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Understanding Nietzsche's perspectivism and reconciling it with perspectival realism

Abstract: Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche often suggest that he is some form of anti-realist, i.e. he does not affirm objective scientific truth or understanding of the world. Nietzsche advocates a viewpoint known as perspectivism, which may seem to cement this anti-realist interpretation, insofar as it emphasises the perspectival nature of understanding. Similarly, Justin Remhof interprets Nietzsche as an object constructivist, i.e. that objects within the world are constructed by human concepts, and this also seems to align neatly with anti-realist interpretations. This essay will show how both Nietzsche's perspectivism and object constructivism are compatible with a realist understanding of the world, in relation to a position known as perspectival realism. Furthermore, this essay will clarify the exact 'world' that Nietzsche believes one can understand, as the non-transcendent world of appearance.

Within *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche writes that "There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective 'knowing'; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more complete will our 'concept' of the thing, our 'objectivity' be".¹ This quotation serves as the basis for a viewpoint known as perspectivism, which is the epistemic position that all knowledge or understanding is from some particular point of view or interpretation. This precludes objective understanding, and thus brings it into conflict with scientific realism; the view that scientific claims can deliver objective and mind-independent truths regarding the world, i.e. truths that exist irrespective of human activity. Another view point typically held in opposition with scientific realism is constructivism, which, broadly, is the view that scientific knowledge is to some extent produced by the interactions and practices of human beings. If knowledge is neither objective nor mind-independent, then this is commonly held to entail an anti-realist position. This essay will contrast Justin Remhof's constructivist account of Nietzsche and Brian Leiter's empiricist perspectivist interpretation, highlight the tension between them, and set forth my own interpretation which develops a constructivist position which accommodates aspects of both. During the second half of the essay, I will show that my interpretation of Nietzsche is compatible with a scientific realist position, by demonstrating its overlap with a view known as perspectival realism. I will argue that Michela Massimi's perspectival realism shows how perspectivists can attain non-relativistic truth regarding the

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufman & R.J. Hollingdale, (USA, Vintage Books, 1969), III, 12

world, and can, in fact, be committed to the basic realist tenet of understanding reality. Finally, I will argue that ‘reality’, for Nietzsche, is a non-transcendent world of appearance.

Constructivism about objects

Before considering perspectivism, I begin with Justin Remhof’s argument that Nietzsche is a constructivist about objects. This is the view that all objects are socially constructed, “the existence of all objects we can encounter, such as rocks, trees, and planets, depends essentially on the application of concepts to the world relative to our needs, interests, and values”.²

Remhof’s argument is as follows:

- 1) Only bundles of forces exist
- 2) If so, then if objects exist, they are identical to unified bundles of forces.
- 3) Objects exist.
- 4) So, objects are identical to unified bundles of forces.

Thus far, the argument is exploiting Nietzsche’s will to power as the fundamental ontology of reality, i.e. all reality consists of power relations or forces (“the world viewed from inside... would be ‘will to power’ and nothing else”, and “we live in a world whose essence is will to power”).³ Further evidence that Nietzsche believes that forces are the fundamental entities of reality is his support for physicist Roger Boscovich who advocates this view.⁴

The following premises, however, are more contentious:

- 5) Bundles of forces are unified by virtue of human practices.
- 6) So, objects are identical to bundles of forces unified by virtue of human practices.
- 7) If so, then human practices bring all objects into existence.
- 8) So, human practices bring all objects into existence.⁵

² Justin Remhof, ‘Defending Nietzsche’s Constructivism about Objects’, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 25:4, (2017) pp. 1132-1158 p. 1132

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Marion Faber, (USA: Oxford University Press, 1998), 36 and 186

⁴ *ibid.*, 12 and,

Op. cit., Remhof, p. 1140

⁵ *Op. cit.*, Remhof, p. 1133

Textual evidence

In defence of 5, Remhof quotes *KSA* 13:14 (98): “A ‘thing’ is the sum of its effects, synthetically unified by a concept”.⁶ This suggests that to be a ‘thing’, the application of a concept is required. Since applying concepts is a human practice, then human practices are requisite for the existence of ‘things’. Since a ‘thing’ here stands for objects within the world, then one can derive premise 6 that objects are unified through human practices. The “effects” that a thing has within the world consists of its empirical properties. The effects are therefore “synthetically united” insofar as the empirical properties are organised, i.e. human beings interpret their sensory experience, the interactions of bundles of forces, with some organisation, and this provides the ‘unity’ which gives rise to an object.⁷

Regarding 7 and 8, one may enquire in what ontological sense the objects are brought into existence, e.g. physically, conceptually? Remhof writes that the existence of objects depends upon stipulated identity conditions, and such conditions presuppose conceptualisation. He derives this from *KSA* 12:2 (77): “A thing = its qualities; but these equal everything which matters to us about that thing; a unity under which we collect the relations that may be of some account to us”.⁸ Again, according to Remhof, ‘thing’ stands for object, and the thing’s “qualities” are precisely the identity conditions stipulated by a given concept. Furthermore, construction of objects is empirically constrained insofar as objects are orderings of bundles of forces (empirical properties of the world). As such, objects consist of things that are already ontologically present within the world. Remhof’s own example concerns planets; the empirical properties or things which constitute planets already exist within the world, but ‘planets’ only exist once human beings create the concept of a ‘planet’ with particular identity conditions, which organise particular empirical properties.⁹ Objects are constructions insofar as they are conceptual organisations of empirical properties, and without human practices to conduct such organisation, they would not exist.¹⁰

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 1134

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 1135

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 1136

¹⁰ I intend to establish Nietzsche’s view, without supposing that constructivism itself is a coherent position.

