

## **Who's Afraid of Joseph Margolis? – Cultural Relativity vs. Relativism –**

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### **0. Theme**

My aim here is to criticize Margolis' relativism as presented in his paper "Relativism and Cultural Relativity", which is published in the same issue of this journal. Margolis argues that cultural relativity is basically pre-philosophical and requires relativism as a philosophical doctrine to justify this simple fact. I, on the contrary, think that the perception and experience of the fact of cultural relativity already bears a philosophical character and that we can discover the most important philosophical meaning of phenomena of cultural relativity in this experiential dimension. As for the Margolisian relativism, I think that it not only fails to prove itself coherent as a doctrine, but also not succeed in correctly theorizing the philosophical meaning of cultural relativism. The opposition between us lies not in the world vision but the theory; as far as our world vision is concerned, I sympathize profoundly Margolis.

My paper is divided into two parts. In the first part, I present a rough sketch of my view of the philosophical meaning contained in the experience of cultural relativity. There I refer to just one point of Margolis' paper, because he takes cultural relativity as a simple fact; it is a basic mistake I have to underline. In the second part, I shall analyse Margolis' paper and critically examine some of its essential points. My theme being critique of Margolisian theory, my own view in the first part is given just in order to show the standpoint from which I make my critique.

### **1. Philosophy of Cultural Relativity**

#### **A. Experience of Cultural Relativity and the Dimension of Frame of Reference.**

There are two respectively evident facts and, as a result, an apparent puzzle in terms of their relationship, and it is this that constitutes one of my main concerns in aesthetics. One is cultural relativity and the other is beauty and the aesthetic (I do not take these as synonymous; I shall show later how they differ each other). Although art is one of the basic fields where cultural relativity is pointed out, it seems at the same time that beauty and the aesthetic contain a certain absolute dimension transcending relativity. I know there are many people who are willing to immediately categorize this kind of opinion, or even this kind of questioning as old-fashioned universalism. Indeed, I would not criticize Margolisian relativism because I am a universalist. The problem is more complicated than that. If we notice two opposing facts, we

have to start by acknowledging that there is a problem. So to begin with, I wish to consider the facts of cultural relativity.

In art as well as in other fields, we have many canonical examples of cultural relativity, which are very often brought forward as counter-evidences against the alleged universality or absoluteness of beauty. For example, a gay piece of Japanese music is heard by Western people as sad; a high and a low key in the Western scale are represented conversely among the people of an African tribe; or even in the Western world, the difference of pitch represented in English and in German as that of high and low is represented in Greek, in Latin and in Italian or French as that of acute and grave. To take an example from pictorial expression, a black-and-white drawing in Indian ink, a style that originated in China and spread to Korea and Japan, leaves white, open spaces. These white areas change meaning according to what is drawn with black ink: here it is the sky, there river or lake; a white area can mean a mountain surface, or a wall of a house, or a man's face, even the same man's clothes. What is sky, river, mountain or face to our eyes does not appear so to the eyes of Western people: they take these white spaces for not having been painted yet. We know a famous historian of art who took them for "non finito".

At first, these facts surprise us. Being surprised, we regard them as unbelievable. Sometimes, we find in a manner of perception different from ours a lack of intelligence and civilized refinement: it is regarded as a mark of being foolish and barbarian. Modern Western thought managed to attain the notion of cultural relativity. The itinerary of this revelation is marked by Montaigne, philosophers of the Enlightenment such as Diderot, and the art historians who theorized the style. For us who live at the end of the 20th Century, cultural relativity is a ready-made notion, through which we can understand strange manners of perception found in different cultures. The fact that we can understand them proves that those phenomena are rather superficial. I do not doubt that there exist many Western people who understand the style of black-and-white as sky, the waters as waters: the fact that there are specialists studying this style of drawing in Western countries is sufficient evidence to believe it. And I myself can hear a gay Japanese melody as sad. All I need to do is to change a certain switch in my mind in order to get this effect: it is as if I am looking at a drawing by Escher. Then how about the difference of key? In Japanese, it is represented just as in English, and this schema (high-low) is so deeply rooted in my mind that I cannot discern keys in a different way; that is to say, I cannot hear a high key as 'low'. But it is possible for me to conceive this inverted schema. 'Altus' in Latin means 'deep' (in two directions) and 'high'. It is not easy but not impossible to represent a depth as a height. It is not easy because we need to have a bodily feeling like that of hand-standing. Once the circuit of perceiving depth as height is established, however, we might be able to accept as reasonable the manner of hearing a low key as high (=deep).

We feel dizzy with a drawing by Escher or hand-standing, dizziness coming from an inversion of a perceptive image which is caused by an inversion of the frame of perception. Strictly speaking, to understand a phenomenon of cultural relativity is to experience this dizziness, and it means that our perception has something to do with a customarily established

schema. As we have just verified, we can imitate a different manner of perception particular to a different culture, or at least conceive its rationality, in other words its conformity to a certain schema: this fact means that the schema in question is not 'natural' but 'cultural'. In this respect, the possibility of understanding a different culture is analogous to the fact that with effort we can learn and understand to a certain extent a foreign language. Margolis is right to begin his paper with a reference to the fact of bilingualism. His intention is to interpret the possibility of learning any language in terms of the equality of every culture. But we can relate the same fact to the *competence* which is natural to the human mind, an aspect that Margolis fails to consider. From the point of view of perception, it is the empirical schema that corresponds to the mother tongue, and the ability of acquiring such schema ("transcendental schema") to the native competence of language. But if we consider the problem in terms of linguistic competence-performance, there is no contradiction between universality and relativity.

