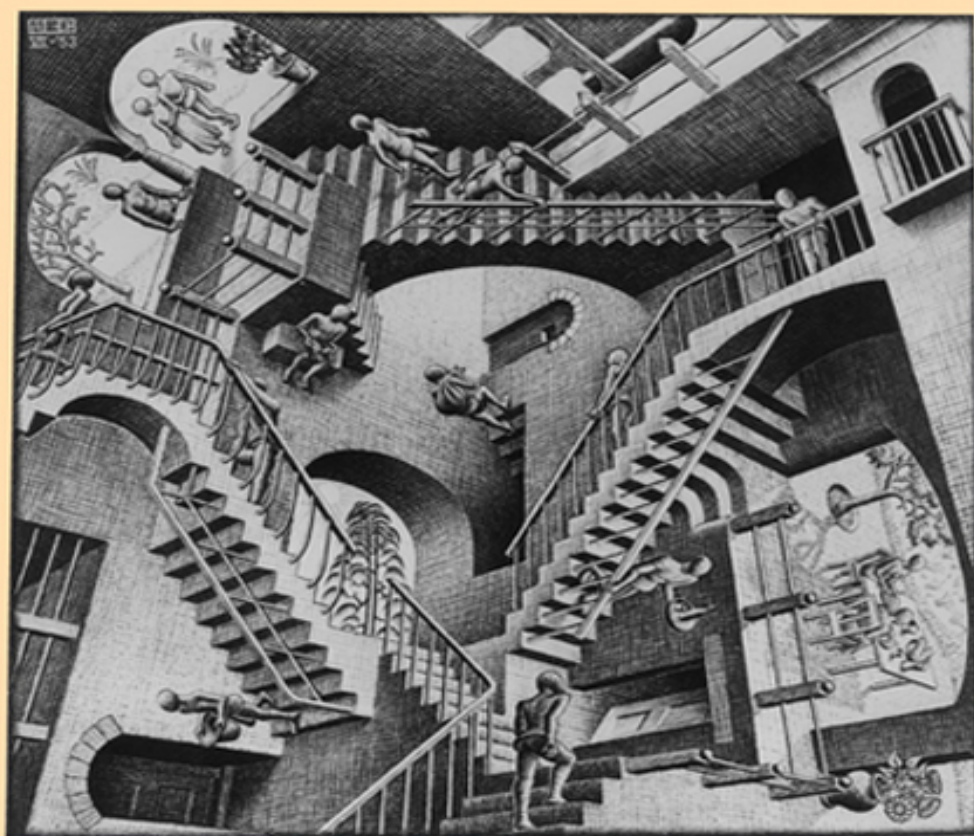


*Blackwell
Companions to
Philosophy*

A COMPANION TO RELATIVISM



Edited by
STEVEN D. HALES

 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

Table of Contents

Cover

Table of Contents

Blackwell Companions to Philosophy

Title page

Copyright page

Notes on Contributors

Acknowledgments

Introduction

Part I: Characterizing Relativism

1 Global Relativism and Self-Refutation

1. Self-Refutation

2. Defining Relativism about a Feature F

3. Relativism about Truth

4. Defining Global Relativism

5. Difficulties with Unrestricted Global Relativism

6. Difficulties with Global Indexical Relativism

7. Applying Global Relativism to Itself

8. Self-Refutation Again

2 Relativism Requires Alternatives, Not Disagreement or Relative Truth

1. Two Intuitions Underlying a Consensus on Relativism

2. The Real Dividing Issue: Is the World One or Many?

3. Disagreement and Relative Truth

3 Three Kinds of Relativism

1. Thoroughgoing Relativism

2. Alethic Relativism

3. Absolutist Relativism

4 Varieties of Relativism and the Reach of Reasons

1. Definition

2. General Contrasts between Relativism and Absolutism

3. Reference Frames

4. Domains

5. Levels

6. Values

7. Absolutist Strands a Relativist Might Negate

8. On the Putative Self-Contradiction of Relativism

9. Reach of Reasons

10. Conclusion

Part II: Truth and Language

5 Truth Relativism and Truth Pluralism

Introduction

1. Truth Relativism

2. Metaphysics of Truth Relativism

3. Truth Relativism and the Scope Problem

4. Truth Pluralism

5. Example: Relative Moral Truth

6. Conclusion

6 The Many Relativisms: Index, Context, and Beyond

Introduction

1. Relativism and Apparent Faultless Disagreement

2. The Many Relativisms: Moderate vs. Radical

3. Moderate Relativisms: Indexical vs. Non-indexical Contextualism

4. Radical Relativism: Content vs. Truth Relativism

5. The Many “Relativism”s

7 Variation in Intuitions about Reference and Ontological Disagreements

Introduction

- 1. Semantics, Cross-Cultural Style**
- 2. Metalinguistic and Linguistic Intuitions**
- 3. Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference**
- 4. The Vacuity of Ontological Disagreements**
- 5. Conclusion**

