

MAKING MEANING THROUGH PERSPECTIVISM

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While I have decided to major in biochemistry, where my strongest interests lie, I would not have been satisfied with my undergraduate education if it did not include several courses in philosophy. This field of study, which gave birth to modern science, remains a key interest of mine. Although I majored in biochemistry, I own and have read more books on philosophy than science in general. I hope to one day become a neurologist and complement this specialty with a background in philosophy. Wherever life takes me, I hope to bring philosophical inquiry and a unique perspective. As a senior, I have come a long way since my philosophical inclinations as a freshman. Originally, I thought I might write a defense of Ayn Rand's Objectivism, but soon came to dislike the dogmatism of that philosophy. Throughout my education, I was exposed to many new concepts, ideas, and perspectives that I had never considered before. The multitude of perspectives I encountered were too interesting and meaningful in their own right to settle with just one. When writing my thesis, it felt like a process of discovery – finding a pattern of thought strung through the courses I took and the books I read. I am indebted to Nietzsche, who originally wrote about perspectivism, and I hope that I have expanded well upon his thoughts.

I would like to thank my friends at the Agora Society. The growing group of young intellectuals has been philosophically stimulating and incredibly helpful in preparing for my Honor's Thesis Defense. I thank Dr. Leever for some great conversations, within and outside the three courses I have taken with him. I also thank all of the professors who have taught honor's courses, as they have all included elements of perspectivism in their curriculum, whether they recognized it or not. Most of all, I thank Dr. Koukal for much inspiration in his philosophy classes as well as giving his time as my honor's thesis director. He has been an excellent editor, providing constructive criticism and helping me clarify my thoughts. Of course, any errors that remain in my thesis are my own responsibility.

I. PERSPECTIVISM AND TRUTH

One of the most profound insights Nietzsche had was perspectivism. Put simply, the central perspectivist thesis holds that all conceptual grasping of reality takes place from a particular point of view – one possible interpretation among many. We can all look at the way reality is constructed, but we will very often come up with different explanations. Through merely being alive, we are in touch with reality, but this connection is necessarily limited by our location in time and space. We struggle to conceptualize reality the best we can, but the inherent restrictions of being human prevent a complete understanding. Nietzsche explains how interpretation is unavoidable: “How far the perspective character of existence extends or indeed whether existence has any other character than this... whether all existence is not essentially actively engaged in *interpretation*” (“The Gay Science” 379). He also asks “has the world become ‘infinite’ for us all over again, inasmuch as we cannot reject the possibility that *it may include infinite interpretations*” (“The Gay Science” 379). This possibility is staggering. Finite time along with nearly infinite possible understandings of reality resigns us to a practical evaluation of just how much of which parts of reality we wish to grasp. Our understanding of reality is constrained by the particular instances of reality that we can interpret and what we *will* interpret.

A helpful analogy into the complexities of perspectivism is the way we view art. In a museum, we can all see the same statue, but since no two people can stand in the same place at the same time, we each perceive slightly different statues. By moving around a bit, we can see that the statue is different than a two-dimensional painting, in that we see different parts of the statue depending on our perspective. Through an unconscious process, we integrate the different visual perspectives to construct a mental three-dimensional model of what the statue must really

be like, beyond any single perception of it. Thus, our understanding of the statue is partly gleaned from direct observation, and partly from the mental model we create.

The nature of the interaction between thinking beings and reality creates certain problems. Our perspectives are necessarily limited, and one large limitation is our reliance on language to communicate meaning. Our language forms a mold through which we interpret every aspect of reality, and we can forget that other languages have a fundamentally different way of organizing concepts. Known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the syntactic and semantic structure of our native language influences our worldview and other cognitive processes (Nordquist). While it may have been originally overemphasized, recent research supports the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis by illustrating the significance of language in shaping our perspectives. A Yale University study by Keith Chen has confirmed that the language a country speaks correlates to how much money the citizens will save, on average. The key element of language here is the way we speak about the future. Chen's study showed that people who speak English, Arabic, Greek, and Romantic languages, which require a separate future tense, save far less money than people who speak Chinese, German, Japanese, or Norwegian, which do not make such a strong distinction between the present and the future. The reason for this could be that the future tense splits one's identity into a present self and a future self, whereas languages lacking distinct present and future tenses cause people to more strongly identify with their future selves (Quinn). From syntax to semantics, language translation is not as simple as a one-to-one replacement of words; it requires experts with great understandings of both languages to translate the common *meaning* of one language's perspective into another.