Assessing textual evidence

Two primary considerations should be upheld when assessing source material from Nietzsche's work. Firstly, whether or not the material is derived from his published work. The unpublished material gathered subsequent to Nietzsche's mental collapse is known as the *Nachlass*, and its usage is controversial. One reason is that one cannot be sure that Nietzsche ever intended to publish it, and may have rejected its content. As such, Hollingdale proposes that any material within the *Nachlass* that finds no parallel within the published material is simply invalid as evidence for Nietzsche's thought.¹¹ This approach may seem severe, but Hollingdale defends it on the grounds that Nietzsche was a proponent of "experimental philosophy", i.e. trying out different points of view (indeed, this is a central aspect of his perspectivism). By experimenting with various ideas, one may entertain notions with which one disagrees.¹² Supposing that Nietzsche may try this approach in his notes, then all unpublished material demands a sceptical approach as prescribed by Hollingdale.

The second consideration is the publication date since it is widely agreed that Nietzsche's thinking regarding truth developed throughout his writings. Clark divides his work into a first phase, a second (beginning in the 1880s), and a third (beginning in 1887 with *Genealogy*).¹³ She argues that beginning with the second phase, he rejects the Kantian distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves, i.e. the separation between how the world appears to human beings and how the world really is in-itself. In the final phase, Nietzsche rejects Schopenhauer's falsification thesis – that our knowledge of the world is necessarily false.¹⁴ This latter principle follows from the distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves insofar as reality itself is therefore unknowable. Thus, to reject this distinction undermines Schopenhauer's thesis. Clark therefore argues that Nietzsche eventually accepts the possibility of non-metaphysical truth, whilst in his earlier philosophy, he assumed

¹¹ R.J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, (USA: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p.222

¹² *ibid.*, p. 223

¹³ Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, (USA: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p. 22

¹⁴ *ibid.*, See chapters 1-4

that all truth was metaphysical.¹⁵ Assuming that this analysis is at least broadly correct, it implies that any references to Nietzsche's early work may not reflect his later 'mature' thought.

Applying these considerations to Remhof's textual evidence, one is alerted by his use of *Nachlass* material for key quotes cited above. The above *Nachlass* quotes, KSA 12:2 77 and KSA, 13:14 98, derive from the 1885-7 and 1887-9 period, respectively. This places it within the middle to late period of Nietzsche's writing, and thus the "mature period", as argued by Clark. As such, writings from this period have a greater probability of corresponding to Nietzsche's developed thought regarding truth. Following Hollingdale, the key step is to ascertain whether these *Nachlass* quotations have any parallel within the published material.

Remhof does make numerous references to *The Gay Science* (1882), falling within the middle period of his writings, and *Beyond Good and Evil*, 1886, the late middle period of his writings. These include quotations that plausibly imply a constructivist viewpoint regarding objects. Consider *Gay Science* 57: "That mountain over there! That cloud over there! What is 'real' about that? Subtract just once the phantasm and the whole human *contribution* from it, you sober ones! Yes, if you could do *that*! If you could forget your background, your past, your nursery school – all of your humanity and animality! There is no 'reality' for us – and not for you either, you sober ones."¹⁶ Here, Nietzsche describes the "human *contribution*" regarding objects within the world, in particular, he emphasises the social background. Indeed, as Remhof notes, objects are constructed using concepts which presuppose the conditions of language, and insofar as language is a social phenomenon, then object construction occurs within the context of a community.¹⁷ Hence the notion that objects are *socially* constructed.

Consider *Gay Science* 58: "The reputation, name, and appearance, the worth, the usual measure and weight of a thing...has, through the belief in it and its growth from generation to generation, slowly grown onto and into the thing and has become its very body"¹⁸ In this passage, Nietzsche describes the various ways in which things are conceptualised and notes how this conceptualisation "grows onto" the thing and has "becomes" the body of the thing. To further emphasise this, he finishes the passage with "let us also not forget that in the long run it is enough to create new names and valuations and appearances of truth in order to create

¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 22

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 57

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, Remhof, p. 1135

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, *The Gay Science*, 58

new things”.¹⁹ In another passage, he suggests that human beings create things according to their own concepts. “We are operating only with things that do not exist - with lines, surfaces, bodies, atoms, divisible times, divisible spaces. How is explanation to be at all possible when we first turn everything into a picture – our picture!”²⁰ From these passages alone, one can therefore find evidence for a viewpoint that is seemingly consistent with the *Nachlass* quotations that Remhof provides indicating constructivism about objects. Thus, it seems that there is support for Remhof’s interpretation in Nietzsche’s published material. Moreover, this material belongs to what Clark would regard as Nietzsche’s second mature phase, and is thus within the confines of his mature thinking.

A challenge to constructivism and a response

Remhof’s account may face the following objection; Nietzsche rejects the existence of objects put forward by the metaphysical philosophical tradition (“errors” such as “enduring things...identical things”), but if Nietzsche is a constructivist, one may suppose that the very fact that the metaphysical tradition conceptualises these entities is sufficient to establish their existence.²¹ The tension here is that Nietzsche is asserting there *not* to be certain kinds of conceptualised objects in the world, yet the constructivist view states that conceptualisation brings objects into existence. Thus, Nietzsche’s constructivism is arguably inconsistent with his objections of metaphysical philosophy. In response, there is, as noted, an empiricist strain within Nietzsche such that objects are constructed from empirical properties. This entails that not just *any* object can be constructed. Metaphysics is criticised by Nietzsche, in part, because it has no grounding in empirical experience. As such, there is no contradiction for Nietzsche to regard objects as constructed, but to reject metaphysical objects.