8 Centered Worlds and the Content of Perception

- 1. Relativistic Content**
- 2. The Argument from Primitive Colors**
- 3. The Argument from the Inverted Spectrum**
- 4. The Argument from Dual Looks**
- 5. The Argument from Duplication**
- 6. Conclusion**

9 Conceptual Relativism

- 1. What is Conceptual Relativism?**
- 2. The Kantian Roots of Conceptual Relativism**
- 3. Epistemology or Metaphysics?**
- 4. Conceptual Relativism and Truth**
- 5. The Scheme and Content Relativized?**

6. Davidson Against the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme

7. Empirical Sources: Conceptual Relativism in Linguistics and Psychology

10 The Limits of Relativism in the Late Wittgenstein

Introduction

1. Anti-Realism and Meaning

2. Two Types of Anti-Realism

3. What Functions Are “Language-Games” Supposed to Serve?

4. Realism and (Dummett’s) Anti-Realism

5. Resisting Transcendentalism

6. Wittgensteinian Realism

Part III: Epistemic Relativism

11 Epistemological Relativism: Arguments Pro and Con

Introduction

1. Arguments Con

2. Arguments Pro

3. Ambivalence Concerning Relativism? The Case of Richard Rorty

4. A Newer Argument Pro: Hales’s Defense of Relativism

12 Relativism About Epistemic Modals

- [1. Epistemic Modals](#)
- [2. Contextualism](#)
- [3. Contextualism about Epistemic Modals](#)
- [4. Relativist Proposals](#)
- [5. Relativists' Arguments Against Contextualism](#)
- [6. Conclusion](#)

[13 Relativism and Confirmation Theory](#)

[Introduction](#)

- [1. First Attempts](#)
- [2. The Bayesian Paradigm](#)
- [3. What Good Is There in a Subjectivist Confirmation Theory?](#)
- [4. Concluding Remarks](#)

[14 Epistemic Relativism, Epistemic Incommensurability, and Wittgensteinian Epistemology](#)

- [1. From the Epistemology of Disagreement to Epistemic Relativism](#)
- [2. The Irrelevance of Epistemic Externalism](#)
- [3. Wittgensteinian Epistemology and Epistemic Relativism](#)
- [4. Williams's Wittgensteinian Contextualism](#)
- [5. Wittgensteinian Epistemology Reconsidered](#)

6. Concluding Remarks

15 Relativism and Contextualism

Introduction

1. Classical Invariantism and the Ho-Hum View

2. Relativism and Contextualism: Clarifications and Distinctions

3. Relativism and Contextualism: A Quick Look at Some Sample Views

4. Flexibility and Disagreement, Charity and Error: A Common Motivating Idea, and a Common Objection

5. Conclusion

Part IV: Moral Relativism

16 Relativism in Contemporary Liberal Political Philosophy

Introduction

1. Liberalism and Relativism

2. Liberalism, Reasonable Disagreement, and Relativism

3. Liberal Approaches to Universal Justification and Application

4. Conclusion

17 Secularism, Liberalism, and Relativism

Introduction

1. Tolerance and Blasphemy

2. Muslim Identity and Internal Reasons

3. Liberal Pluralism

18 Moral Relativism and Moral Psychology

Introduction

1. Psychological Studies of Folk Moral Judgments

2. From Expressivism to Moral Relativism

3. From Sentimental Rules to Moral Relativism

4. From Constructive Sentimentalism to Moral Relativism

19 Bare Bones Moral Realism and the Objections from Relativism

Introduction

1. Three Objections From Relativism

2. Bare Bones Moral Realism

20 Virtue Ethics and Moral Relativism

Introduction

1. The Confrontation of Aristotelian Virtue Ethics and Moral Relativism

2. Foot's Challenge

3. MacIntyre's Tradition-Based Defense of the Virtues

- [4. Nussbaum's Non-Relative Virtues](#)
- [5. The Ethical Naturalism of Foot and Hursthouse](#)

[21 Relativist Explanations of Interpersonal and Group Disagreement](#)

[Introduction](#)

