1. Background

1.1. Reminder: Norm-Circularity Argument

Suppose that there are two epistemic systems, $C_1$ and $C_2$, such that:

a. According to $C_1$, $E$ justifies $B$;

b. According to $C_2$, $E$ does not justify $B$; and

1. If it’s an absolute fact that $E$ justifies $B$, then there is some justification for favoring $C_1$ over $C_2$.
   (From R1)
2. The only justification for favoring $C_1$ over $C_2$ presupposes $C_1$.
3. If the only justification for $C_1$ over $C_2$ presupposes $C_1$, then that justification is circular.
4. According to any acceptable epistemic system, circular justification is impossible.

R2. $\therefore$ It is not possible to arrive at justified beliefs about what absolute epistemic facts there are.
   (From 1-4)

Boghossian doesn’t try to refute Norm-Circularity in this chapter (though he does in the next). Rather, he shows that there are independent reasons for rejecting epistemic relativism. (a “direct objection” in the language of my handout.)

2. Nagel’s Objection

1. Any considerations against the objective validity of a type of reasoning are attempts to offer reasons against it.
2. Any attempts to offer reasons against a position must be rationally assessed.
3. $\therefore$ Any considerations against the objective validity of a type of reasoning must be rationally assessed.
4. If something is rationally assessed, then it is assessed according to a valid type of reasoning.
5. $\therefore$ All considerations against the objective validity of a type of reasoning require a valid type of reasoning. (From 3,4)

Rebuttal to Nagel’s Argument: Epistemic relativism does not deny that there is some kind of reasoning in play; it only denies that it is absolute and objective.

3. Traditional Objection

1. If epistemic relativism is true, then nothing is objectively justified, but justified only relative to a particular epistemic system.
2. The following is either objectively justified or justified only relative to a particular epistemic system:
   a. Nothing is objectively justified, but justified only relative to a particular epistemic system.
3. If 2.a. is objectively justified, then it is contradictory.
4. If 2.a. is only justified relative to the relativist’s epistemic system, then there is no reason for non-relativists to believe in relativism.
5. $\therefore$ If epistemic relativism is true, then there is no reason for non-relativists to believe in relativism.

Rebuttal to the Traditional Argument: Recall that the Norm-Circularity Argument rests on general assumptions that most non-relativists do accept:

- According to any acceptable epistemic system, circular justification is impossible.
- In evaluating an epistemic system, there is no alternative but to use some epistemic system or other.

Hence, 2.a is not only justified relative to the relativist’s system, but relative to any acceptable system.

4. Galileo Objection

4.1. Key Terms

An epistemic principle is a general statement of the form: For all $p$ and $S$, if $S$ satisfies condition $C$, then the $S$’s belief that $p$ is justified.

Ex. (Observation) For any observational proposition $p$, if it visually seems to $S$ that $p$, then $S$ is justified in believing that $p$. 
An epistemic judgment is an instance of an epistemic principle, where \( p \) and \( S \) have specific values.

Ex. If it visually seems to Galileo that lunar mountains exist, then Galileo is justified in believing that lunar mountains exist.

### 4.2. The Galileo Objection

G1. If it visually seems to Galileo that lunar mountains exist, then Galileo is justified in believing that lunar mountains exist.

G2. It visually seems to Galileo that lunar mountains exist.

G3. Galileo's observations justify his belief that lunar mountains exist. (From 1,2)

G4. \( \therefore \) The statement, Galileo's observations justify his belief that lunar mountains exist, is an absolute epistemic fact of the form \( E \) justifies \( B \). (From the definition of an absolute epistemic fact + G3)

G5. If epistemic relativism is true, then there are no absolute epistemic facts of the form \( E \) justifies \( B \). (Non-Absolutism)

G6. \( \therefore \) Epistemic relativism is not true. (From 4,5)

A variant of the Galileo Objection is one in which we do one/more of the following: (a) swap “Galileo” for a different person (b) swap “lunar mountains exist” for a different beliefs, or (c) use different epistemic judgments than ones appealing to visual seemings (e.g. deductions, inductions, etc.)