Remhof takes his constructivist interpretation to conclude that Nietzsche conceives of truth in a pragmatist fashion, i.e. that true propositions are determined by which provide practical benefits. He argues that the truth conditions of propositions will often depend upon objects within the world, whereby a proposition is true if it corresponds to real properties of

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*, 112

²¹ *ibid.*, 110

these objects.²² However, if objects within the world are constructed, then aspects of objects are constructed, and it follows that truth conditions for propositions will also be constructed.²³ In other words, the truth of propositions regarding objects is conditional upon human activity in creating concepts which bring objects into existence. Since Nietzsche regards objects as constructed, then Nietzsche must regard the truth conditions of propositions as constructed. Human beings construct concepts according to their interests (all concerns from aiding one's survival to manipulating one's environment for convenience). Remhof finds the dependence on human interests and needs to overlap with the pragmatism of William James.²⁴ Remhof paraphrases James; "a "thing" is something we "carve out" of sensory experience to "suit our human purposes," such that "man engenders truth upon (the world)."²⁵ The similarity between the two views thus leads Remhof to conclude that Nietzsche is a pragmatist regarding truth. This pragmatist position is in opposition to a correspondence conception of truth whereby true statements are those that correspond to mind-independent features of the world, i.e. aspects of the world that exist independent of human cognition of them. A basic requirement of scientific realism is that claims regarding the world are at least attempting to "get things right", and thus, realism as understood presupposes a correspondence notion of truth.²⁶ Remhof's interpretation is therefore a serious challenge to any realist interpretation of Nietzsche. In order to salvage a realist interpretation of Nietzsche, I will show that this pragmatist interpretation is inadequate.

Nietzsche's perspectivism and empiricism

At this juncture, I shall introduce Brian Leiter's interpretation of Nietzsche's perspectivism. He rejects what is called the 'received view' (RV) of Nietzsche's perspectivism, to which he attributes the following claims:

- 1) The world has no determinate nature or structure;

²² Justin Remhof, 'Nietzsche's Conception of Truth: Correspondence, Coherence, or Pragmatist?', *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 46:2, (Summer 2015), pp. 229-238 p. 231

²³ *ibid.*, pp. 231-2

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 233

²⁵ *Op. cit.*, 'Nietzsche's Conception of Truth', p. 234

²⁶ Michela Massimi, 'Four Kinds of Perspectival Truth', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 96, No. 2, (Mar. 2018) pp. 342-359 p. 345

- 2) our theories or concepts do not “describe” or “correspond” to the world because it has no determinate character
- 3) Our concepts and theories are “mere” interpretations or “mere” perspectives (reflecting pragmatic needs, at least on some accounts)
- 4) No perspective can enjoy an epistemic privilege over any other, because there is no epistemically privileged mode of access to this characterless world.^{27 28}

Leiter accepts Clark’s thesis that later Nietzsche comes to accept the possibility of attaining truth as correspondence, as well as her distinction between a first, second and third stage of Nietzsche’s conception of truth, whereby the latter stages represent the culmination of his thinking.²⁹ From the second stage, Nietzsche rejects the distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves. This is well supported, consider, for instance, “The ‘apparent’ world is the only real one” or “‘knowledge in itself’...always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable”.³⁰ By describing perspectives as “mere perspectives”, the RV suggests that perspectives are deficient because they do not provide understanding of reality as it really is, however, this presumes the distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves which Nietzsche rejects. As such, the RV mischaracterises Nietzsche’s mature thinking.

The other main charge that Leiter levels against the RV is that it fails to acknowledge that Nietzsche is an empiricist and, thus regards empirical perspectives as epistemically superior. Empiricists hold that sensory experience is the basis for all knowledge. Nietzsche writes that “All credibility, all good conscience, all evidence of truth come only from the

²⁷ Brian Leiter, ‘Perspectivism in *Genealogy of Morals*’, in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality: Essays on Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Richard Schacht, (USA: University of California Press, 1994) pp. 334-358 p. 334

²⁸ Remhof himself certainly accepts points 1-3 as interpretations of Nietzsche, although, he would likely accept 2 on the grounds that propositions cannot correspond to the world because objects are constructed, and do not therefore correspond to the world.

²⁹ *Op. cit.*, Leiter, p. 335

³⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Duncan Large, (USA: Oxford University Press, 1998), III, 2 (This falls at the end of the third stage of Nietzsche’s writings), and, Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufman & R.J. Hollingdale, (USA, Vintage Books, 1969), III, 12

senses.”³¹ Consider also; “We possess science nowadays precisely to the extent that we *accept* the evidence of the senses...the rest is abortion and not yet science: to wit, metaphysics, theology, psychology, theory of knowledge....reality is nowhere to be found in them”.³² As Leiter notes, this passage is not merely distinguishing between good and bad science, but upholding the former on the grounds that it is grounded in reality, in virtue of using empirical evidence.³³ This same principle is invoked with his claim “in Christianity neither morality nor religion come into contact with reality at any point”.³⁴ On this evidence, it seems that Nietzsche clearly regards certain perspectives to possess greater “epistemic merits” than others, i.e. aspects that pertain to a perspective as a basis for knowledge or understanding.³⁵ Leiter thus rejects 4 of the RV.