- [1. The Tacit-Agreement Approach to Morality as Social Construction](#)
- [2. Speaker Relativism](#)
- [3. What it Might Mean for Morality to be Constructed as Part of Human Culture](#)
- [4. Explaining Moral Commonalities and Differences Across Cultures](#)
- [5. Relativism and the Meaning of Moral Terms](#)
- [6. Explaining Intra-Group Disagreement](#)
- [7. Why Fundamental Intragroup Disagreement Might Be Inevitable](#)

[Part V: Relativism in the Philosophy of Science](#)

[22 Relativism and the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge](#)

[Introduction](#)

- [1. Disentangling the Social](#)

- 2. The Definition of Relativism**
- 3. The Confusion of Relativism and Idealism**
- 4. The Confusion Between Relativism and Subjectivism**
- 5. The Confusion Between Relativism and Particularism**
- 6. Are All Truths Absolute Truths?**
- 7. Propositions**
- 8. Concept Satisfaction**
- 9. Rules**
- 10. The Naturalistic Framework**
- 11. Verbum Sat Sapienti**

23 Incommensurability and Theory Change

- 1. Relativism and Incommensurability**
- 2. Semantic Incommensurability**
- 3. Methodological Incommensurability**
- 4. Prospects for Incommensurability**

24 Thomas Kuhn's Relativistic Legacy

Introduction

- 1. Paradigms, Disciplinary Matrices, and Epistemological Relativism**
- 2. Incommensurability**
- 3. The Transcendence of Truth**
- 4. World-Change, Idealism, and Ontological Relativism**

**5. Relativism in the Sociology of Science
and the History of Science**

25 Anti-Realism and Relativism

**Part VI: Logical, Mathematical,
and Ontological Relativism**

26 Horror Contradictionis

Introduction

1. Logic and Confronting the Truth

2. Avoiding Contradiction in Discourse

**3. Relativism Inside Logic: Ways of Avoiding
Contradictions**

**4. Avoiding Contradiction in the Setting of
Agency**

5. Conclusion

**27 Varieties of Pluralism and
Relativism for Logic**

Introduction

**1. Defining Terms: Relativism, Pluralism,
Tolerance**

2. What Is Logic?

3. One Route to Pluralism: Logic-as-Model

**4. The Boundary Between Logical and Non-
Logical Terminology**

5. Vagueness

6. Relativity to Structure

28 Relativism in Set Theory and Mathematics

Introduction

- 1. Mathematical Relativism: Does Everything Go In Mathematics?**
- 2. Conceptual, Structural and Logical Relativity in Mathematics**
- 3. Mathematical Relativism and Mathematical Objectivity**
- 4. Mathematical Relativism and the Ontology of Mathematics: Platonism**
- 5. Mathematical Relativism and the Ontology of Mathematics: Nominalism**
- 6. Conclusion: The Significance of Mathematical Relativism**

29 Putnam's Model-Theoretic Argument

- 1. The Model-Theoretic Argument**
- 2. Difficulties and Differences**
- 3. Putnam's Progress**
- 4. Implications**
- 5. Objections and Replies**

30 Quine's Ontological Relativity

Introduction

- 1. The Inscrutability of Objectual Reference**
- 2. Empiricism, Naturalism, and Provincialism**

31 Carving Up a Reality in which There Are No Joints

Introduction

1. Sameness and Objects

2. The “Softness” of Sameness in Kind and Numerical Sameness

3. Carving out Strange Kinds

4. Carving Out Strange Individuals

5. The World Onto Which We Project Kind- Sameness and Persistence

6. We Who Project Kind-Sameness and Persistence

Index

Blackwell Companions to Philosophy

This outstanding student reference series offers a comprehensive and authoritative survey of philosophy as a whole. Written by today's leading philosophers, each volume provides lucid and engaging coverage of the key figures, terms, topics, and problems of the field. Taken together, the volumes provide the ideal basis for course use, representing an unparalleled work of reference for students and specialists alike.