Now it is clear that the Margolisian notion of cultural relativity is false. According to him, the cultural relativity "is a truth no one ever dream of disputing" and "one extremely tame concession" (p.9). Furthermore, he differentiates it as a "first order fact" from "the relativist's thesis": "By themselves", he says, "the bare facts regarding cultural relativity have no philosophical importance at all"(p.9). Indeed, it is reasonable to distinguish cultural relativity and relativism, and we should find their distinction in a relation of first order and second order. But, nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the philosophical ingredient of cultural relativity. "The bare facts regarding cultural relativity" is far from being "a truth no one ever dream of disputing", but is simply something astonishing, so that we can hardly believe in the possibility of perceiving differently. When we succeed in accepting it as cultural relativity, i.e., acknowledging it as "a truth" no one can dispute, we must have had at least a vague intuition that the perception is based on a frame of reference which is schema, and that its frame of reference is formed, to a certain extent, culturally: a recognition that "there exists a way of seeing and thinking different from mine". Now, this cognition is given to us as common knowledge, and we start with it. As a result, we do not experience the drama of gaining a new recognition. Even so, we have to try at least to perceive in a different way from the usual one in order to be able to accept the fact of cultural relativity.

In other words, to acknowledge the fact of cultural relativity is already to grasp the relativity of the frame of reference. A forerunner such as Montaigne attained this knowledge after having tried many times to adopt in himself different ways of thinking. The relation between the phenomena of perception and its frame of reference is constant: the cultural relativity cannot be regarded as a pre-philosophical fact.

Furthermore, the recognition of cultural relativity carries a question concerning the limits of nature and culture. Even if cultural difference is an evident fact, we are still not sure if everything is determined by culture or how far the control of culture extends. Although Margolis thinks that everything is culturally determined and subject to a constant change, such thoughts as the Kantian idea of "transcendental schematism" would argue that under perception lies a mechanism common and natural to every person. The second vision seems no less evident than the fact of cultural relativity; in fact, as we have mentioned above, we do

understand a different culture to a certain extent. We have to acknowledge that there is a possibility of overcoming cultural difference. The philosophical horizon peculiar to cultural relativity extends this far.

### **B. Limits of cultural relativity— (a) the aesthetic and competence.**

Now we have thus verified that the phenomena of cultural relativity, very apparent as it is, should be considered in relation to its frame of reference, rather than in its aspect of "bare facts". Although perception's frame of reference is a scheme, some facts of cultural relativity have for their frame of reference a world vision or 'philosophy'. Limiting our scope of discussion to aesthetics, I would like to consider the aesthetic with regard to perception, and the beautiful in relation to world vision. I draw a sharp distinction between the aesthetic and the beautiful. The aesthetic is the perceptual properties of an object which are mentally appreciated in reference to a certain framework of judgement (what Kant calls "free play between the imagination and the understanding"); the beautiful, on the contrary, is the overwhelming power that reality exercises on us <sup>1)</sup>.

Let us consider in the first place the aesthetic. My definition above suggests that it is much less important in itself than the beautiful. However, isn't it really a *lampe* leading us to a really unknown dimension? Isn't it under the guidance of the aesthetic that we can arrive at knowing or inventing something truly new? I am thinking now of what a creative artist must experience when he/she breaks fresh ground. It must also be what everyone must experience when he/she arrives at understanding an artistic beauty which he/she has not known before. Indeed, in most cases, an aesthetic judgement is based on a standard that is formed culturally through an accumulation of experiences, a characteristic that is common to all empirical judgements. We move then, by definition, within the horizon of experienced things. But if all judgements were empirical, we would not be able to evaluate anything new we had not had the chance to experience.

An artist in particular (now I am especially thinking of an artist working in traditional Japanese craft, whose work consists in making a thing), undergoes a gradual transfiguration and maturation through finding good a new property his hand happens to realize. Here, he/she does discover this new beauty (the aesthetic in its mode of experience), and not construct it. I can speak only of discovering, because he/she learns for the first time in this concrete example the criterion itself which makes him/her approve it. Discovering a new beauty is an experience of creativity <sup>2)</sup>.

It is impossible to explain this fact of experiencing the new and its positive evaluation as a cultural phenomenon. A new beauty is new because it is irreducible to anything existing, while the cultural is formed and acquired: the problem consists in knowing how it is possible to acquire something. Indeed a new artistic beauty is a cultural phenomenon, but its new element

1) Cf. my paper, "Puissance du beau, Impuissance de l'esthétique—Considération sur l'essence du beau naturel", *JTLA*, vol.2, 1978, pp.39-52.

2) Of course, I bear in mind Margolis' argument that: "The assumption is that there is simply no way discover the true norms of objectivity in any domain at all. ...even our adherence to a bivalent logic (in physics, say) may have to take a constructivist turn"(p.12-13).

is only possible because it is supported by a transcendental faculty. Culture owes its creativity or its transfiguring dynamism to something non-cultural. As for the evaluation of the goodness in a perception, the transcendental is the faculty ("the free play between the imagination and the understanding") that judges a perceptual goodness by a feeling of pleasure/displeasure. This innate faculty belongs to man's nature. An artist invents (discovers=creates) a new beauty, when the form made by this nature which is his hand, is received by this another nature which is the perceptual faculty. As far perception or cognition are concerned, what applies to the new applies to the hetero-culture as well, which appears purely and simply as a kind of newness. The possibility of understanding a hetero-culture presented at the beginning of my paper is sustained by this natural basis.