Another major problem with the limited nature of perspectives is that we can often confuse our interpretation of reality, our perspective, with reality itself. It is possible to get so

involved with concepts, that the reality they represent is cast aside and forgotten.¹ This difficulty has been known for a long time; a Zen Buddhist saying warns against mistaking the finger pointing at the moon for the moon itself. In addition to the many mistakes we discover and correct in our everyday lives, Nietzsche has argued that our perspectives deviate from reality due to our grammar, which generates concepts needlessly. Consider the phenomena of lightning flashing or sight seeing. These phrases are mere redundancies. The lightning *is* the flashing and the sight *is* the seeing, Nietzsche would argue, “‘the doer’ is merely invented as an afterthought, – the doing is everything” (“On the Genealogy of Morality” 404). This “doubling” of concepts is also apparent in Chen’s language study mentioned above, where the additional future tense splits the concept of self into present and future. Ludwig Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* has emphasized the distinction between words and reality. By focusing too much on the meaning of words in abstraction, we can lose focus on the way in which words are tools used to relate to reality. Wittgenstein goes as far as to say the object of philosophy is to “erect a wall at which language stops anyway” (187). While this may not be its entire purpose, philosophy and other forms of critical thinking can certainly make clear the distinctions between concepts and objects, between practical knowledge and unobtainable complete knowledge. The map is not the territory.

Moving forward, a key point I will argue in my thesis is the perspectival nature of truth, which allows for many truths and negates an Absolute Truth. Without understanding perspectivism, much confusion results when one explanation of a phenomenon is brought to an individual with a different, but still valid, interpretation. It is important to realize the place of perspectives in phenomenal interpretation. We would not want to mistake a single interpretation

¹ This is a problem for the correspondence theory of truth. Other theories of truth, such as the coherence theory of truth, do not have to worry about the relationship between concepts and reality, as long as all statements cohere.

for the definitive, ultimate explanation of reality, nor ignore other valid interpretations in favor of our preferred one. The distinction between a single interpretation and reality itself is often designated by the capitalization of the first letter of the word “truth.” The proper noun, “Truth,” can refer to either reality itself or a complete descriptive system of reality, while many “truths” refer to valid interpretations or models of reality (Brodie 13). To fully understand a problem, there are often a variety of perspectives needed. For a mental health problem, such as anxiety, there are multiple analytical approaches. Neurologists can interpret this disorder as a brain malfunction, psychologists can interpret it as negative thought patterns, and sociologists can interpret it as an epidemic brought on by the stressful demands of modern life. All of these are valid interpretations, and each perspective contributes to overcoming difficult challenges.

Throughout the history of philosophy, many philosophers begin with a series of premises and then build these into a systemized philosophy, complete with metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, etc. Among the first philosophers to do so was Plato, whose metaphysics still has a strong influence on the Western world today. His theory of Forms was used to explain every object and quality as a reflection of a perfect Form of the concept in a higher realm. Another philosopher to develop an all-encompassing philosophy was G. W. F. Hegel. He developed an “absolute idealism” in which our entire being is comprehensible through the dialectical progression of concepts throughout the course of history. These philosophies have not taken into account the perspectival nature of truth; both have mistaken one particular understanding of concepts for the Absolute Truth. Plato and Hegel believe they have given an objective, systemized account of the world for everyone to learn and follow, but this leaves out the subject, the individual for whom the truth has been made. This criticism was discussed at length, and will be revisited throughout my thesis, by Søren Kierkegaard, an existentialist philosopher who

expressed the folly of constructing an objective philosophical system without reference to the existing individual (29). Therefore, if the problem with Absolute Truth is its false claim to pure objectivity, we must somehow incorporate the subjective element of human experience. However, including subjective experience would eliminate the quest for Truth altogether, since each individual has their own unique perspective, and create many truths.

The perspectivist notion that there are many truths introduces a dynamic between the objective and subjective aspects of truth. Truth is not simply found, like a quarter on the sidewalk; it is synthesized from the givens of experience and the framework of interpretation. It is constructed by humans, the only animal on Earth capable of writing down their ideas and communicating them in abstract terms, and thus will have a uniquely human bias. This is not something to be avoided. There is no way to reach the maximum objective description of the universe, the proverbial “view from nowhere,” by attempting to transcend time and space, as I will explain in chapter 4. Little value would be gained from such a description because it would be so abstracted from our human experience as to be completely meaningless.

Instead of the futile quest for the unattainable Truth, I propose an alternative method for constructing meaning and making sense of the world. The objective elements of truth are necessary but not sufficient to describe reality. In order for truth to have any meaning, it must be connected to the existing individual. We cannot go too far to reject the objective as a requirement for truth, however, as this would lead to relativism, which assumes that all perspectives are equally valid. Since objective analysis can be used to determine which perspectives are more practical and coherent, we can rule out some perspectives as invalid or untrue interpretations. Perspectives include values, goals, and beliefs. When one’s beliefs lead to actions that thwart his or her goals and negate his or her values, then that person’s perspective is flawed. Believing that

smoking cigarettes will help you live a long, healthy life is an unsound perspective. When we construct objectively valid perspectives based on our own experience, we bridge the objective-subjective gap in a meaningful way.