### 4.3. Pushing the Argument Further

Now, it may be that relativists could deny G1 or G2. However, it's hard to see how G2 has anything to do with epistemic relativism. Moreover, for epistemic principles, such as (Observation), to be applicable, G2 must be true. So, perhaps relativists would deny G1. This would mean:

\( \sim \)G1. It visually seems to Galileo that lunar mountains exist, but Galileo is not justified in believing that lunar mountains exist.

Boghossian raises a problem with this strategy: \( \sim \)G1 entails the following:

(Not-Observation) For some observational proposition \( p \), it visually seems to \( S \) that \( p \), but \( S \) is not justified in believing that \( p \). (From \( \sim \)2)

Indeed, this generalizes:

1. If epistemic relativism is true, then no variant of the Galileo Objection is sound.
2. If no variant of the Galileo Objection is sound, then all epistemic judgments are false.
3. If an epistemic judgment (e.g. G1) is false, then its corresponding epistemic principle (e.g. Observation) is also false.

4. \( \therefore \) If epistemic relativism is true, then all epistemic principles are false. (From 1-3)

5. Epistemic systems are sets of epistemic principles.

6. If epistemic relativism is true, and statements of the form “\( E \) justifies \( B \)” stand any chance of being true, then they must be interpreted as According to the epistemic system that I, \( S \), accept, \( E \) justifies \( B \) (Epistemic Relationism).

7. Statements of the form “\( E \) justifies \( B \)” stand some chance of being true.

8. \( \therefore \) If epistemic relativism is true, then statements of the form “\( E \) justifies \( B \)” must be interpreted as true according to a set of false principles. (From 4-7)

9. Statements of the form “\( E \) justifies \( B \)” need not be interpreted as true according to a set of false principles.

10. \( \therefore \) Epistemic relativism is false. (From 8,9)

### 5. Incomplete Propositions

5.1. Potential relativist rebuttal to the Galileo Objection

Suppose that G3 is neither true nor false; it is incomplete.

What is an incomplete proposition? One that requires more information to be “filled in” before it can be determined whether it’s true or false. For example, the following is incomplete:

Tom is taller than….

If G3 is incomplete, then it’s not an absolute fact, so it seems as if we can stop the Galileo Objection dead in its tracks.
5.2. **Boghossian vs. Incompleteness**

1. Suppose that epistemic relativism is true and the statement, *Galileo’s observations justify his belief that lunar mountains exist*, is incomplete.

2. If anything will complete this statement, it’s the statement, *According to epistemic system C, Galileo’s observations justify his belief that lunar mountains exist*.

3. But if the statement, *Galileo’s observations justify his belief that lunar mountains exist*, is incomplete, then so is the statement, *According to epistemic system C, Galileo’s observations justify his belief that lunar mountains exist*.

4. ∴ If epistemic relativism is true, then either the statement, *Galileo’s observations justify his belief that lunar mountains exist*, is complete or the statement, *According to epistemic system C, Galileo’s observations justify his belief that lunar mountains exist* is incomplete. (From 1-3)

   • But this is precisely the set of options that won’t let notion of incompleteness help the relativist.

6. **Pluralism Objection**

1. If epistemic relativism is true, then there are genuinely different epistemic systems, but no facts in virtue of which one of these systems is more correct than any of the others.

2. If there are genuinely different epistemic systems, then there is at least one $E$ and $B$ such that one system entails that $E$ justifies $B$ and the other entails that $E$ does not justify $B$.

3. It cannot be the case that $E$ both justifies and does not justify $B$.

4. If it cannot be the case that $E$ both justifies and does not justify $B$, then there is a fact in virtue of which one epistemic system is more correct than another.

5. ∴ Epistemic relativism is false (from 1-4)