Already published in the series:

- 1.** The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy, Second Edition

Edited by Nicholas Bunnin and Eric Tsui-James

- 2.** A Companion to Ethics

Edited by Peter Singer

- 3.** A Companion to Aesthetics, Second Edition

Edited by Stephen Davies, Kathleen Marie Higgins, Robert Hopkins, Robert Stecker, and David E. Cooper

- 4.** A Companion to Epistemology, Second Edition

Edited by Jonathan Dancy, Ernest Sosa, and Matthias Steup

- 5.** A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy (two-volume set), Second Edition

Edited by Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit

- 6.** A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind

Edited by Samuel Guttenplan

- 7.** A Companion to Metaphysics, Second Edition

Edited by Jaegwon Kim, Ernest Sosa, and Gary S. Rosenkrantz

- 8.** A Companion to Philosophy of Law and Legal Theory,
Second Edition
Edited by Dennis Patterson
- 9.** A Companion to Philosophy of Religion, Second Edition
Edited by Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper, and Philip L. Quinn
- 10.** A Companion to the Philosophy of Language
Edited by Bob Hale and Crispin Wright
- 11.** A Companion to World Philosophies
Edited by Eliot Deutsch and Ron Bontekoe
- 12.** A Companion to Continental Philosophy
Edited by Simon Critchley and William Schroeder
- 13.** A Companion to Feminist Philosophy
Edited by Alison M. Jaggar and Iris Marion Young
- 14.** A Companion to Cognitive Science
Edited by William Bechtel and George Graham
- 15.** A Companion to Bioethics, Second Edition
Edited by Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer
- 16.** A Companion to the Philosophers
Edited by Robert L. Arrington
- 17.** A Companion to Business Ethics
Edited by Robert E. Frederick
- 18.** A Companion to the Philosophy of Science
Edited by W. H. Newton-Smith
- 19.** A Companion to Environmental Philosophy
Edited by Dale Jamieson
- 20.** A Companion to Analytic Philosophy
Edited by A. P. Martinich and David Sosa
- 21.** A Companion to Genethics
Edited by Justine Burley and John Harris
- 22.** A Companion to Philosophical Logic
Edited by Dale Jacquette
- 23.** A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy

Edited by Steven Nadler

24. A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages

Edited by Jorge J. E. Gracia and Timothy B. Noone

25. A Companion to African-American Philosophy

Edited by Tommy L. Lott and John P. Pittman

26. A Companion to Applied Ethics

Edited by R. G. Frey and Christopher Heath Wellman

27. A Companion to the Philosophy of Education

Edited by Randall Curren

28. A Companion to African Philosophy

Edited by Kwasi Wiredu

29. A Companion to Heidegger

Edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall

30. A Companion to Rationalism

Edited by Alan Nelson

31. A Companion to Ancient Philosophy

Edited by Mary Louise Gill and Pierre Pellegrin

32. A Companion to Pragmatism

Edited by John R. Shook and Joseph Margolis

33. A Companion to Nietzsche

Edited by Keith Ansell Pearson

34. A Companion to Socrates

Edited by Sara Ahbel-Rappe and Rachana Kamtekar

35. A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism

Edited by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall

36. A Companion to Kant

Edited by Graham Bird

37. A Companion to Plato

Edited by Hugh H. Benson

38. A Companion to Descartes

Edited by Janet Broughton and John Carriero

39. A Companion to the Philosophy of Biology

Edited by Sahotra Sarkar and Anya Plutynski

40. A Companion to Hume

Edited by Elizabeth S. Radcliffe

41. A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography

Edited by Aviezer Tucker

42. A Companion to Aristotle

Edited by Georgios Anagnostopoulos

43. A Companion to the Philosophy of Technology

Edited by Jan-Kyrre Berg Olsen, Stig Andur Pedersen, and Vincent F. Hendricks

44. A Companion to Latin American Philosophy

Edited by Susana Nuccetelli, Ofelia Schutte, and Otávio Bueno

45. A Companion to the Philosophy of Literature

Edited by Garry L. Hagberg and Walter Jost

46. A Companion to the Philosophy of Action

Edited by Timothy O'Connor and Constantine Sandis

47. A Companion to Relativism

Edited by Steven D. Hales

Also under contract:

A Companion to Schopenhauer, Edited by Bart Vandenabeele

A Companion to Relativism

Edited by
Steven D. Hales

 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**
A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2011

© 2011 Blackwell Publishing Ltd except for editorial material
and organization © 2011 Steven D. Hales

Blackwell Publishing was acquired by John Wiley & Sons in
February 2007. Blackwell's publishing program has been
merged with Wiley's global Scientific, Technical, and Medical
business to form Wiley-Blackwell.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate,
Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

Editorial Offices

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19
8SQ, UK

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer
services, and for information about how to apply for
permission to reuse the copyright material in this book,
please see our website at www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell.