Due to the complexity of the issues involved, in the following chapters, I will take a closer look at several aspects of perspectivism. In chapters 2 and 3, I will focus on the development of perspectivism beyond Nietzsche's account. In chapters 4, 5, and 6, I will examine the objective and subjective elements of truth and meaning, and how they can be integrated in a non-dualistic fashion. Finally, in chapter 7, I will discuss how to overcome certain limitations of our perspective and the ways perspectivism can enrich the way we make meaning of the world.

II. TRANSCENDENTAL PERSPECTIVISM

Since Nietzsche's death in 1900, many philosophers have had the chance to expand on his philosophy. Specifically, with the rise of postmodern philosophy, the importance of taking different perspectives has largely been realized. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard examines the fall of "grand narratives" that dominated previous philosophies. There is great temptation to legitimize all human knowledge with a common, overarching metanarrative that ties everything together in one neat package. The drive towards legitimacy once meant fitting knowledge into these metanarratives. While this approach constructs a unifying explanation, it ignores the many different possible frameworks within which human knowledge could fit. Eventually, exploring new perspectives became more popular than expanding one perspective to account for everything, and in the postmodern world, "most people have lost the nostalgia for the lost narrative" (Lyotard 41). Philosophy is moving forward without attempting to construct legitimizing metanarratives for human knowledge. The decline of the "grand narrative" means that the quest for Absolute Truth has been abandoned, but not perspectival truth. As Lyotard puts it, "our business is not to supply reality, but invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented" (Lyotard 81). The philosophy of perspectivism celebrates these allusions as the best alternative meaning-making method as compared to trying to grasp an Absolute Truth.

Postmodernism pulls us out of the third-person perspective of the "grand narrative," and brings us into a first-person perspective, making us aware of how our own experience contributes to the construction of our worldview. However, Werner Kriegelstein stresses the importance of incorporating the second-person perspective into our worldview in order to avoid the egoistic limitations of the first-person perspective. In *Compassion: A New Philosophy of the Other*,

Krieglstein seeks to develop transcendental perspectivism (TP), the goal of which is to rediscover the perspective of the Other, the second-person perspective. This is far from a new venture, since Krieglstein finds elements of perspectivism in academia, popular culture, and, more recently, the sciences. His favorite example of a perspective that invalidates the metanarratives of history proposed by Hegel and Marx is the experience of Native Americans. U.S. history classes teach the founding of America from the perspective of Europeans who came and conquered the New World. The 1993 Discovery Channel series *How the West Was Lost* reexamines history from the perspective of the Cherokee, Dakota, Lakota, and Nez Perc tribes. From this perspective, the founding of America was not a victorious revolution against a tyrannical king, but a tragic loss of the way of life for millions of people (Krieglstein 15). By taking the perspective of this other culture, the illusion of the ‘grand narrative’ of history is revealed as a veneer masking the loss of Native American cultures. Thinking about the world from another’s perspective has great value, if only to show how far our own perspectives are from the Absolute Truth.

In *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, psychologist Steven Pinker claims that self-serving bias can be overcome through considering the perspective of the Other. Several studies have shown that in violent disputes, the aggressor and the victim deliver opposing narratives. In the perpetrator’s narrative, he/she claims to have responded reasonably to a provocation, minimizes the harm done, and expresses a desire to put the whole episode behind them. In the victim’s narrative, the harmful act is just the latest in a series of injustices, and the perpetrator is a sadist who caused the innocent victim to suffer irreparable harm. These are two sides of the same story, but neutral observers often attest that neither of them is correct. The two narratives distort what actually happened because our psychology generates self-serving biases towards our own

perspective (Pinker 489). This particular bias is known as the “Moralization Gap.” Pinker suggests that overcoming this form of self-deception requires taking the perspective of the opposing party. Both the victim and the aggressor already believe that their perspective is objective, since they naturally interpret the objective events with an egoistic bias. They each have developed a kind of ‘grand narrative’ of their own lives, which can be proven illusory through perspective-taking. To empathize with the other’s account would be to see through the distortions and realize that your own ‘objective’ account may need some modification to better reflect the truth.

Krieglstein’s transcendental perspectivism highlights underdeveloped aspects of perspectivism, including the role of feeling to further understanding. TP emphasizes the need to become “deeply and emotionally involved in other people and in the subject we set out to understand,” which Krieglstein identifies as the essence of perspectivism (14). Thus, empathy plays an important role in TP² and should be utilized to “get out of your head and try to understand” another’s perspective (Krieglstein 39). Passion is an irreducible aspect of a value-filled perspective. Thus, truly understanding another perspective requires the emulation of their feelings. Some objective accounts may only focus on the beliefs of the Other, but this approach deprives the perspective-taker of the emotional power behind the meaning those beliefs embody. TP contributes the idea that the union of compassion and belief is essential to perspective-taking.

Despite the many benefits TP offers, it has certain limitations in its range of application. Krieglstein praises the spread of perspectivist thinking in scientific endeavors such as psychology and sociology, and feels that it should also be introduced to other fields such as zoology and even physics. He is confident that perspective-taking has no limits; hence, the

² Empathy or, more accurately, sympathy also plays a key role in David Hume and Adam Smith’s moral philosophies. They write at length of about the passions and our ability to understand the feelings of the Other.