Against the pragmatist interpretation

I argue that the failure to acknowledge Nietzsche’s empiricism also applies to Remhof’s pragmatist interpretation. As shown, Remhof describes how construction of objects is empirically constrained by sensory properties within the world, but he nonetheless concludes that objects themselves reflect human interests, and therefore regards Nietzsche as a pragmatist. This interpretation is inadequate with regard to Nietzsche’s empiricist claims. If human interests are the key basis for truth, then this is inconsistent with attempts to understand reality. Truth defined according to human interests is detached from truth as defined by actual properties of reality. Indeed, Nietzsche distinguishes between true or false beliefs and useful beliefs; “Through immense periods of time, the intellect produced nothing but errors; some of them turned out to be useful and species preserving”.³⁶ According to a pragmatist interpretation, there would be no such separation between truth and usefulness, since the former is defined in terms of the latter. Consider also; “*Life is not an argument.* – We have arranged

³¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1973), 134. All further references to *Beyond Good* are to the Faber translation.

³² *Op. cit.*, *Twilight of the Idols*, III, 3

³³ *Op. cit.*, Leiter, p. 337

³⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, (UK: Penguin Books, 1990), 15

³⁵ *Op. cit.*, Leiter, p. 336

³⁶ *Op. cit.*, *Gay Science*, 110

for ourselves a world in which we are able to live – by positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest...without these articles of faith no one could endure living! But that does not prove them...the conditions of life might include error.”³⁷ Again, Nietzsche describes ideas without which survival itself would be impossible. Yet, even these (one must say highly useful) ideas are not therefore true. This suggests that Nietzsche defines truth by some criterion besides usefulness, and is therefore not a pragmatist.³⁸

Leiter on Nietzsche’s perspectivism

Leiter presents a passage from *Genealogy* (published at the start of Nietzsche’s third and most mature period), in which Nietzsche writes that objectivity should be “understood not as contemplation without interest (which is a nonsensical absurdity) but the ability to *control* one’s pro and con and to dispose of them, so that one knows how to employ a *variety* of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge”. Nietzsche continues to describe how former concepts such as “pure reason” and “knowledge in itself” presumed the impossibility of “an eye turned in no particular direction”, i.e. a standpoint in which the subject offers no interpretation. On the contrary, he writes that; “There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective ‘knowing’; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of the thing, our ‘objectivity’ be”.³⁹ This passage clearly expresses epistemic perspectivism, i.e. all knowledge is necessarily perspectival, (from some particular standpoint and thus non-objective). Leiter also interprets this as the suggestion that human practices are a condition of understanding, insofar as Nietzsche holds that an interpretation presupposes language which presupposes a community (Remhof accepts this point).⁴⁰ However, human interests do not *constitute* this knowledge.⁴¹ This is because Nietzsche is evidently committed to understanding the world empirically, from sensory experience, which

³⁷ *ibid.*, 121

³⁸ As the above quotes show, Nietzsche does nonetheless make seemingly pragmatist insinuations to the ‘usefulness’ of ideas. But, importantly, he does not define truth in terms of usefulness.

³⁹ *Op. cit.*, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, 12

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, Leiter, p. 349

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 350

he believes connects one with reality. This is important if one maintains that he is a realist committed to understanding.

Knowing, Leiter argues, bears similarities with seeing in that both depend upon perspectives. Through consideration of this analogy with sight, he derives the following claims regarding Nietzsche's perspectives. The perspectivism claim - that one can know an object from a particular perspective.⁴² The plurality claim - the more perspectives that one employs, the greater one's understanding of an object.⁴³ The purity claim - certain perspectives will distort our understanding of an object.⁴⁴ A typical realist understanding of the world advocates the semantic thesis; that claims regarding the world are objectively true or false. Evidently, such an approach is impossible according to Nietzsche, since all of human understanding presupposes some perspective. Insofar as Nietzsche regards empirically based perspectives to be superior to non-empirically based perspectives, then his perspectivism is certainly not relativist, i.e. it does not propose that all perspectives are equal. Nonetheless, it is not yet clear how this coheres with a realist interpretation. In the above passage, he redefines objectivity as the ability to employ a variety of perspectives regarding a given object. This therefore seems to conflict with a conventional realist approach. I will soon consider the importance of the plurality claim, and how this can be reconciled with a realist approach, but firstly, I will show how Nietzsche's perspectivism relates to the constructivist interpretation. According to Leiter's interpretation, Nietzsche seems to be positing that one can come to some understanding regarding the world (and thus objects within the world), but one may ask how this could be consistent with a constructivist interpretation in which, objects are products of human activity. One may argue that this entails that understanding can correspond with mere human constructions.

How to reconcile this with the view that objects are constructed?

I maintain that Remhof's constructivist interpretation overlooks the extent of Nietzsche's empiricism. Within *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes; "Concepts are more or less precise figurative signs for frequently recurring and simultaneous sensations, for groups of

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 345

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 346

sensations”.⁴⁵ In this extract, Nietzsche describes concepts as “signs” in the sense of a signifier for sensations in the world. This sense of the term ‘concept’ carries the suggestion that concepts have the role of representing things within the world. Remhof himself summarises concepts as a means to “organise empirical properties”.⁴⁶ Considering Nietzsche’s already established empiricism, I maintain that objects should be understood as the organised units of empirical sensations within the world, and such organisation occurs in virtue of concepts. Organising experience is a *mediation* that human beings have with the world, rather than constitutive of the world. Objects are created, but not as fictional entities belonging to the human imagination. On the contrary, objects are the labels or categorisations that human beings give to their experience of the world, and they *consist* of empirical properties within the world. The term ‘construction’ remains appropriate since, according to Nietzsche, an ‘object’ still requires some human addition, i.e. all conceptualisation rests on the condition of human practices. Regarding the question ‘Are objects real?’, one must therefore give a qualified response. The category of an object requires human practices, yet the things in which objects consist belong to reality, independent of human beings. Similarly, with regard to the mammal category within biology, the category itself is arguably a construction insofar there is no precise mammal kind in the world, rather, a ‘mammal’ is a concept for grouping particular biological properties of organisms, e.g. grouping animals together that possess mammary glands, hair, etc.⁴⁷ This emphasises Nietzsche’s empiricist commitment whilst acknowledging human construction.