### C. Limits of cultural relativity — (b) natural beauty

It is our inner nature which supports a perception of the new. Outer nature, i.e., nature as reality, appears to us as natural beauty and reveals the beautiful to us. Natural beauty is true beauty; and artistic beauty is only like its shadow. With natural beauty, there is nothing new to be perceived. It is, however, always new because of its plenitude of reality. Although artistic beauty is a cultural phenomenon, natural beauty has no cultural variance. It is universally beautiful, and presents evidence of the limits of cultural relativity.

Curiously enough, this natural beauty provokes, at the level of its discourse, a phenomenon of cultural relativity: it is a cultural relativity of world vision or philosophy (that of the natural beauty). I am thinking of the aesthetics of Adorno. Many Western philosophers specialized in aesthetics lack an interest in and understanding of natural beauty; it is already a fact of cultural relativity. Among them, Adorno is an exception in having a profound insight into the beauty of nature: it is from this point of view that he criticizes Hegel. In spite of that, however, he maintains that the viewpoint of natural beauty is relative to culture. According to him, the act or attitude of looking at the beauty in nature is programmed by culture, for a farmer pressed by daily needs is indifferent toward the natural beauty stretching before him <sup>3)</sup>.

In my opinion, it is this notion rather than the experience of natural beauty, that is relative to culture: it is determined by the tendency peculiar to the Western culture to overemphasize culture and to neglect nature, so much so that it fails to grasp the reality of natural beauty, which consists in revealing to us our powerlessness and smallness, as acknowledged through the fact that this natural scenery is far beyond our capabilities of making. The beauty of nature is a power, and impossible to be constructed by our consciousness. Then is the Adornian evidence of the needy farmers an invented story? Probably not. Simply, they know that there is beauty in nature, which they could enjoy anytime they wish; consequently, they have established the principle of preferring the necessities of life to natural beauty. For all that, they might happen to be captured by its charm.

3) Cf. my paper, "Consolation of nature: An Essay in Critique of Formative Reason", in *Issues in Contemporary Culture and Aesthetics*, No.5, Departement of Theory, Jan van Eyck Akademie, Maastricht, April 1997, pp.73-83.

Now the problem focuses on the farmers' natural beauty: who is right, Adorno or myself? This is an issue that is probably always pending. It does not concern a fact to be certified, but an interpretation, which is determined by a world vision as its frame of reference. And here, the world vision in question is cultural rather than individual. That would mean that this world vision or philosophy is a typical phenomenon of cultural relativity. For me, the beauty of nature as true beauty is an universal fact transcending cultural relativity. But the philosophy of natural beauty, including my own position on this, is characterised by cultural relativity. Taking as evidence this unsolved opposition of two philosophies of natural beauty, should I then adhere to Margolisian relativism? But in that case I think I would be committing an error. In order to explain that, I have, first of all, to try to understand what relativism is in Margolis' vision.

## 2. The Relativism according to Margolis

### A. Reformulation of the Theory of Margolis

I am a beginner as far as relativism goes, but what is at stake here is not a encyclopaedic knowledge concerning relativism in general, but only the theory of Margolis<sup>4)</sup>. As I have explained above, acknowledging the phenomena of cultural relativity, my view is that, on the one hand, there is a universal dimension in the aesthetic (of the new) as well as the beautiful (in nature), and on the other hand, I recognize that the philosophy of the beauty of nature itself is relative to culture. Margolis, on the contrary, takes cultural relativity as a simple primary fact and claims relativism as the philosophy justifying it. That seems to me a conflicting view that I have to refute. So I will begin by analysing Margolis' paper and representing its outline: his paper is so difficult for a beginner like me that I find it indispensable to take this step. Indeed, it is not a linguistic problem, though his English is not easy for me. After several readings and taking note of the points of his argument, I have even discovered some aspects that are kind to his audience: the author repeats his thesis several times, and occasionally provides a summary of his argument. Having grasped the broad outline of his argument, I can say that it is far from complicated but rather simple and clear in its own way.

Then why does it give an impression of being difficult? I assume two reasons. The first is his polemical style. A controversy implies an exaggeration for the purpose of stressing the difference. For example, the words he uses to present cultural relativity are colored with a polemical bias: he says that the cultural relativity is nothing but "a matter of first-order fact" acknowledged as a "tame concession", which has to be "dismiss(ed) as a false pretender" from the viewpoint of philosophical relativism (p.9). Margolis does not distort his thought. But this rather strong tone is quite different from his real opinion developed afterwards on the relation

4) As for studies dealing with the philosophy of Margolis, I read three papers published in the journal *Man and World*, vol.30 No.2, April 1997: "Joseph Margolis on interpretation" by E. S. Casey, "Margolis and the philosophy of history" by D. Carr, and "Margolis and the historical turn" by T. Rockmore. These are all good papers and I learned a great deal from them about the evolution and the wide scope of Margolis' thought. But as the subject is different, I do not quote them.

between relativism and phenomena of cultural relativity. The initial words quoted above incite us to construe his thesis as something like this: relativism is the sheep, cultural relativity the goat. Following this incitement, one would find it quite hard to grasp the real tone of his argument. It is essential not to be disturbed by this polemical style. Moreover, the fact that he stresses certain points in his argument because of dispute in the United States, makes it seem difficult to a beginner like myself: Margolis always maintains a fighting stance against his supposed enemy, and the points attributed to this supposed enemy do not necessarily coincide with what I want to know. It is prudent for us to ignore this kind of bias.