“transcendental” quality of TP. Krieglstein proposes that the application of unbounded TP can arrive at a collective “cosmic consciousness.” TP recommends that scientists “observe and describe animal behavior from their perspective” so that they can gain a better understanding of them. This might be regarded as unscientific because it ignores the traditional methodology of objective description. Additionally, human interpretation of the animal perspective inevitably anthropomorphizes animals, since we can have no experience of the entirely different minds of animals. Nietzsche holds that “We cannot look around our own corner: it is a hopeless curiosity that wants to know what other kinds of intellects and perspectives there might be” (“The Gay Science” 379). Krieglstein only scoffs at such claims (93). TP also embraces French nuclear physicist Jean Charon’s notion that electrons carry with them their own mind and spirit, and says we should take the perspective of these subatomic particles to gain a better understanding of the universe³ (Krieglstein 107). Although particles do not have the sort of consciousness that humans do, Krieglstein and Charon suggest they have a proto-consciousness that extends beyond their mathematical description.

In perspectivist philosophy, second-person perspective-taking only works if there is a *second person* around. From there, we must make our best guess as to what the other person may be consciously experiencing through the extrapolation of our own experience, because without consciousness-merging technology, we can never know this with certainty. Thomas Nagel, in his essay “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” explains that if we consider animals to be conscious, then that means animals have an experience, a first-person perspective. Nagel uses a bat as an example, which differs from the human perspective in a variety of ways, such as using echolocation to catch prey, flying with webbed arms, and spending long periods of time hanging upside-down. Krieglstein invites us to take the unique perspective of the bat; however, Nagel

³ The goal of electrons, according to Charon, is to raise its energy level to the highest excitable state (Teule).

claims that we cannot do this because “in so far as I can imagine this (which is not very far), it tells me only what it would be like for me to behave as a bat behaves. But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a bat to be a bat” (“What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” 3). We are restricted by the faculties of our own mind, and this is a hard limit of perspective-taking. Our imagining of another’s experience is filtered through our own consciousness. We could never consciously explore the “proto-conscious” perspective of particles, for this is a contradiction in terms. Only conscious beings have perspectives. My central perspectivist thesis that all ideation takes place from a particular perspective remains unbroken.

The main problem for TP is its failure to recognize that the further you stray from your own perspective, the more speculation is involved. While we can acknowledge that other species have subjective experiences, we can never fully know these experiences because of our different brain structures. Bats, dolphins, and space aliens may have the same richness of experience that humans have, but “such an understanding may be permanently denied to us by the limits of our nature” (Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” 3). By nature, Nagel means the features of the body and mind, such as the bat’s unconscious understanding of echolocation signals and wings to fly, which humans do not have. Most animals are too different for us to understand their perspective. When taking the perspective of other people, there is still considerable speculation, but not enough to prevent practical knowledge of others’ subjective experiences. We must use our imagination to fill in the particulars, but at least, in most cases, humans share the same basic neuroanatomy. By ignoring the fundamental limitations of human perspective, TP removes itself from serious philosophical consideration and resembles many of the questionable philosophies of the New Age variety.

At this point, a reasonable person might object to the whole notion of perspectivism. If we can never truly experience the perspective of another person, then what is the point? Other perspectives are explored with a degree of error. This error results from layering our own interpretation on top of another's perspective. While it is true that we may not be able to "get outside of our own head," there are still several important benefits of considering the perspective of the Other. Exploring other perspectives helps us understand why certain beliefs are held, which allows us to prepare responses to criticisms, which is especially useful in debates. Seeing the world through another's point of view is essential for combating dogmatism. Static perspectives do not grow their understanding along with experience, or as Nietzsche writes, "convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies" ("Human, All Too Human" 187). If our perspectives are informed through our experience, then investigating what other perspectives there might be helps us extend our thought beyond our own experience. We should acknowledge the inevitable mistakes we make when taking another perspective, but this hardly detracts from the wisdom that we gain from doing so.

Exploring new perspectives can be enlightening, but the sheer amount of perspectives that can be taken is overwhelming. In the next chapter, I will investigate attempts to take multiple perspectives at once so that the wisdoms of each can be experienced in a new, integrated way. I will also elaborate on the many benefits of thinking through perspectivism in chapter 7.

III. PERSPECTIVE INTEGRATION

In claiming that the nature of truth is essentially perspectival, perspectivism leaves truths scattered across hundreds of nations and thousands of years of history. Some ambitious philosophers aim to pick up the pieces. Through a process of integration, the wisdom of several perspectives can be brought together into a single, unifying perspective. Integration holds great value for the organization of related perspectives, and can reveal a meaning that is greater than the sum of its parts. The process of integrating perspectives may be the best approach to creating meaning, despite its inability to grasp an eternal, Absolute Truth. Any perspective, no matter how holistic, cannot discount the possibility of revision or future refinement. Some of the integration method's greatest strengths are the ability to resolve apparent contradictions and mediate binary interpretations.

