

## Reply to Shogenji on Relativism

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In "A Consistent Relativism" (Hales 1997) I offered a formal logical system (RL) for truth relativism, defining two new operators for "absolutely" and "relatively". This system was intended to be, as the title of the paper suggested, a consistent relativist logic, not the only possible one. I modeled the system on the alethic modal logic S5 for two reasons. The first is that the traditional self-refutation problem of global relativism can be beautifully and compellingly demonstrated in an S5 framework in a way that conforms to people's gut worries about relativism. The second reason is that S5 is, for better or worse, the default modal system philosophers seem to accept. Thus I hoped that the relativist logic I presented spoke a logical *lingua franca*.

Shogenji (1997) argues that the self-refutation proof I gave fails if one uses an S4 relativist logic instead of S5. This should come as no surprise. The choice of logical system is crucial for all proofs. Even *modus ponens* fails if we abandon traditional logic for certain relevance logics. Two questions immediately arise: (1) should an S4 relativist logic be employed instead of S5? and (2) can "everything is relative" be proven false in an S4 relativist logic? Shogenji argues that the answer to the first question is yes. His argument proceeds by questioning the symmetry of the commensurability relation, a requirement of RL. To my mind, however, the rejection of symmetry is too hasty, and implicitly relies on a dubious and undefended concept of a perspective. Some concept of a perspective is needed by all parties, but Shogenji's realist vs. idealist example trades on perspectives as somehow being established by the intentions of individual persons, which seems suspicious. No matter. The answer to question (2) is also yes, as Shogenji admits in footnote 5.

Since "everything is relative" is false in both an S5 relativist logic (like RL) and an S4 one, it is pretty hard to see the great advantage the defender of "everything is relative" gains by going the S4 route. His central thesis is false in both. In fact, I agree with Shogenji that "everything is relative" turns out false no matter which modal system is supplemented with "absolutely" and "relatively" operators. What more is needed to persuade us that "everything is relative" is false and to look about for which logical system will permit the strongest relativistic claims? Strangely, Shogenji is still not convinced. Instead, he concludes that "this only means that a glo-

bal relativist should not impose a single logic on all perspectives as a universal tool of truth evaluation". I am not quite sure what this means, but it sounds as if a champion of "everything is relative" is advised cagily to avoid being pinned down as to choice of logical system, in the knowledge that as soon as she settles upon one, her thesis is false. I leave to the reader an evaluation of the philosophical plausibility of this approach.

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#### REFERENCES

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