The second difficulty consists in the way that Margolis tries secretly to enlarge the argument that is otherwise restricted to the field of art or culture. On several occasions, he suggests the possibility of this generalization, but it rather tends to function as noise interrupting the understanding of his thought. In my case, as I distinguish culture from nature and since I think this distinction essential, this noise is quite disturbing, because it diffuses my attention. I would neglect this point as far as possible <sup>5)</sup>.

Consequently, the reformulation we are going to give here of Margolis' argument tries to strip off the polemical bias and to simplify. His paper is divided into three parts. They are not titled, but the argument is roughly articulated as follows. Margolis begins by distinguishing two dimensions of the problem concerning relativism: "alethic" and "ontic/epistemic". The former is the argument concerning truth value, aiming to establish the consequence of relativism; the latter discusses whether the relativistic option is pertinent or not in particular cases. The author repeatedly distinguishes these two points of view, mentioning their co-relative character. In the first paragraph, Margolis examines the "alethic" problem and contrasts relativistic logic with bivalent logic. The second is dedicated to a concrete consideration, through which our philosopher claims, restricting his field of discussion to culture, especially art, to adopt relativism. It is there that he develops his opinion concerning cultural relativity, basing it on the "intentional" character of culture, and maintaining that the logic of justifying cultural relativity is relativism. The third paragraph aims to establish the co-relativity between the two dimensions: the author asserts that the choice of the logical principle (bivalent or relativistic) depends on how we understand the nature of the object (for example that of art). In claiming in particular that bivalent logic is completely impertinent to cultural phenomena, he argues that intentional qualities are determined through social customs (he adopts the Hegelian concept of "sittlich").

The outline of the paper being thus sketched, we shall now discuss some of its main points.

## **B. Notion of "relativistic logic"**

One of the main reasons for the difficulty of Margolis' theory is that he does not provide a definition of relativism. Is relativism an indefinable concept like "being"? Margolis himself admits that it is not an evident one, because he says that cultural relativity is very often

5) Margolis might say that there is no great difference between culture and nature, so that he could simply apply his argument on culture to nature. I would not accept this opinion, because not only in conscience but also through behaviour, he does in fact distinguish nature from culture.

confused with relativism. So he needs to define it. Margolis' paper does in fact contain implicit definitions. What we need, however, is an explicit one, because he speaks of relativism in two different dimensions, and the use of the word there does not seem univocal: the distinction is not made clear enough.

The first use is "relativistic logic", as opposed to bivalent logic. Naturally, Margolis' argument focusses on the refutation, or critique of bivalency, or more exactly, of the claim that bivalency is the only true logic. Bivalent logic admits only two truth values true-false for any judgement or proposition. How, then, is relativistic logic opposed to it? Rejecting the "three-valued set—one that merely adds Indeterminate to the usual bivalent pair", Margolis admits that relativistic logic is a "many-valued" one (p.6). "I am entirely willing", he says, "to label my many-valued values in any way that suits the occasion in hand", and proposes such examples as "apt", "reasonable", "plausible" etc. (p.7). These are examples presented with regard to artworks.

Then why does he deliberately call this polyvalent logic relativistic? The answer may perhaps be found in the third of six essential elements he presents of the relativistic logic: "...truth-claims that, on a bivalent logic... would be formally contradictory or incompatible may be logically compatible when assigned one or another of the replacing many-valued values" (p.6). Let us take as an example ten interpretations of *Hamlet*. According to bivalent logic, if we consider one among them to be true, then the other nine should be judged false, because what is not true must be false. But it does not fit the fact that we accept all interpretations which are good. It seems to me that because he attaches importance to this fact, he prefers to call it relativistic.

Now I should like to devote attention to the conditional clause in the above quote: "...when assigned *one or another* of the replacing many-valued values" (my emphasis). "Replacing" means "which replaces 'true' of the bivalence". We may apply the above mentioned "apt-reasonable-plausible...". Then "one or another" in the clause in question is ambiguous. Simplifying the example, let us take two interpretations of *Helmet*, say A and B. Then what does Margolis mean by "one or another", or that "A is apt, and B reasonable", or even admitting "A is apt as well as B". I think he means the former, because just after the quote above, he continues that "these may be named 'incongruent' values". He means that such values as "apt-reasonable-plausible" are not conflicting or contradictory, and that he wants to use this notion to establish the possibility of pertinence or compatibility of plural interpretations. I do not think that this logic covers the case of two interpretations equally "apt".

I think this ambiguity problematic, because it seems to me that there is a gap between the relativistic view of interpretation and polyvalent logic. "Incongruent" values might be not conflicting or contradictory. But as far as it concerns the truth value which applies to a judgement or proposition, there cannot be plural judgements having an identical truth-value: if there were two judgements having the same truth-value, they must be regarded as the same judgement. That is true both for poly-valence as well as for bivalence (I shall discuss this problem a little later). In the case of the interpretation of an artwork, on the other hand, we can



appreciate two completely different interpretations as equally "apt". That happens because the viewpoint of interpretation can be different, or we can underline different aspects in interpreting the same artwork. We have to acknowledge that "apt/reasonable/plausible" are very fuzzy estimations given to such a complex mental activity as interpreting complex constructions like artworks. Even if two interpretations might be judged "apt", what is referred to by this concept, as well as the implication of the concept, must be different. For this reason, such judgements are "incongruent". Indeed, the more precise the object of interpretation, the more strict becomes the estimation of its adequacy. In an extreme case, the interpretation of a word in a poem or a novel becomes much more univocal: even if there are two possible glosses, we cannot easily speak of their compatibility: we should have to choose one of them in relation to the totality of the work.