For all its complexity, the integration of perspectives is something that most people do quite often. Consider two opposing accounts of the personality of a stranger, S. Person A has known S for a while and they get along quite well, but after person B meets S, he has the opposite experience. Together, A and S have shared many jokes and have had long conversations about all sorts of topics. On the other hand, person B has worked with S for the past week, and finds the relationship uncomfortable, as S appears humorless and shows no interest in what B has to say outside of work-related topics. Person A speaks highly of S, but person B has only negative things to say. How is this contradiction resolved? Given the relationship between S and A, it would make sense that long-time friends get along well, but within the working environment of S and B, their relationship might not be as friendly. It could be that S is shy and takes time to open up, or that S likes to stay focused when working. These different perspectives

of S can be integrated by considering the context and understanding that people are multi-faceted and complex.

Philosophical perspectives can be integrated in a similar way. In general, when we have two opposed, yet plausible, perspectives of a given situation, there are four approaches. The first option is to simply reject one perspective as absurd, and to hold the other as the only truth. The second option is cognitive dissonance. The two perspectives go unresolved, and confusion results. The third is a kind of doublethink, Orwell's term for holding two contradictory thoughts in tandem, whereby the two perspectives are believed simultaneously. Their essential characteristics are not resolved, integrated, or synthesized, but left as a simple combination. The fourth, and what I propose to be the optimal solution, is the integration of the perspectives. Neither perspective is Absolutely True, but then again, they are not untrue. The context of each perspective is evaluated in order to place each within a broader framework of interpretation. Taken together this way, the integration as a whole becomes truer than its parts.

In his book *The Evolving Self*, Robert Kegan discusses how when people move through psychological stages of development, their approach to opposing perspectives changes. The final stage in the "evolving self" results in a cognitive scheme that uses dialectical thinking and becomes more amenable to contextualization and reevaluation. This approach to contradictions gives rise to a new understanding, so that, "rather than completely threatening the system... the contradiction becomes more recognizable as a contradiction; the orientation seems to shift to the relationship between the poles in a paradox rather than a choice between the poles" (Kegan, ch. 8). The context in which both perspectives can be applied becomes apparent, so that a more meaningful resolution can be sought in a larger context. Just as with the personality of the stranger, S, the two perspectives can be examined as such. It is not that either person A or B is

mistaken, nor are they both right, decontextualized, that S is both affable and unsociable. It would also be wrong to say that either perspective has a monopoly on the truth. Each personal relationship is taken in context to provide greater meaning.

Kegan describes two meaning-making methods, formal and post-formal, and presents them with the implication that the latter is “more evolved.” The “formal operational” stage is dualistic, finding distinctions, opposites, and contradictions as the ultimate relation to “the way things are.” The “post-formal operational” stage is more non-dualistic, seeking unity, cohesion, and continuums between concepts rather than dichotomies (Kegan, ch. 8). Binary concepts of formal operation are replaced with a spectrum; new experiences are not simply assigned a category, but placed in relation to other experiences. In the search for meaning, post-formal operation allows for more flexibility and precision. While the formal stage is an entirely adequate way to make meaning, it is limited by the constraints of that particular system of thought or perspective. Post-formal operation actively engages in the integration of perspectives – it does not limit itself by taking one system of thought to be ultimate; rather, the relationship between systems is included in a new perspective.

In addition to gaining greater perspectives through psychological development, Hegel wrote about how philosophical perspectives progress through time, building upon each other through a similar integration method. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel wrote about how “the truth is the whole in the process of development” (Phipps, ch. 9). The dialectical process of synthesis-antithesis-synthesis is how perspectives develop. When perspectives are included in their synthesis, they are both preserved and changed, which is described by the German word *aufheben*. Hegel believed philosophical perspectives grew by including the thesis and antithesis, while transcending their limited perspective by recognizing their mutual interdependence

(Phipps, ch. 9). With more experience, philosophers have been able to see a larger framework that perspectives can fit into without contradiction.

The integration of perspectives goes beyond the Hegelian dialectic. A greater understanding and novel insights can be gained by examining different perspectives of the same thing. Consider the parable of the blind men and the elephant. Several men feel different parts of the same elephant, coming to different conclusions. One man might feel the trunk, claiming the elephant is long, thin, and flexible. Another man feels the body, concluding that the elephant is large, wide, and tough. A third might feel the tusk, then tell the other men that the elephant is not flexible or tough, but hard like bone. The meaning of the parable is that while each man's perspective is correct, it does not constitute the Absolute Truth. The integration would hold that the elephant is each of these things. The perspectives to be integrated may be disparate, not necessarily direct negations of each other.