Interaction between perspectives

As already shown, constructivism is conditional on a social community. Remhof cites *Gay Science*; “consciousness actually belongs not to man’s existence as an individual but rather to the community – and herd aspects of his nature”.⁴⁸ If conceptualisation requires language, and language presupposes a community (since Nietzsche believes there are no solitary language users), then concept formation also presupposes a community. Leiter makes a similar point with regard to perspectives. Indeed, if perspectives are interpretations of the world then arguably concepts are microcosms of perspectives. Presuming that concepts fall within the

⁴⁵ *Op. cit.*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 268

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, ‘Defending Nietzsche’s Constructivism...’, p. 1134

⁴⁷ This example is merely an illustration, though it is accepted by some.

⁴⁸ *Op. cit.*, *The Gay Science*, 354

scope of perspectives, then henceforth I shall use ‘perspective’ as an encompassing term which includes concepts. Within a social community, human beings hold both language in common and certain perspectives which effect how they experience the world. Shared perspectives (encompassing concepts) can construct objects and thus provide objects in common. However, a perspective does not entirely constitute the object, and thus Nietzsche states that “using the same word is not enough to ensure mutual understanding: we must also use the same words for the same inner category of inner experiences; *ultimately, we must have the same experiences in common*” (emphasis my own).⁴⁹ Once again, Nietzsche emphasises sensory experience for attaining understanding.

Arguably, new perspectives could form which provide differing interpretations of objects held in common. This supposes a broad differentiation between background perspectives, which provide the conditional framework, and working perspectives, which operate within the framework provided by the former type. Scientific theories, for instance, could provide both background and working perspectives, insofar as objects formed by science now form an essential place within the understanding of the world e.g. atoms and planets. Against these background perspectives, further scientific perspectives can develop which elaborate on and refine understanding of these objects. The important point is to show how perspectives can both construct objects, and interact with other perspectives.

The basis for plurality

Leiter’s perspectival claim holds that, for Nietzsche, our experience and knowledge of the world is fundamentally perspectival. So, our only access to the world is through perspectives. Following from Leiter’s purity claim, some perspectives can be inaccurate or wrong, i.e. assuming a correspondence view, then some perspectives more closely correspond to objects in the world than others. Indeed, Nietzsche claims that one must not only employ perspectives, but also “dispose of them”, to attain understanding.⁵⁰ One may object that if all understanding is perspectival, and derives from sensory experience, then a perspective regarding one’s experience is infallible. If one’s perspective is a mere description of one’s experiences, then it seems that whatever one’s perspective, this will be accurate for that particular individual. This

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 268

⁵⁰ *Op. cit.*, *Genealogy of Morals*, III, 12

therefore seems to entail a form of Protagorean relativism in which truth depends upon one's perspective.

For Nietzsche, a perspective (via concepts) is a way of interpreting or organising one's experience, and interpretations can be inaccurate. Nietzsche clearly regards certain interpretations of experience to be incorrect; "If you'll forgive me, an old philologist who can't give up the wickedness of pointing out examples of bad interpretative practice, the 'lawfulness of nature' that physicists speak about so proudly, as if...this only exists by grace of your interpretations...it is not a factual matter...but rather no more than a naïve humanitarian concoction".⁵¹ Here, we find him describing a certain scientific interpretation as bad, primarily because it is not a "factual matter", i.e. the world is not in fact lawful. This suggests that Nietzsche is open to the possibility both that there are facts, and that one can know them. If not, then he could not state that natural laws are not facts. Further evidence is found in *Twilight*; "Heraclitus, too, did the senses an injustice. They do not lie either in the way that the Eleatics believe, or as he believed – they do not lie at all. What we *make* of their evidence is what gives rise to the lie, for example the lie of unity, the lie of materiality, of substance, of duration... 'Reason' is what causes us to falsify the evidence of the senses".⁵² Once again, we have the suggestion that certain interpretations can be incorrect, but also that the senses themselves show the world faithfully ("they do not lie" entails that they only provide truth). Falsity arises only through bad interpretations ("what we *make*") of sensory experience. Since interpretations are fallible, then one can interpret experience falsely, and thus the Protagorean relativist objection to Nietzsche is untenable. Evidently, since Nietzsche rejects the notion of a transcendent reality-in-itself, then the world of appearance is the only reality.⁵³ The senses therefore display reality faithfully, but are distorted by interpretations.