This remark incites us to further our critique. When truth-value is concerned, the problem consists in the adequacy of a judgment=proposition. From this point of view, is it possible to think of a case where different poly-valent values are "incongruent"? The most typical poly-valent logic is the logic of probability, and Margolisian value examples "apt-reasonable-plausible" seem to be conceived according to the scale of probability <sup>6)</sup>. Let us suppose three judgements about the same fact:

A = Because of the murder of Mr.Y, Mr.X should be sentenced to twenty years of penal servitude.

B = Because of the murder of Mr.Y, Mr.X should be sentenced to fifteen years of penal servitude.

C = Because of the murder of Mr.Y, Mr.X should be sentenced to ten years of penal servitude.

Then, suppose also that I appreciate that A is apt, B reasonable, and C plausible. But there might be another person who thinks that B is apt, A reasonable, and C plausible. And there will arise a dispute as to whether A or B is apt. Thus, there are two aspects to distinguish: the first is the appreciation of a person concerning different judgments of probability, and the second the different appreciation of different persons concerning the same judgement of probability. When he speaks of "incongruent values", which case does Margolis have in mind? At least from the logical viewpoint, it must be the second, because the compatibility in the first case is not peculiar to polyvalent logic but applicable to bivalent logic: for example, "A is apt" and "B is inapt" are compatible (the pair of apt-inapt is as bivalent as true-false; the reason why I avoid to use "true-false" will be explained later). Now we have to examine the second case in order to know if the different truth-values applied there are really "incongruent". The problem can be concretely formulated as follows: when I appreciate that A is apt, do I admit another person's appreciation that B is apt? In the final analysis, I should not admit it. Even if the difference is just one year of the prison term, the opposition could not be avoided: these different appreciations are not "incongruent".

6) Let me quote a phrase from Margolis' paper: "I should say that something similar obtains in a many-valued logic that admits 'probable' or 'probably true', although it is likely to be intended in non-relativistic ways and is characteristically linked to a bivalent logic"(p.7).

Indeed, this opposition will be sharpened only when we have to make our judgement. Then is it possible to say that the moment of opposition or contradiction belongs not to truth-values such as "apt-reasonable-plausible" but drives from the context in which we live which obliges us to make decisions about our opinions? It might be the case for Margolis: he might simply assert that these truth-values are conceptually or logically incongruent, or non-contradictory. Now we come back in a sense to the above mentioned first choice, only with this difference: it is no longer a matter of the compatibility of two different estimations ("A is apt" and "B is inapt"), but the compatibility, or rather acceptability, of two different judgements ("A" and "B"); though when we say "B is inapt", this judgement B has to be rejected, whereas "B is reasonable" expresses an attitude which admits the judgement B to a certain extent. It seems to me that this is just what Margolis affirms with his notion of "incongruent" truth-values, because he wishes to establish logically the possibility that different interpretations of the same artwork can cohabit.

Now I should like to ask whether the compatibility is intrinsic to would-be incongruent truth-values. I doubt it. As for the bivalent pair true-false, they exclude one another by definition. As for "apt-reasonable-plausible", however, we cannot say they are compatible by definition. Judging only from the conceptual analysis of the words, we cannot tell if "apt" is compatible or not with "reasonable" or "plausible". We should say, "it depends"; in other words, we cannot tell their logical status without referring to the real situation in which they are used. As we have seen above, when we have to decide our opinion, they exclude one another. So at what state are they compatible? My answer would be that it happens when we are indifferent to the opinion of other people. From the viewpoint of Margolis, it should be hoped that we could answer "at the standard state without any bias of the need of decision". But I think this is impossible, since we cannot decide the compatibility of "incongruent" truth-values on the semantic basis. I think this dependence on the real situation of use comes from the essence of these words, which I think represent not context-free judgements but our decision-making judgements. The basic way of use of these words is this: "this judgment is apt/reasonable/plausible for me to make". In other words, these concepts are far from an objective attribution in the way that true-false can be, but represent my attitude taken in my own situation. This was the reason why, wishing to give a bivalent appreciation with regard to the above mentioned examples A, B, and C, I could not say "A is true/B is false", but "A is apt/B is inapt"; it is the personal commitment included in these judgements A, B, C, that does not allow the concepts "true/false" to be applied.

After all, "apt-reasonable-plausible" are not truth-values, but represent different degrees of my possible commitment to the judgement in question. In the case of two different interpretations of the same artwork, if they are compatible, it must be because they do not refer to strictly the same aspect of the work. In a sense, the subject of their attribution is different, so that it is natural that these interpretations are not contradictory. If the object is strictly the same, its different interpretations should oppose one another, and give rise to a dispute. It would be just like the above mentioned case of a gloss of a word in a novel. Margolisian "incongruency" cannot claim a logical status, but is only based upon the praxis of interpretation of artwork at its

macro-level.