In his book *Evolutionaries*, Carter Phipps examines Ken Wilber's bold attempt at a new "integral theory" which seeks to explore the relationship of all perspectives in the broadest context possible. The key premise of this philosophy is the categorization of every world event into two types, individual and collective, and of two angles, interior and exterior, for a total of four "domains." Neither Phipps nor Wilber are simple dualists. They believe that two perspectives are heavily interrelated, as two sides of the same coin (Phipps, ch. 11). The interior, individual perspective consists of one's personal thoughts, psychology, and spiritual experiences. The interior, collective perspective resembles transcendental perspectivism's notion of the perspective of the Other. Together, many people can share a culture, worldview, and values. The exterior, objective perspective consists of the physical aspects of the reality of the individual, the brain and body. The exterior, collective perspective examines physical reality in bulk, such as

economies, political organizations, and societal structure. All four of these categories, argues Wilber, are interrelated, and every analysis must consider aspects in each of these four perspectives to be complete (Phipps, ch. 11). Thus, by focusing on the dynamism among these four systems, perspective integration is a post-formal operation.

Wilber's integral theory holds perspectives themselves as the basic unit of understanding, rather than the perceptions of a singular perspective. Some perspectives attempt to reduce reality so it can be explained in terms of only one of these perspectives. For example, scientific reductionism and crude forms of behaviorism hold the exterior, objective perspective to be the ultimate reality. Marxism is a materialist philosophy which reduces history to its economic structures, the objective collective perspective. These philosophies hold part of the truth, but their exclusivity to one particular perspectival domain prevents them from arriving at a comprehensive account of what they describe. A fully integrated perspective includes accounts of the four domains of reality, interior/exterior and individual/collective. These are accumulated from the vast number of interpretations, and according to Wilber, none should be left out, "every approach, I honestly believe, is essentially true but partial" (Phipps, ch. 11). The quest for the most completely integrated perspective remains indefinitely incomplete.

Perspectivism holds great promise for furthering our understanding of reality, but the notion that *every approach* is partially true is dubious. For practical reasons, there must be some way to judge perspectives in a way that is not subject to the biased interpretation of a particular perspective. The integration of multiple perspectives could be said to produce a meta-perspective. They could build on each other to find patterns at different levels and across disciplines. The meta-perspective, composed of partially true perspectives, establishes an understanding beyond that of any single perspective. If every perspective holds a piece of the

truth, this includes every possible formulation, and “we cannot reject the possibility that it may include infinite interpretations. Alas, too many ungodly possibilities of interpretation are included in the unknown, too much devilry, stupidity, and foolishness of interpretation” (“The Gay Science” 379). Nietzsche hits a key point: some perspectives provide nothing of value, and could be antithetical to the developing understanding to the meta-perspective. Some possible interpretations could be completely disconnected from reality or entirely absurd. Perspectives with contradictory goals and values are ineffective. As mentioned before, when a perspective’s model of reality lead to actions that thwart its goals and negate its values, it has become self-defeating. It may be more practical, when constructing an integrative meta-perspective to avoid these types of interpretations, which do not contribute towards further meaningful understanding.

Another reasonable objection may be brought against perspectivism here: when integrating perspectives how can one impartially measure the worth of each one? Our initial perspective informs where we look and which perspectives are selected to form the newly integrated perspective. In response, the only way to truly to integrate perspectives impartially is include every non-self-defeating perspective. Aside from this, when identifying the perspectives to be integrated, we have already decided what kind of meaning we are searching for and by what criteria to judge its usefulness. The pragmatic solution is to first integrate the perspectives that most obviously facilitate a greater understanding. This is not a problem because the meta-perspective becomes more meaningful within a specific range of intended applicability, which was the original goal.

Once the nature of truth as essentially perspectival is grasped, we can use the strategy of integrating perspectives to deal with seemingly contradictory facts and disparate, seemingly random information. Perspectivism allows these to be resolved in a more meaningful way, fitting

them into a larger pattern. Acknowledging contexts, relationships, and spectrums promotes a fuller understanding. Bold attempts at wide scale integration, like Wilber's integral theory, have the potential to uncover larger patterns of meaning across many fields of study and at different levels of analysis. Before I discuss more about how we can use perspectivism to make meaning, the two sides of meaning, the objective (chapter 4) and subjective (chapter 5), require more explanation. Then, I want to clear up any confusion about how meaning is created from the intersection of the objective and subjective perspectives in chapter 6.

IV. THE OBJECTIVE PERSPECTIVE

When it comes to meaning-making, a completely objective perspective may seem like the optimal approach. However, pure objectivity separates itself so far from the existing individual that nothing meaningful is left. This does not mean this perspective cannot be of any use. An examination of the objective perspective allows for a revaluation of our meaning-making strategies. When trying to understand the world, we can often find more meaning by taking a step back and looking at the larger picture. We may realize that our initial perspective was too subjective, and that what we took to be real was merely an illusion. For Nietzsche, this meaning-making strategy has limited value. There is a connection between objectivity and reality, but they are not equivalent.⁴ There may be a point where taking a more objective perspective provides no additional understanding, or even contributes to confusion. Our subjective perceptions are just as much an aspect of reality as its objective features. Our understanding of reality cannot be criticized for its merely being an interpretation, for what else could it be?