Since perspectives can be wrong, then one must acquire perspectives and determine the most accurate, which requires comparisons. Nietzsche supports this point when discussing problematic moral systems; "precisely because the moral philosophers knew moral *facta* only roughly...knew them as them as the morality of their neighbourhood, say, or of their class, their Church, the *Zeitgeist*, their climate or region...they never did catch sight of the real

⁵¹ *Op. cit.*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 22

⁵² *Op. cit.*, *Twilight of the Idols*, III, 2

⁵³ Appearances can deceive since one may interpret experience inaccurately, but 'reality itself' is nonetheless the world of appearances rather than a transcendent reality-in-itself.

problems of morality – all of which come to light only by comparing *many* moralities”.⁵⁴ Through opening ourselves to many perspectives, it allows perspectives to collide, and thus the problems of each, which would otherwise remain obscured, to be exposed. Though Nietzsche accepts that some perspectives can be superior to others, the problem remains of how to establish which perspectives are superior and thereby derive understanding of the world in a realist fashion.

Perspectival realism

Perspectival realism is an approach derived from realism vs anti-realism debates within philosophy of science. Coined by Ron Giere, it originated as an attempt to steer a path between what is deemed an untenable strong realist viewpoint, whereby scientific claims are considered to be objectively true and correspond to mind-independent features of the world, with an opposing anti-realist viewpoint in which it is broadly argued that there are “no joints at which nature can be carved”, no objective truth to scientific claims due to pernicious human interests, and no mind-independent facts.⁵⁵ Perspectival realism claims that scientific theorising and modelling is perspective bound, and thus acknowledges the role of human interests within scientific theories, and with that; the impossibility of pure objectivity regarding scientific claims. These Kuhnian notions take their cue from a variety of arguments, such as the plurality of scientific viewpoints that often occur regarding the same phenomena. This has served to challenge the monist presumption that underlies the objectivist realist stance, i.e. that there must be *one* correct theory or model which corresponds to phenomena.

Giere provides an example of observing the Washington Monument from various positions, each of which provide differing yet equally valid aspects of the obelisk.⁵⁶ From each position, individuals will possess different perspectives and may make seemingly contradictory claims, insofar as the building may appear very different from, for instance, the base than from the Capital building.⁵⁷ Yet, when these claims are placed within the context of their perspectives, there is no contradiction. It can be true that from the base, the Monument appears

⁵⁴ *Op. cit.*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 186

⁵⁵ Michela Massimi, ‘Bringing Real Realism Back Home’, in *The Philosophy of Philip Kitcher*, eds. Mark Couch & Jessica Pfeifer, (USA: Oxford University Press, 2016) pp. 98-120 p. 99

⁵⁶ Ronald Giere, *Scientific Perspectivism*, (USA: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 13

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

one way, whilst from the Capital building, it appears to be entirely different. This offers another potential basis for Nietzsche's claim that one must gather various perspectives to attain understanding of an object; multiple perspectives can sometimes provide differing yet true evaluations of a given object, and thus acquiring many perspectives can provide greater understanding of that object. Both Nietzsche and perspectival realists therefore accept pluralism; the tenet that understanding is not acquired from a single viewpoint, but that the most complete understanding must take in to consideration as many valid perspectives as possible. Some perspectival realists do nonetheless maintain that there are mind-independent states of affairs within the world. This essay will focus on Michela Massimi's perspectival realism, which regards knowledge claims as perspectival yet which attempts to show how perspectives can attain some form of perspective (or mind) independent understanding.⁵⁸

Is perspectival realism relevant to Nietzsche?

Massimi regards her approach as realist insofar as it aspires to the "minimal realist commitment" which is "getting things right", i.e. acquiring truth regarding the world.⁵⁹ Any approach that disposes of this commitment is not a plausible candidate for realism. This leads us back to the challenge to regarding Nietzsche as a realist. To recap, his constructivism holds that concepts form objects through organisations of empirical sensations, sensations are aspects or properties of reality, and thus objects consist of properties of reality. Properties become objects when unified in a particular way. To attempt to understand objects is to attempt to understand reality, for Nietzsche, as objects are merely the necessarily human ways in which human beings organise their experience of the world. The 'things' that underlie the objects are constantly present and belong to the natural world. Further, I have shown Nietzsche rejects certain perspectives for not being "factual", and consistent with his empiricism, he claims that the senses "do not lie".⁶⁰ This all suggests that he is committed to truth or "getting things right" regarding reality, as opposed to a pragmatist or anti-realist position.

Nietzsche describes the proper approach to one's sensory experience in highly scientific terms during a passage in which he criticises the credulousness of those who have undergone religious experiences;

⁵⁸ *Op. cit.*, 'Four Kinds of Perspectival Truth', p. 343

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 345

⁶⁰ *Op. cit.*, *Twilight of the Idols*, III, 2

“What did I really experience? What was going on inside and around me? Was my reason bright enough? Was my will turned against all deceptions of the senses and stalwart in warding off the fantastic?’ None of them has asked such questions...But we, we others, we reason-thirsty ones, want to face our experiences as sternly as we would a scientific experiment, hour by hour, day by day! We want to be our own experiments and guinea-pigs”.⁶¹

This extract shows that, for Nietzsche, understanding is best attained through a scientific approach. He is an empiricist, and science is the highest culmination of empirical theorising. He writes; “We possess science nowadays precisely to the extent that we decided to *accept* the evidence of the senses”.⁶² The connection, therefore, between Nietzsche’s approach and perspectival realism regarding science is not trivial, but worthy of serious consideration.