Now we must distinguish at least two levels of interpretation: micro and global levels. At the micro level, an interpretation of a word in a novel, for example, opposes and denies another one: it has a truth claim, but of bivalent nature. An interpretation of an artwork in its totality, on the contrary, has a quite different behaviour. Whether it has a truth claim or not depends the interpreter's intention: in other words, it is not decided by its nature. Even if it brings with it a truth claim, this will not be received in bivalent way. Two interpretations of the same work can provide us with aesthetic evidence in their own ways: a good example is the interpretations of the Symphony No. 1 by Brahms recorded by Furtwängler and E. van Beinum. We need not reject one in favor of another: they are "incongruent". If we can speak of truth, that is not a logical truth, but a truth of being, which can be pluralistic: a true king does not exclude the existence of another true king. An interpretation of an artwork is just like an artwork itself, because it is nothing but a way of realizing an artwork. The criterion of the truth of being of an interpretation of an artwork, as well as an artwork itself, is aesthetic evidence or persuasive power.

Now we have arrived at the conclusion that Margolisian "relativistic logic" is a hybrid notion: indeed, interpretations of an artwork are "relativistic" in the sense of "pluralistic", but it is more an effect of the truth of being rather than something that concerns a logical meaning. At the end of the first paragraph, Margolis expresses his hope that "those who have been tempted to drop the notion that interpretative judgements take truth-values at all" (p.7) would come back to relativism, assuring us that his relativism allows him to ascertain that. As we have verified above, we have to disistinguish at least two levels in "interpretive judgements". At the micro level, an "interpretive judgement" has, most often, a bivalent truth-claim, and does not differ from other judgements; this means that it does not require a "relativistic logic". When we pay special attention to the compatibility of plural interpretations, a striking character peculiar to the interpretaton of artwork, this does not concern a truth-value, because it is not situated at the dimension of proposition. In this sense, I think that the intuition of critics who differentiate interpretation and truth-claim is ritht. A critic might claim that his/her interpretation is valid, but it is doubtful if he/she would affirm it as "true". I will discuss in the concluding paragraph the reason why Margolis would affirm relativism as a problem of truth-values.

### C. Notion of "Relativism"

What Margolis calls relativism does not coincide necessarily with "relativistic logic". If they were the same, relativism must be a theory which claims to adopt "relativistic logic" at all occasions. Margolis makes consistently and repeatedly an attack against the position which admits only bivalent logic; he must reject the monopolizing policy of relativistic logic too <sup>7)</sup>. We find only one passage in his paper which can be regarded as a definition of relativism,

7) He does not explicitly say so anywhere, probably because there is no one who maintains in a monistic way relativistic logic. I wonder, at the same time, whether he does not wish somehow to assert relativistic logic as the only one at the extremity.

namely: "For to justify relativism is to qualify the logical variety of admissibly objective truth-claims and to explain why relativism should be favored in certain domain at least"(p.8). The second use of "relativism" here must signify "the relativistic logic", and "the logical variety" seems to designate the right of cohabitation to be allowed to relativistic and bivalent logics. This has been asserted in the first part: "... bivalent and relativistic logics remain compatible and may be jointly used..."(p.6) and: "Whatever advantages accrue to bivalence or relativism depend entirely on our picture at the world in which they apply"(p.7). That is to say, we have to choose either relativistic or bivalent logic according to the nature of the object. The requirement that logic be fitted to the nature of the object is one of the basic elements of Margolisian theory, and constitutes a main topic of parts 2 and 3. If it were not to include this point, his relativism would be lacking the coherency indispensable for a doctrine. That there exist cases where it is not necessary to adopt relativistic logic, is only an affirmation of a local fact. Consequently, it is absolutely necessary to distinguish relativism itself from relativistic logic. It is therefore confusing and misleading to use "relativism" in the sense of relativistic logic, as in the above. In spite of this, the ambiguous wording was possible, it seems, because the basic meaning of "relativism" is to admit the right of plural things (including logic) and to justify their cohabitation instead of considering one thing as absolute, a meaning which was stressed when polyvalent logic was called relativistic.

I have just said that without the distinction of relativism from relativistic logic, Margolisian relativism should lack the coherency of doctrine. Margolis himself, however, might not think so, because, in attacking the monists of bivalent logic, he says the following: "they neglect to explain why our local 'logic' should not be tailored to what we believe a given sector of reality can rightly support in the way of truth-claims" (p.5). Here too he maintains relativism at its global level; but I would like to underline the fact that he thinks it necessary to explain why we refuse to change the principle in an ad hoc way. Isn't this requirement rather surprising? We commonly consider it axiomatic that a doctrine does not change the principle. From this point of view, someone, like Margolis, who wishes to positively maintain the change of principle, needs a theory justifying his opinion. Whose duty is it to supply the proof, the acuser or the accused?

An ism or doctrine can only keep its identity and maintain its position, in as far as it affirms the monistic dominance of its thesis. Cartesian dualism, for example, is a total theory. Unquestionably, an assertion that we can accept monism somewhere, while choosing dualism elsewhere, disqualifies it as a theory. Dualism asserts that all substances are either spiritual or material, and excludes exceptions. Its proper place is ontology, and it exercises a certain controlling function in respect of epistemology and ethics. Indeed, there do exist doctrines having a quite restricted territory. Vitalism, for example, is a theory that asserts a certain life principle *sui generis*, called (by G. E. Stahl), *anima sensitiva*, and it does not cover the non-animate nature. But vitalism only qualifies as a theory because it employs a monist principle to explain all phenomena pertaining to such a vast field of beings as animate nature.