In *The View from Nowhere*, Thomas Nagel discusses the idea of a description of the universe *without* interpretation. Any abstraction, concept, or perception has no place in this description, for they obscure the details. Concepts presuppose a conceptual scheme which requires a subjective perspective. To test this, we might imagine breaking down the universe to its most fundamental components and start there. A physicist might break these down into the indivisible particles and their position in space and time. However, the description of the universe as ultimately fundamental particles is not certain. Wittgenstein argues in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that the world comes down to interrelated atomic facts – the fundamental relations of nature. Further, it is problematic to even begin discussing the fundamental features of

⁴ This does not necessarily lead to phenomenalism which reduces objective phenomena to our subjective experiences of them. As I will discuss in chapter 6, perspectivism gives equal weight to the objective and subjective aspects of existence.

reality because of the assumptions that language imposes. In chapter 1, we have seen that natural language contains implicit interpretations. Even formal systems, such as math, utilize certain logical systems and basic assumptions that are not necessarily features of reality.⁵ The conclusion arrived at from this thought experiment is that it is meaningless to talk about objective facts without some sort of interpretation. The view from nowhere is a view of nothing.

This is to say, a purely objective account of truth is completely meaningless. There is nothing meaningful or understandable to be taken from an entirely objective description, except as an illustration of the following principle: for a description of reality to make any sense, it must reflect the subjectivities inherent to conscious beings. Interpreting reality introduces subjectivity, which is necessary for anything to make sense. Nietzsche wonders “whether existence without interpretation, without ‘sense,’ does not become ‘nonsense’” (“The Gay Science” 379). Even the most obvious statements, like “there are eight planets in the solar system,” rely on human perceptions and conceptions (Nietzsche, ch. 12). Not too long ago, there were nine planets. All “objectively” truthful *formulations* are influenced by subjectivity somewhere along the way.

Nietzsche recognizes that the way we speak about truth simultaneously accepts this fact and ignores it. He describes truth as “a movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified” (“On Truth and Lies” 117). This is how we make sense of natural phenomena. In the past, lightning was described as a bolt shot down from the heavens by a god. Still, when we talk about the electrons of lightning being attracted to positive charges, we borrow the concept ‘attraction’ from what we know about human relations. Objectively, these particles simply tend to move towards each other, but our language dresses this interaction with familiar

⁵ The Münchhausen trilemma comes to mind here. Like a child that asks “why?” incessantly, the quest to understand the foundations of our knowledge comes down to circular reasoning, argumentum ad infinitum, or axiomatic arguments.

concepts. What passes for a truthful statement may often be metaphorical or a figure of speech, which goes unchallenged as long as the statement conveys the intended meaning.

In *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnsen make the argument that metaphors are more than poetic devices and actually pervade all of language. They believe that “our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff 3). This is a bold claim, and the primary example they use to justify it is the concept of argument. The way we speak about arguments borrows language from the way we speak about war: arguments are verbal battles to be won by attacking the opponent’s claims and defending your own position. Metaphors like this allow us to understand one thing in terms of another thing. However far metaphors extend into language, it should be clear that metaphors are accepted as truth because they provide a conceptual scheme that allows understanding (Lakoff 159). Whether these truths are legitimate and objective is disputed.

The philosophy of logical positivism infamously rejects any notion of truth containing impurities resulting from metaphors and the fuzzy use of language. This notion of truth requires that all true statements be empirically verifiable in order to be meaningful (Creath). This restricts what can be meaningfully talked about only to that which can be scientifically examined. Without the possibility of empirical confirmation, propositions about morality, theology, and many philosophical matters are rendered meaningless. The first and most obvious objection to this view is to apply the verification principle to itself. How could it be empirically verified that truth consists of only the things that are empirically verifiable? In short, it cannot. Logical positivism’s anti-metaphysical view disposes of many abstractions that have meaning for others, such as free will, an ultimate purpose, and the existence of God.

In addition, some thinkers claim that the verification principle cannot produce any meaning at all. Instead, meaning comes from a broader evaluation of the information we obtain through empiricist methods. Science provides the facts, but in order to make any sense of this we must use other methods. Those with this view, such as sociologist Robert Bellah, believe that the proper role for science may be defined as such: to collect information objectively, free from any bias imposed through interpretation. Scientific principles and methods are very useful in this sense, “but in the broader perspective... it is important to remember that science can produce information but not meaning” (Bellah 443). Bellah believes science may answer certain questions about the functions of nature, but contributes nothing to other important questions, such as ethics. This perspective is close to the opposite of logical positivism, that science concerns itself with the meaningless, and that higher order, abstracted discussion provides the meaning we seek.