Perspectival truth

Now, one can return to the problem previously raised regarding to move from perspectives to understanding regarding the world. Although Nietzsche suggests endorses a plurality of perspectives regarding a given object within the world, and accepts that some can be superior to others, it remains unclear, firstly, how to reliably compare between perspectives insofar as there are no perspective independent means of comparison, i.e. one is always judging from a particular perspective, and secondly, how to judge that a particular perspective should be rejected. Without any clear standards in place, it remains the case that a perspectival approach simply permits differing interpretations to make claims that contradict other interpretations, whereby each is true according to that particular perspective. This could again entail a form of relativism regarding truth, i.e. truth is not objective but relative to perspectives. If so, then it does not meet the realist requirement of “getting things right” regarding the world, rather, something is true merely because it meets the truth values of a perspective.

Michela Massimi has attempted a solution to this problem. She begins with an analysis of differing notions of perspectival truth, and rejects the idea that perspectival truth is relative to a given perspective. On the contrary, she argues that the perspectivist can uphold the realist notion of truth as corresponding to perspective-independent entities and states of affairs.

⁶¹ *Op. cit.*, *The Gay Science*, 319

⁶² *Op. cit.*, *Twilight of the Idols*, III, 3

Massimi accepts that if truth values simply vary across perspectives then this does indeed entail a form of relativised truth. Moreover, this notion of perspectival truth cannot be committed to realism because it merely states what is the case from a given perspective, without commitment to getting things right in the world.⁶³ Neither the claim “In the Ptolemaic perspective, the earth is not orbiting the sun” or the claim “In the Copernican perspective, the earth is orbiting the sun” are committal regarding the actual orbit of the sun.⁶⁴ A commitment to understanding actual states of affairs is a prerequisite of a realist position, and therefore this notion of perspectival truth is inadequate.

A more promising way forward, she suggests, begins with the notion of scientific perspectives as providing truth conditions or “contexts of use” for scientific claims.⁶⁵ A claim is therefore true according to the particular context of use provided by a given scientific perspective. Contexts of use includes the relevant circumstances for truth or falsity, e.g. if attempting to study water then “If the purpose is to construct models of fluid flow, the principles of fluid mechanics, which treat water as a continuous fluid, generate by far the best fitting models. But if our purpose is to understand diffusion in a fluid, we must turn to the principles of statistical mechanics applied to molecules.”⁶⁶ Defining perspectival truth as dependent on perspectival contexts of use allows for claims to refer to the world since perspectives postulate conditions for truth, and such conditions can relate to an independent world, rather than being true merely in virtue of belonging to a particular perspective. Yet, this does not resolve the issue of establishing which perspectives are superior.

Standards of performance adequacy

Massimi adds a significant qualifying condition to perspectival truth: truth conditions of scientific claims depend upon the particular contexts of use within scientific perspective, but “such knowledge claims must also be assessable from the point of view of other (subsequent or rival) scientific perspectives”.⁶⁷ This condition is the “context of assessment”, in which an

⁶³ *Op. cit.*, ‘Four Kinds of Perspectival Truth’, p. 352

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 352

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 349

⁶⁶ Ronald Giere, ‘Scientific perspectivism: behind the stage door’, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Jun. 2009) pp. 221–223 p. 222

⁶⁷ *Op. cit.*, ‘Four Kinds of Perspectival Truth’, p. 354

individual can cross between differing perspectives, and translate terms from one perspective to another. Claims would not straightforwardly contradict each other if one recognises how they rely on differing truth conditions. Significantly, a context of assessment allows comparison and evaluation of differing perspectives according to standards that hold *across perspectives*. Massimi describes these as “standards of performance adequacy”.⁶⁸ These include “accuracy”, “empirical testability”, “projectibility”, and “heuristic fruitfulness”.⁶⁹ The latter two refer to the possibilities offered by a claim or theory for further understanding. Differing perspectives may define these assessment standards somewhat differently, but these standards are sufficiently broad such that they hold across perspectives for cross-perspectival assessment. Moreover, they are empirically rigorous standards of assessment to which any empirically committed perspective arguably *should* be committed.

One can apply this to the reasons cited for Nietzsche’s pluralism. Determining superior perspectives presupposes moving between perspectives, and establishing some means of assessment. This is rendered possible by the conjunction of contexts of use for translation between perspectives, and standards of performance adequacy within contexts of assessment. Standards of performance adequacy belong neatly within Nietzsche’s empiricist outlook. He understands the empiricist commitment as the requirement to apply stern standards of testability and accuracy to all experiences. Indeed, Leiter writes that truth, for Nietzsche, “must be established on other grounds: for example, empirical adequacy, explanatory potency, coherence, and the like”, which overlaps neatly with the standards of performance adequacy specified by Massimi.⁷⁰ Nietzsche’s superior perspectives will be committed to empiricism, and will thereby hold in common the empirical standards of assessment stipulated above. These can provide cross-perspectival assessment, and determine the most successful or empirically adequate perspectives.

If the claims of a given perspective continuously meet standards of performance adequacy, then one may conclude that they are successful or adequate. Importantly, the success of a given perspective must ideally be established using these standards by multiple other perspectives. Cross-perspectival assessment allows for a greater assortment of information to compare, and to better judge to what extent certain claims and evidence are consistent across perspectives. But it also helps to avoid circularity in which a single perspective is validated on

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 355

⁷⁰ *Op. cit.*, Leiter, p. 347

its own grounds.⁷¹ Nietzsche's idea of objectivity, which Leiter refers to as "modest objectivity", is similarly pointing out the need to acknowledge perspectives besides one's own regarding a given object.⁷²

Inferring truth

For Massimi, by establishing success or performance adequacy, one is in a position to infer that the claim in some way reflects mind-independent aspects of reality or is "getting things right". This inference from perspectival claims to how things are in the world is a central presupposition within the argument. It involves an inference to the best explanation; if a given knowledge claim is established to be empirically adequate (i.e. accurate with its claims, consistent with claims of other successful perspectives, etc.), then the best explanation for this success is that the claim in some way reflects or corresponds to aspects of the mind-independent world.⁷³ The counter suggestion that certain scientific claims could possess such success across perspectives whilst being false (not corresponding to reality), seems highly improbable. Massimi thus argues that we can acquire mind-independent knowledge of the world from within a perspectival approach. This knowledge refers to reality as it is in itself, i.e. reality beyond appearances. However, it has been shown that Nietzsche rejects the distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves assumed by Massimi.⁷⁴ As such, it must be established precisely *what* reality Nietzsche intends to understand.