Margolis, on the contrary, admits a quite free change of principle—he says that, under certain conditions, "bivalent and relativistic logics remain compatible and may be jointly used..."

in as *ad hoc* a way as we please" (p.6, my emphasis)—and regards it as the essential element of relativism. I think, for reasons I have already mentioned, that this vision lacks the rationality or coherency of a theory. Margolis questions several times the coherency of "relativistic logic", and makes effort to prove it coherent. But I am convinced that what he needs to prove is the coherency of relativism, i.e., his thesis that we should use properly relativistic and bivalent logics according to the nature of the fields. The only reason I can find for him not having to prove it is the speciality of relativism, that is, a notion that relativism includes the change of principles in an *ad hoc* way. His statement that "relativism need not be an all-or-nothing affair" (p.8) may suggest this; as for me, I think all theory must be all-or-nothing affair. The disposition of this argument recalls us to the paradox of skepticism, whatever he says against it<sup>8)</sup>. However different from skepticism, relativism probably does not suffer from being caught by its own assertion that it only has a relativistic effect (to change principles in an *ad hoc* manner). So is relativism, then, rational in Margolisian sense?

First of all, does the Margolisian assertion contain something forced or inconvenient? Maybe not: it represents the reality we live and practice. In most cases, we live without deciding right and wrong. A time limit of presenting a manuscript or even paying a debt, is most often roughly determined, and two or three days delay does not cause that serious an effect. This looseness helps smooth management of social life. But, if the payment is delayed so long as two or three weeks, and even two or three months..., then people take legal action to decide right and wrong. Indeed, we live under conditions of changing relativistic and bivalent logics. Margolisian relativism theorizes in a straight way this fact of our life: it is pragmatic in its spirit.

Of course, it is not right to compare Margolisian relativism to our behavioural principle. In court, the truth-claim (right or wrong, bivalently) comes to the fore and makes the point in dispute. But in scenes of daily life, it is rarely made. Margolis finds in the interpretation of artwork the most proper field of relativistic logic. In fact, we often recognize several different interpretations of the same work as persuasive; and I do not object to finding in this fact the essential feature of artistic interpretation. I have already mentioned above the problem of whether this fact concerns truth-values. Now, presupposing this relativistic logic and its own fields, I wonder what meaning the claim of relativism can have as a comprehensive doctrine combining relativistic logic with bivalent logic and changing them in *ad hoc* way. Probably nothing but emphasizing a pragmatic world vision, because the change of principles is a banal fact every person practices.

Apart from adopting different logics to different fields, are there any cases where two logics are combined tightly so as to constitute one reality, making it correct to maintain relativism in theorizing the relation itself of these two logics? Margolis discusses the relation between describing and interpreting a painting. There exist really "diverse interpretations of Velásquez's *Las Meninas*, which, on the evidence, cannot be reconciled with a bivalent logic", but at the

8) Of course, I mean by "paradox of skepticism" the argument that the skeptic assertion is to be applied to skepticism itself, thereby making it skeptical. Its relativist version "relativism can only be 'true' relativistically" is referred to on p.4; and the differentiation of relativism from skepticism is argued on p.8.

same time, "there *are* indeed uncontested descriptive claims about *Las Meninas* that rightly fit a bivalent model and even provide, as such, the initial grounds on which relativistically disputed interpretations of the painting effectively vie for objective standing" (p.4). In other words, what he means is that the interpretation of an artwork, the representative activity of relativistic logic, is inseparable from and based upon the description of the work, which is bivalent. Indeed, two logics are here combined and might require a higher theory to formulate their relation. But, here also, there are two problems.

The first concerns the fact that this is a phenomenon limited to artistic interpretation, or interpretation in general at most; beyond the area of interpretation, we might return to the policy of switching two logics. Margolis might consider that all cognitions with truth-claim are interpretation. Being not sure of his personal opinion, I find this a promising option; if all cognitions are interpretation, then relativism as a meta-theory based on interpretation and description as its basis can claim a generality as Margolis does. Here, however, the second problem appears. Because, regarded from this viewpoint, a bivalent logic of description and a relativistic logic of interpretation based upon the description are not two opposing principles as Margolis might believe, but a harmonious relation where one supports the another. Two harmonious logics do not need any higher theory to mediate between them.

Margolisian relativism thus reaches an impasse as regards its capacity of theory. Either Margolis wishes to correlate would-be two logics which are in fact not in opposition to one another, but are two heterogeneous ways of thinking; or, on the contrary, he invents an opposing relation between two harmonious logics. In either case, his relativism is in danger of breaking down as theory. My final question, then is what is the merit of maintaining it in spite of all these difficulties.

#### **D. Use of relativism**

At one point, Margolis speaks of the meaning of relativism as follows. "Imagine that the champions of some political *status quo* insisted that they had found the true norms of invariant human nature—and *therefore* were obliged to treat moral and legal and political and religious questions in accord with a strict bivalence *informed by those ulterior truths*" (p.13. Original emphasis). He thus points out the danger of a fanatic taking his personal vision as the truth and rejecting, according to bivalent logic, all other visions as false. Margolis condemns this attitude as "the false pretensions of a canon that might well wreck us with its own misguided zeal" (*ibid.*). Of course, he proposes relativism as the thought capable of overcoming this danger. The word about "the champions of some political *status quo*" seem abstract to me and difficult to make a concrete image of. I understand, however, through personal conversation with him, that he is thinking of the religious, political and cultural ungenerosity which he finds even in the politics of the United States. The accusation against ungenerosity through philosophical theorization belongs to a history of noble ideas that goes back to Locke and Voltaire, and we find here something of the sound common sense supporting the Enlightenment.