The right of Steven D. Hales to be identified as the author of
the editorial material in this work has been asserted in
accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act
1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in
any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted
by the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, without
the prior permission of the publisher.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic
formats. Some content that appears in print may not be

available in electronic books.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book are trade names, service marks, trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publisher is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book. This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold on the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A companion to relativism / edited by Steven D. Hales.

p. cm. – (Blackwell companions to philosophy ; 74)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4051-9021-3 (hardback)

ISBN 978-1-4443-9248-7 (ebk)

1. Relativity. I. Hales, Steven D.

BD221.C65 2011

149-dc22

2010038871

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

Notes on Contributors

Mark Balaguer is Professor and Chair of Philosophy at California State University at Los Angeles. He is the author of *Platonism and Anti-Platonism in Mathematics* (1998) and *Free Will as an Open Scientific Problem* (2009).

Akeel Bilgrami is Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University. He is the author of *Belief and Meaning* (1992) and *Self Knowledge and Resentment* (2006).

Alexander Bird is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Bristol, and is author of *Thomas Kuhn* (2000) as well as co-editor of the *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*.

David Bloor is Professor Emeritus at the University of Edinburgh. His books include *Knowledge and Social Imagery* (1976), *Wittgenstein: A Social Theory of Knowledge* (1983), *Wittgenstein on Rules and Institutions* (1997), and *Scientific Knowledge: A Sociological Analysis* (1996, with B. Barnes and J. Henry).

Paul Boghossian is Silver Professor of Philosophy at New York University. He is the author of *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism* (2006).

Berit Brogaard is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Missouri, St Louis. She has published in journals such as *Noûs*, *Philosophical Quarterly*, *Philosophical Studies*, and *Philosophy and*

Phenomenological Research. She is the editor of *Erkenntnis*.

Otávio Bueno is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Miami. He is the author of *Constructive Empiricism: A Restatement and Defense* (1999) and the co-author of *Elements of Paraconsistent Set Theory* (1998, with Newton da Costa and Jean-Yves Béziau).

Igor Douven is Professor of Philosophy at the Institute of Philosophy, Centre for Logic and Analytical Philosophy, at the Catholic University of Leuven. He is the editor of *Scientific Realism* (2005) and has published in journals such as *Mind* and *Synthese*.

Andy Egan is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Rutgers University. He has published articles in journals such as *Philosophical Review*, *Philosophers' Imprint*, and *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*.

Crawford L. Elder is Professor and Chair of Philosophy at the University of Connecticut. He is the author of *Real Natures and Familiar Objects* (2004).

Maximilian de Gaynesford is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Reading. He is the author of *John McDowell* (2004), *Hilary Putnam* (2006), and *I: The Meaning of the First Person Term* (2006).

Christopher W. Gowans is Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University. He is the author of the entry on moral relativism in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and the editor of *Moral Disagreements* (2000).

Steven D. Hales is Professor of Philosophy at Bloomsburg University. His books include *Relativism and*

the Foundations of Philosophy (2006, 2009) and *Nietzsche's Perspectivism* (2000, with Rex Welshon).

Patricia Hanna is Professor of Philosophy and Professor of Linguistics at the University of Utah. She is the co-author of *Word and World: Practice and the Foundations of Language* (2004, with Bernard Harrison).

Gary L. Hardcastle is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Bloomsburg University. He is co-editor of *Logical Empiricism in North America* (2003, with Alan Richardson) and is the Executive Secretary of the Philosophy of Science Association.

Bernard Harrison is Emeritus E. E. Erickson Professor of Philosophy, University of Utah, and Emeritus Professor in the Faculty of Humanities, University of Sussex. He is the author of *Form and Content* (1973) and the co-author of *Word and World: Practice and the Foundations of Language* (2004, with Patricia Hanna).

Max Kölbel is ICREA Research Professor at the University of Barcelona. He is the author of *Truth Without Objectivity* (2002) and the co-editor of *Relative Truth* (2008, with Manuel García-Carpintero).

Michael Krausz is Milton C. Nahm Professor of Philosophy at Bryn Mawr College. His books include *Rightness and Reasons: Interpretation in Cultural Practices* (1993), *Varieties of Relativism* (1995, with Rom Harré), and several edited volumes on relativism.

Graham M. Long is Lecturer in Politics at Newcastle University. He is the author of *Relativism and the Foundations of Liberalism* (2004).

Dan Lopéz de Sa is an ICREA Researcher at the Logic, Language and Cognition Research Group at the University of Barcelona. He has published in journals such as *Mind*, *Noûs*, *Synthese*, and *Analysis*.

Michael P. Lynch is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Connecticut. His books include *Truth in Context* (1998) and *Truth as One and Many* (2009).