Mind-independent truth within Nietzsche's reality

As shown, Nietzsche rejects the distinction between things in themselves and appearances, and regards the reality of appearances to be the sole reality. Indeed, this is integral to his empiricism. Insofar as the reality of appearances is the only reality, then to understand reality, one must assess how things appear, i.e. one's sensory experience of the world. To Nietzsche, the world of appearances is *the* world. It is mind-independent insofar as Nietzsche accepts that it exists independent of human minds, however, he would refrain from the description 'reality

⁷¹ *Op. cit.*, 'Four Kinds of Perspectival Truth', p. 357

⁷² *Op. cit.*, Leiter, p. 349

⁷³ Putting aside the plausibility of this move, it is noteworthy that this is a fairly common move within arguments for scientific realism.

⁷⁴ *Op. cit.*, 'Four Kinds of Perspectival Truth', p. 342

in itself' since this again presumes the opposition with appearances which he rejects. Even when perspectives regarding sense experience are wrong, this is not because there is something 'beyond' or transcending the senses, but because the perspective itself is an interpretation of the experience which is in some way inadequate or distorting (...“what we *make* of their (the sense's) evidence is what gives rise to the lie”).⁷⁵ If one were to acquire a true perspective of sense experience, one would possess understanding that was always present within appearances, hence Nietzsche's claim that the “senses do not lie”.⁷⁶

Such a perspective is true, akin to Massimi's account, because it corresponds with reality, yet the point of difference is that reality is closer to home for Nietzsche. Massimi's account of perspectival truth through contexts of use and contexts of assessment provides a way of reconciling the perspectival view with the realist aim of “getting things right”. Nietzsche's views are inconsistent with this account only in regard to which “things” one is attempting to get right; for him, such things are not transcendent, but are available to us directly through the senses. One comes to know “the *thing itself* (*not* in itself)”.⁷⁷ Applying Massimi's account to Nietzsche's, then one could compare perspectives using a context of assessment to determine if and which perspectives make empirically adequate claims. If shown to be successful, then Nietzsche could follow Massimi and infer from success to correspondence with reality, but in which 'reality' is the non-transcendent world of appearances.

As established, “All knowing is perspectival”, and thus Nietzsche would reject with Massimi's attempt to attain mind or perspective-independent knowledge.⁷⁸ There is simply no escaping the perspectival nature of human interaction with the world. However, this is unproblematic if perspectives are interpretations of sense experience, and sense experience itself is sufficient to access reality.⁷⁹ If an interpretation of sense experience is accurate, then this gives direct understanding of reality whilst being perspectival. To be constrained within a perspective, therefore, does not preclude access to reality. Perspectival knowledge, on this view, would not be inferior, for Nietzsche, to metaphysical knowledge whereby one has objective and perspective-independent understanding of the world. The former is the only attainable knowledge. Moreover, the inference from success to correspondence with reality is

⁷⁵ *Op. cit.*, *Twilight of the Idols*, III, 2

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Op. cit.*, Leiter, p. 350

⁷⁸ *Op. cit.*, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, 12

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

a much smaller leap for Nietzsche than Massimi, since the move from interpretations of appearances to an apt interpretation of appearance would be less contentious than the move from perspectival claims to conclusions regarding non-perspectival aspects of reality. Despite rejecting mind or perspective-independent truth, Nietzsche nonetheless maintains the basic realist commitment, as Massimi calls it, insofar as he is committed to “getting things right”.

Conclusion

I began with Remhof’s object constructivist interpretation, and showed how this position has good textual support. Remhof argues that Nietzsche’s constructivism entails pragmatism regarding truth. With support from Leiter, Nietzsche’s empiricism was emphasised, and the pragmatist interpretation was shown to be implausible. It was argued that Nietzsche does seem to be committed to truth in a typical realist sense as correspondence to reality, and I developed a constructivist position that attempted to show how perspectives can both construct objects within the world, whilst acknowledging that there is an independent reality. I argued that insofar as this construction consists of organising empirical sensations within the world, then it is consistent with attempts to understand the world. Finally, I considered how Nietzsche dictum, that understanding requires gathering many perspectives, can be understood as both an advocacy of pluralism and the suggestion that one must compare multiple perspectives to establish which are superior. Massimi’s perspectival realist position offers a means of achieving this through contexts of assessment which allow comparison across perspectives using empirical standards to establish which perspectives are successful or empirically adequate. I argued that this is consistent with Nietzsche’s empiricist commitment and his perspectivism. Massimi infers from success or empirical adequacy of perspectives to their truth, and I argued that such a move would be an even smaller leap for Nietzsche insofar as truth, on his view, would be correspondence to a non-transcendent world of appearances, rather than a transcendent reality-in-itself. Since this includes a commitment to “getting things right”, then Nietzsche is committed to the basic tenet of scientific realism.

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