather than relativism. For example, if mere disagreement over what is right rather than relativism, coupled with the auxiliary principles, can derive tolerance as well, then it seems that the auxiliary principles are primarily responsible for the resulting tolerance, not relativism. Bennigson recognizes this situation with regard to Wong's argument (283), but it is not clear to me that his own argument based on agent relativism rather than the appraiser relativism he sees in Wong's argument overcomes the problem.

## 4 Arguing Beyond a Dichotomy of Facts and Values

The preponderance of argument has been against the requirement for tolerance in relativism, at least without resorting to auxiliary principles.<sup>11</sup> I am not sure how well the various arguments can be synthesized into a single account, but I have not reviewed these arguments to provide such a synthesization, or indeed to engage critically with them much at all. Rather, I have presented them mainly to put Harrison's argument into context.

I find Harrison's article to be the clearest analysis of the relationship between relativism and tolerance, at least concerning the question of whether relativism requires tolerance. Harrison's distinction between the observer and participant levels provides a means for separating relativism from tolerance, while his identification of an ambiguity in the phrase "as good as" provides an explanation of why some have mistakenly thought that tolerance must follow from relativism.

Yet Harrison's argument relies upon a distinction between facts and values, which might be seen as a weakness in his argument. If there is no strict dichotomy between facts and values, the natural tendency to slide from an observer to a participant point of view may indeed result in a kind of entailment between relativism and tolerance. Harrison is certainly not blind to this possibility, and acknowledges bluntly that he is taking a dogmatic stance concerning the dichotomy (Harrison 1976, 123).

However, I think his argument can be expanded to cover this possibility. My strategy will be to argue that even if there is no strict dichotomy between facts and values, tolerance is not the only possible evaluative response to the

---

<sup>11</sup> A few other articles on this topic did not fit very well into my review thus far. I mention them here for the sake of completeness: (Graham 1996) Graham argues against the connection between relativism and tolerance primarily by means of the examples of Nietzsche and Mussolini, both of whom he takes to be relativists that were not in fact tolerant. The remainder of the article is devoted to an argument for objectivism and tolerance. (Speck 1998) Speck offers a fairly loose argument against linking tolerance with relativism, mainly from a Catholic perspective.

supposed fact of relativism.

Suppose that as an observer, I acknowledge a case of relativism in a particular instance. Suppose also that there is a kind of entailment relation between facts and values. What should my response be as a participant? The answer depends upon the specific entailment relation supposed between the facts of relativism and the proposed resulting evaluative response.

As Harrison points out, it is the feature of relativism indicated by the observation that one system is as good as another that seems to require tolerance. The use of the word ‘good’ does seem problematic in this characterization, suggesting a moral interpretation, so I will refer to this feature of relativism more blandly as equity between rival systems. Someone who challenges the separation of facts and values might think that my response to relativism as a participant in such a relativistic system should reflect the structure of the relativism that I recognize as an observer, since any other response to relativism, particularly an absolutist kind of response, would seem to constitute a kind of hypocrisy. An absolutist response would seem to deny the equity that I have acknowledged by hypothesis. Rather my response should be more consistent with my observations in the form of a mirroring requirement, for example: *a response that recognizes relativism should reflect the structural features of that relativism within the response.*<sup>12</sup> I am not convinced that such a requirement can be justified, but for my purposes such justification is not important, since the requirement represents the accepted hypothesis of some kind of entailment relationship between facts and values. My argument is that there are other responses besides tolerance that satisfy this mirroring requirement, and therefore that relativism does not require tolerance even if there is no dichotomy between facts and values.

The crucial consideration for this argument is that facts can be valued positively, negatively, or neutrally, and therefore the structural feature of equity in relativism could likewise be valued in these three ways. Certainly, if the equity that holds between rival relativized systems is valued positively, then tolerance seems to be the result of the mirroring requirement, and my corresponding response to relativism would be to treat all systems as equally good. However, the equity of rival systems can just as well be valued negatively. If other systems with which I disagree must be recognized to be on equal terms with my own, the result may be that I consider all systems, including my own, as equally bad and lapse into a kind of nihilism with regard to the topic of the relativism in question, whether morals or cultures or conceptual schemes.<sup>13</sup> The negative attitude that results from the mirroring requirement in this case is not tolerance, but apathy or even contempt.

More interesting, perhaps is a neutral interpretation of the equity between

---

<sup>12</sup> There may be other ways to deny a dichotomy between facts and values that allow tolerance to follow from relativism, but I think that this formulation captures the common thinking linking tolerance with relativism.

<sup>13</sup> Harrison recognizes this interpretation as a possibility, but only when positions other than one’s own are considered (133). Note that the possibility of the denigration of belief was also part of Jonas Proast’s arguments against Locke, prompted not by relativism, but by tolerance.

rival systems. There may be no need to view such equity as good or bad, but merely to recognize it as a neutral fact. Yet the mirroring requirement demands that my response to this fact reflect the structure of the equity of rival systems. What would a neutral response look like?

Even if rival systems are equal in some way, they still compete in other ways, competing for adherents, resources, and so forth. So it seems to me that a neutral response to the equity in relativism could be recognized in the model of competition in general in which a level playing field is acknowledged prior to competition. It might be thought that a competition between two rivals in which one is clearly better than another is no real competition at all, thus suggesting that true competition provides a suitable model for a neutral conception of equity between relativistic rivals. As an observer in the competition within relativism, I recognize the equity between the rival systems, but as a participant in the competition, I engage in the competition on behalf of my own system with the aim of defeating my rivals.