Edouard Machery is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh. He is the author of *Doing Without Concepts* (2009).

Christian B. Miller is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Zachary T. Smith Faculty Fellow at Wake Forest University. He is the editor of *The Continuum Companion to Ethics* (forthcoming), and has published in journals such as *Ethics* and *Noûs*.

Christopher Norris is Distinguished Research Professor in Philosophy at Cardiff University. His books include *Quantum Theory and the Flight from Realism* (2000) and *Philosophy of Language and the Challenge to Scientific Realism* (2004).

Duncan Pritchard is Chair in Epistemology at the University of Edinburgh. His books include *Epistemic Luck* (2005), *Knowledge* (2009), and *Epistemic Disjunctivism* (forthcoming).

Carol Rovane is Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University. She is the author of *The Bounds of Agency: An Essay in Revisionary Metaphysics* (1998) and *For and Against Relativism* (forthcoming).

Patrick Rysiew is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Victoria (Canada). He has published in journals such as *Noûs*, *Philosophical Quarterly*, and *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

Howard Sankey is Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne. He is the author of *The Incommensurability Thesis* (1994), *Rationality, Relativism and Incommensurability* (1997), and *Scientific Realism and the Rationality of Science* (2008).

Stewart Shapiro is O'Donnell Professor of Philosophy at Ohio State University. His books include *Philosophy of Mathematics: Structure and Ontology* (1997), *Thinking about Mathematics: The Philosophy of Mathematics* (2001), and *Vagueness in Context* (2006).

Harvey Siegel is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Miami. His books include *Relativism Refuted: A Critique of Contemporary Epistemological Relativism* (1987), *Educating Reason: Rationality, Critical Thinking, and Education* (1988), and *Rationality Redeemed? Further Dialogues on an Educational Ideal* (1997).

Kenneth A. Taylor is Henry Waldgrave Stuart Professor of Philosophy at Stanford University. His books include *Reference and the Rational Mind* (2003) and *Referring to the World* (2007).

Johan Van Benthem is University Professor of pure and applied logic at the University of Amsterdam and Henry Waldgrave Stuart Professor of philosophy at Stanford University. His books include *The Logic of Time* (1983), *Logic, Language, and Meaning* (2 vols, 1991), and *Logical Dynamics of Information Flow* (2009).

David B. Wong is the Susan Fox Beischer & George D. Beischer Professor of Philosophy at Duke University. His books include *Moral Relativity* (1984) and *Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism* (2006).

Acknowledgments

Chapter 4: This chapter is adapted from Michael Krausz, “Mapping Relativisms,” in Michael Krausz (ed.), *Relativism: A Contemporary Anthology*. Copyright © 2010 Columbia University Press; used by arrangement with the publisher.

Chapter 11: This chapter is adapted from Harvey Siegel, “Relativism,” in Ilkka Niiniluoto, Matti Sintonen, and Jan Woleński (eds.), *Handbook of Epistemology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2004), pp. 747–780; used with permission from Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Chapter 30: Text extracts from “Ontological relativity,” in W. V. O. Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (Columbia University Press, 1969); reprinted with permission of the publisher.

Introduction

Relativism is one of the oldest and most tenacious ideas in all of philosophy. About 2,500 years ago, Protagoras reportedly began his book *Truth* (now regrettably lost) with the claim that “Of all things the measure is man, of the things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not.” Protagoras was apparently struck by the fact that there were situations in which it looked like two parties disagreed, and yet they were both right. Protagoras’s idea is explained by Plato in his dialogue *Theætetus*: suppose we both have the same wind blowing in our faces and you are cold and I am hot. You claim that it is a cold wind and I claim that it is a hot wind. While we disagree, it seems implausible that one of us is objectively right and the other objectively wrong. Not only could we argue indefinitely without resolution, but it seems quite peculiar to suppose that there even is some absolute matter of fact upon which we might converge. Protagoras’s solution is that we are both right: it is a hot wind relative to me and a cold wind relative to you. There is no further, human-independent fact of the matter.

Protagoras’s relativism is a form of conflict resolution. You and I dispute about whether the wind is hot or cold, and some sort of relativizing move is a way to make the disagreement go away. There are other approaches to disagreements too. Here are a few:

- 1** We keep arguing even though you think I’m too hard-headed to ever to see the light of reason, and I think the same thing about you.
- 2** We agree to disagree and move on to other topics.
- 3** We compromise and decide that we’re each partially right. We agree that the wind is sort of hot and also sort