

To Have in One's Power

The Use of Perspectives in Genealogy
Draft



CAMERON HUBBARD
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
RIVERSIDE



I

Perspectivism & Disinterested Inquiry

Reading Nietzsche as a Perspectivist

I I

II

III

Nietzsche's perspectivism is sometimes offered as the cornerstone of his mature philosophy.

We may suspect a natural resonance that makes this especially so in the case of his genealogical method.

Perspectivism is likely to demand radical innovations in our approach to inquiry.

Genealogy is manifestly such an innovation.

An Interpretive Tension

I I

II

III

The use Nietzsche makes of genealogy generally would then be something we hope perspectivism helps us better to understand.

Yet, the more seriously we take the implications of perspectivism, the more there may seem to be a philosophical tension between the two.

If genealogy requires the disinterested pursuit of knowledge, then perspectivism looks as if it makes its practice impossible.

Disinterested Genealogists & the ‘English Psychologists’

I I

II

III

In the preface to *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche inveighs against ‘English hypothesizing *into the blue*.’ (GM Preface: 7)

Nonetheless, he praises these ‘English psychologists.’

GM I: 1

These explorers and microscopists of the soul are basically brave, magnanimous, and proud animals who know how to keep a rein on their hearts as well as their pain and have trained themselves to sacrifice all desirability to truth, to every truth, even plain, harsh, ugly, unpleasant, unchristian, immoral truth...

The Castration of the Intellect

I I

II

III

But if there is only a perspectival seeing, only a perspectival knowing, then what room is there as well for such a hard-headed ideal of truth? (*GM* III: 12)

Worse, isn't this admiration for the devotees of that ideal precisely what Nietzsche claims to reject by his perspectivism?

Doesn't he say, in the Third Treatise of the very same book, that to harden yourself against the affects for the sake of truth would 'be to *castrate* the intellect?' (*GM* III: 12)

Dissolving the Tension & Revising Objectivity

I I

II

III

My argument is that genealogy is not a method of castration.

Rather, genealogy constitutes Nietzsche's attempt to radically revise the concept of **objectivity**.

There is no inconsistency with the perspectivist backdrop because that future objectivity is just what we anticipated it would require.

Dissolving the Tension & Revising Objectivity

I I

II

III

Nietzsche's praise of the so-called 'English psychologists' is avowedly not praise for their scholarly output, but instead for the 'resolute reversals of the familiar perspectives and valuations...' to which these cold frogs are driven by the most refined manifestation of the will to truth. (*GM* III: 12)

These are nonetheless indispensable stilts for doing so, as 'to see differently in this way for once, to want to see differently, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its future 'objectivity...'' (*GM* III: 12)

Future Objectivity

I I

II

The new objectivity demands precisely that we be not disinterested.

III

Future Objectivity (*GM III*: 12)

To see differently in this way for once, to want to see differently, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its future ‘objectivity’—the latter understood not as ‘disinterested contemplation’ (which is a non-concept and absurdity), but rather as the capacity to have one’s pro and contra in one’s power, and to shift them in and out: so that one knows how to make precisely the difference in perspectives and affective interpretations useful for knowledge.

Future Objectivity

I I

II

My further claim is that:

III

1. Genealogy cultivates the capacity to be objective in this revisionary sense by forcing the genealogist to exercise and expand the capacity to occupy different perspectives.
2. It makes that capacity useful by producing knowledge that meets Nietzsche's new standards.

What these standards are we can then articulate by considering what the point of objectivity could be to a perspectivist.



II

The Significance of Nietzsche's Perspectivism

Motivating Perspectivism

I

II

III

At the core of perspectivism are two fundamental thoughts.

1. The first-person stance is inescapable.
2. The first-person stance is always bounded.

From these two thoughts, the conclusion that there is only a perspectival seeing, knowing, acting, and so forth follows.

The Consequences of Perspectivism

I

II

III

Does the bounded nature of a perspective also represents limitations for its occupant?

Following Lanier Anderson, I think we can fruitfully approach that as a question about the boundaries and limitations of our representations.

Representation

Our representation of something is the mode or manner in which it is present to us from inside the first-person stance.

The Consequences of Perspectivism

I

II

III

According to Anderson, to be a perspectivist minimally requires accepting that no bounded perspective is without representational limits.

This raises the issue of what those limits are and of whether perspectivists might coherently disagree about their character.

The Possibility of Absolute Representation

I

II

The denial of perspectival limitations entails the possibility of absolute representation.

III

Bernard Williams called an aspiration to represent the world independently of any perspective the ‘absolute conception of the world.’

The absolute conception is the conception of the world *as it is* in itself, rather than *as it seems*.

The question concerning perspectives and absolute representation is whether the world as it seems to us could also sometimes be the world as it is in itself.

Two Kinds of Impossibility

I

II

III

Representing the world as it is in some region or locality may not be enough to realize the aspiration to the absolute conception of the world.

Many of its aspirants do not aim at absolute though merely local representation, but rather at the ideal of a total, comprehensive representation of the world-in-itself in its entirety.

There could only be one such absolute representation and so only one absolute perspective.

Absolute Representation vs. the Absolute Conception

I

II

III

The possibility of absolute representation and the possibility of *the absolute representation* are *prima facie* distinguishable.

A perspectivist could deny the possibility of the absolute conception without denying the possibility of all absolute representation.

The Limits of Philosophy

I

II

III

For example, one of the well-known claims that Williams made in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* was that it would be a mistake either to do away with all our standards for ethical concepts or to take the standard for those concepts to be that of absolute representation.

Since the absolute conception demands either the absolute status of ethical concepts or their demotion as a genuine element of the world, that is already enough to rule out its possibility.

Restricted & Unrestricted Perspectivism

I

II

III

Williams is generally taken to accept the existence of genuinely absolute representations in some part of the non-ethical world.

I am happy enough to still call this a form of perspectivism.

Indeed, Anderson's own stance seems to be that minimal perspectivism requires only the rejection of the absolute conception.

Restricted & Unrestricted Perspectivism

I

II

One of his major concerns is the debate amongst Nietzsche scholars about whether he is only a minimal perspectivist.

III

Restricted

Restricted interpreters restrict the impossibility of absolute representation to some class of representations, usually a restriction fairly similar to the one Williams accepts.

Unrestricted

Unrestricted interpreters deny both the possibility of the absolute conception and the possibility of any absolute representations at all.