Unfortunately, however, nobility does not immediately ensure the truth of an opinion. First

of all, we have to ask whether it is not "false zeal" rather than bivalent logic that is responsible for this danger of ungenerosity. To affect many other people for the purpose of social reform is clearly an effect of a "zeal". Margolis, of course, condemns "false zeal". Where does its falseness come from? We may consider all zeals to be false; the only solution then is asceticism. But Margolis does not incite us to renounce the world. There must be "good" and "false" zeals. Then isn't it the case that when the basic cognition is false, the "zeal" arising from it becomes accordingly false? If so, it is almost impossible to control zeals one by one. For all cognitions that inspire a zeal have necessarily a truth-claim, and we assert something with zeal only because we are convinced that it is true. This pragmatic character is an essence of the truth. A thesis no-one is against is not called truth; a true thesis is something which many people are not aware of and may even oppose when it is formulated<sup>9)</sup>. A truth is a truth, because it goes against different views. It would therefore make no sense to expect self recognition to be false because of "the false zeal". The only prevention is to point out the general possibility of being false: the prudence such as "man is subject to making error", or a wisdom such as "zeal deceives us" might be efficacious. Margolisian relativism in aim and spirit is in touch with this wisdom.

Relativism is not, however, a wisdom, but a philosophical doctrine which aims to justify this wisdom; in other words, it claims a general range. The assertion of relativism as a general theory consisted in switching logics according to the nature of the field of application. This standpoint, indeed, is in opposition to the monopolized bivalent policy of "the champions of some political *status quo*". Nevertheless, Margolisian relativism appears somehow similar to the political opinion of those "champions". This impression comes from the fact that both emphasize the meaning of reality and wishes to generalize it. Then what does their difference consist in? Margolis would say that although "the champions of political *status quo*" take bivalence as the only logic without reflection, his relativism is the result of a critical examination of the correlative relation between logic and object. I am afraid, however, that his relativism would fail in attaining its object, because it aims to justify reality philosophically. Its intention is to refute the bivalent way of thinking of "the champions of political *status quo*", but I fear that it would actually end in serving their bivalence. Margolisian relativism asserts that we should choose the logic according to the nature of the object. But "the champions of political *status quo*" also says, echoing him, that that is just what they think. They wish to adopt bivalence in ethics, religion and politics, not because they think that bivalence is the only logic, but because they are convinced that they must follow the bivalent especially in ethics, religion and politics. Margolis has only one weapon against this opinion: he says that judgement on the nature of object should be made "sittlich". Even this weapon might be captured by his enemy, because from the "sittlich" point of view, it is not necessarily heterodox to think that we must judge bivalently in ethics, religion and politics: the existence of people with this opinion might support and strengthen the position of "the champions of political *status quo*".

9) Cf. my paper, "Fiction et vérité", in *Aesthetics*, No.3, the Japanese Society for Aesthetics, 1988, pp.33-46.

### **Conclusion: Cultural Relativity vs. Margolisian Relativism**

Margolisian relativism originates in a prudent precaution against the arrogant conviction that we are inclined to have in the abosoluteness of our own opinion, and a noble thought willing to admit the right of existence of cultural others. But I find that the relativism he proposes as the solution for this is not only insufficiently coherent as theory, but also dangerous because it can be easily utilized as the logic to defend the opposite opinion it criticizes. Margolisian relativism is constituted on two levels. The first is that of "relativistic logic". Relativistic logic, as opposed to bivalent logic, is polyvalent, but is called relativistic because of the emphasis laid on the compatibility of plural opinions: a model case is provided by the interpretation of artwork. Margolis, however, does not claim to adopt this logic in all cases, but to change the logic (bivalent or relativistic) according to the nature of the object: this is relativism in strict sense.

Theoretical failures are found on both of these two levels. As for relativistic logic, Margolis puts in question the behaviour of truth-values, and truth-values concerning propositions. However, the relativistic nature asserted there is that of interpreting artworks; it is certain that there can exist several good interpretations of the same work, but it is not possible to reduce the interpretation to a proposition. The basic defect there consists in trying to theorize in terms of truth-values that which cannot be a problem of truth-values. As for relativism which claims to change logics according to field, although it corresponds to the reality we experience, it is based upon a mistake in interpreting our different attitudes towards reality in terms of truth-claims. Even if we can take as a model the relation of description (=bivalent logic) and judgement (=relativistic logic) in interpretation, these two logics integrate one another and do not require relativism as a theory of mediation. These are the main points of the theoretical failure of Margolisian relativism.

Now, considering how it can be used, we must acknowledge the danger of it being seized as a weapon by the enemy, contrary to Margolis' will. By arguing that we should choose a proper logic according to the nature of the object, Margolis aims at rejecting bivalent logic in ethics, religion and politics. The champions of bivalent logic, however, would pretend that they choose bivalent logic exactly according to the nature of the object. It is a defect peculiar to general theories. It is nothing but a scandal for a theory to support the errors that it intends to target.

In conclusion, because of an erroneous philosophical ambition to justify its own position in terms of logic or truth-values, noble thought not only fails to realize a coherence as theory, but has to undergo a tragic frustration of serving the ideological enemy. What we should do is not to justify this reality, but maintain the standpoint of cultural relativity. From the viewpoint of cultural relativity, we are never allowed to take our own axiological standards as absolute: the recognition of cultural relativity is already accompanied by an awareness that it is not a simple matter of fact, but concerns a relativity of world vision as a frame of reference for judgement as well as perception. At the same time, this fact of cultural relativity provokes the question of whether natural universality exists, and if so, where its boundaries are. So we are doubly



restrained from monopolizing our familiar way of thinking. In this sense, the idea of cultural relativity is a true philosophical wisdom.

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