Like equity itself, this conception of competition may be valued positively or negatively. For example, Mussolini has been cited as an instance of a relativist who is not tolerant (Tilley 1994, 11; Graham 1996, 47), and a negative interpretation of competition may ultimately treat that competition as a call for a kind of genocide, namely that we must destroy all competing systems and their adherents in order to wipe out the very relativism that prompted the competition. Yet the competition in relativism might also be interpreted positively as a call to convert others to a single system in order to share the benefits, even though competing systems might be recognized as equally valid. The cost of continual competition in such as relativized system might be considered simply too high, while sharing a single system might have distinct economic benefits. However, as a kind of globalization, this positive interpretation might just as well be interpreted negatively by those who do not want to be part of that single system.

Yet I don't think the notion of competition that results from a neutral interpretation of the equity in relativism need be viewed as positive or negative at all. For a model of a neutral interpretation of competition, consider neither warfare nor economics, but rather sport. I may recognize my competitors as worthy rivals, even as friends, but once the competition is on, I will do my best to crush them. Yet a single competition does not resolve anything, since there will be other matches, other playing seasons, other Olympics where the competition will continue. Perhaps some may see this model of competition under a positive interpretation, reveling in the perpetual glories of sport, but from my detached perspective it is simply neutral, just something that keeps going on and on.

Thus I conclude that since there are ways of meeting the mirroring requirement other than tolerance, relativism does not require tolerance even if a strict distinction between facts and values is rejected. Given the paradox of tolerance and other such worries, perhaps tolerance is even not the best way to respond to relativism on the rejection of a dichotomy of facts and values, particularly since the notion of competition provides a model for an interpretation of rival

systems in relativism that need not be valued either negatively or positively.

## 5 Conclusion

After examining the relationship between relativism and tolerance, it seems clear to me that there is no necessary connection, though they may be compatible in some cases. I offered an argument based on the epistemology lying behind the justification of tolerance to show that relativism does not follow as a consequence of tolerance unless relativism or pluralism are first adopted as the grounds for tolerance. Then, acknowledging Harrison's argument against the requirement for tolerance in relativism under the assumption of a dichotomy between facts and values, I argued that even if such a dichotomy is rejected, tolerance is not the only evaluative response that can be adopted if relativism is acknowledged as a fact.

As I suggested earlier, in the fundamental concerns raised by the question of the relationship between relativism and tolerance, relativism itself seems to drop out, leaving a concern with tolerance and the paradoxes of tolerance. Consequently, if there is no necessary relationship between tolerance and relativism, tolerance rather than relativism would seem to be the proper focus of concern in this context. Relativism has its own problems to address without complicating it with the problems of tolerance.

### References

- Bennigson, Thomas. 1999. "The Truth in Vulgar Relativism." *Philosophical Studies* 96: 269–301.
- Devine, Philip E. 1987. "Relativism, Abortion, and Tolerance." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 48 (1): 131–138.
- Graham, Gordon. 1996. "Tolerance, Pluralism, and Relativism." In *Toleration: An Elusive Virtue*, edited by D. Heyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Halberstam, Joshua. 1982. "The Paradox of Tolerance." *Philosophical Forum* 14: 190–206.
- Harman, Gilbert. 1975. "Moral Relativism Defended." *The Philosophical Review* 84 (1): 3–22.
- Harrison, Geoffrey. 1976. "Relativism and Tolerance." *Ethics* 86 (2): 122–135.
- Heyd, David, ed. 1996. *Toleration: An Elusive Virtue*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hocutt, Max. 1986. "Must Relativists Tolerate Evil?" *The Philosophical Forum* XVII (3): 188–200.
- Kim, Hye-Kyung, and Michael Wreen. 2003. "Relativism, Absolutism, and Tolerance." *Metaphilosophy* 34 (4): 447–459.
- Locke, John. 1823. "A Letter Concerning Toleration." In *The Works of John Locke*. London: printed for Thomas Tegg [and others].

- Lyons, David. 1976. "Ethical Relativism and the Problem of Incoherence." *Ethics* 86 (2): 107–121.
- Mill, John Stuart. 1989. *On Liberty*. Edited by S. Collini. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Popper, Karl. 1966. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. 5th ed. Vol. I. London: Routledge.
- Sandel, Michael, ed. 1984. *Liberalism and Its Critics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Shayegan, Daryush, Isabelle Albaret, and Olivier Mongin. 2001. "La tolérance condamne-t-elle au relativisme?" *Esprit* November 2001 Supplement: 17–23.
- Speck, Bruce W. 1998. "Relativism and the Promise of Tolerance." *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 10 (1-2): 67–84.
- Stace, Walter Terence. 1937. *The Concept of Morals*. London: Macmillan.
- Strauss, Leo. 1953. *Natural Right and History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Swabey, William Curtis. 1942. "Westermarckian Relativity." *Ethics* 52 (2): 222–230.
- Tilley, John J. 1994. "Cultural Relativism and Tolerance." *Lyceum* 6 (1): 1–11.
- Westermarck, Edward. 1932. *Ethical Relativity*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd.
- Williams, Bernard. 1976. *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*. Reissue ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, Bernard. 1996. "Toleration: An Impossible Virtue?" In *Toleration: An Elusive Virtue*, edited by D. Heyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Wolfson, Adam. 1997. "Toleration and Relativism: The Locke-Proast Exchange." *The Review of Politics* 59 (2): 213–231.
- Wong, David B. 1984. *Moral Relativity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wreen, Michael. 2001. "How Tolerant Must a Relativist Be?" *Public Affairs Quarterly* 15 (4): 329–339.