I would like to propose a perspective that accords science more respect than this. The pursuit of science should not be confused with the pursuit of purely objective explanations. Science is not the blind accumulation of data, nor does it result in a collection of uninterpreted relations. It is objective in the sense that it ideally transcends individual or cultural bias, but the scientific method is employed by humans and so will consistently have a human bias. This allows us to develop meaning through experimentation and careful observation. The main goal of science is to provide meaningful explanations of phenomena, but that is not its only objective. As a collective, scientists tend to perform experiments with other things in mind, for example applications in the health sciences for the well-being of those suffering from disease. Sometimes, the goal of the scientific method is stated explicitly, such as in the *Journal of Environmental Sciences* which states that, “the journal is devoted to publish... applied research on atmospheric,

terrestrial and aquatic environments, pollution control and abatement technology” (“Journal”). Scientific journal articles do not simply present the methods and results of experiments. They begin with an introduction that explains why the research is important, and end with a discussion of their results, to propose further areas of research and possible applications of the discoveries made. Science may be mischaracterized by those outside the field as completely detached from things concerning humanity, partly due to the reputation of the logical positivists. Steven Jay Gould recognized that pure impartiality is neither attainable nor desirable, and so when discussing objectivity in science, it “must be operationally defined as fair treatment of data, not absence of preference” (Gould qtd. in Nicoletis, ch. 12). The successes of science arise because of the values maintained by scientific communities and the motivations of scientists when applying the scientific method.

However, critics of science make a good point. The scientific method provides a meaning-making strategy limited by its rigorous analytical approach to understanding. This perspective may not be the best for everyday functioning and has no way to evaluate certain statements about philosophy. Nietzsche also shares this sentiment about science, “an interpretation that permits counting, calculating, weighing, seeing, and touching, and nothing more... would be one of the poorest in meaning” (“The Gay Science” 378). In a sense, by focusing on the exact relation amongst particulars, the forest is lost for the trees. A fine piece of art can be scientifically analyzed, but that perspective misses the worth of art *as art*, to be perceived and appreciated as it appears. Analogously, life does not need to be scientifically analyzed in order to make sense, but can be understood through other perspectives.

These other perspectives provide rich meaning to life, even if it means stepping away from the completely objective approach. As time-bound, existing individuals, the objective

perspective does not provide a complete picture of the world. Still, meaning can be created through perspectives that serve as frameworks of interpretation for objective phenomena. Science and other academic pursuits, such as history and economics, try to overcome individual biases through their respective methods to provide meaningful truths in those fields. Creating meaning in an individual's own life, on the other hand, entails a more subjective approach. The perspectives that include more interpretation than a detached commitment to the real are sometimes referred to as "illusions" and "false." The perspectivist philosophy of Nietzsche finds no fault in this: "We are in principle inclined to claim that judgments that are the most false (among which are the synthetic a priori judgments)⁶ are the most indispensable to us, that man could not live without accepting logical fictions" ("Beyond Good and Evil" 314). These "false" judgments are only false in the sense that they are not Absolutely True; they are still true within the human perspective.

What we regard as truthful in our own lives is thought to be true, though not the Absolute Truth, because of the necessary subjective influences we bring through our interpretations. This is the fundamental principle of perspectivism – all conceptions of reality take place from a particular perspective. Avoiding the "illusions" arising from perspectival truth requires abandoning perspective altogether, but the purely objective framework that is thought to do this fails to convey any meaning. This is why science, as a meaning-making method, cannot be purely objective and requires values and the human perspective in order to be useful. The properties and relations discovered by science are those that are relevant to our pursuits. Science is idealized as the most objective perspective, so that it can avoid the subjective bias of any individual, but the actual practice of the scientific method comes with the values, goals, and

⁶ Nietzsche refers to Kant's category of judgments which includes the metaphysical assertions deemed meaningless by logical positivists, such as the directionality of time.

cognitive scheme of the scientific community. Perspectives that are more meaningful come through interpretations specific to communities and the individual.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the nature of the subjective perspective and how it relates to the individual. The purely objective perspective has been found meaningless, and so will the purely subjective perspective. In chapter 6, I will explain in detail how these perspectives can come together to produce meaning.

V. THE SUBJECTIVE PERSPECTIVE

The objective perspective examined in chapter 4 is set in contrast to the subjective perspective discussed in this chapter. While logical positivists have championed objectivity as the sole carrier of truth, Søren Kierkegaard gives the same status to subjectivity. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Kierkegaard expresses his belief that “subjectivity, inwardness, is the truth” (41). When examining the themes discussed in the above chapter on objectivity, it becomes clearer what is meant by this challenging statement. The purely objective perspective, the view from nowhere, cannot relate itself to someone with a particular perspective without losing its purely objective status. For truth to have meaning, it must exist within an interpretation framework, allowing for many other representations. Still, subjectivity can only go so far; I will explain why a purely subjective perspective is also meaningless.

As discussed briefly in chapter 1, Kierkegaard criticizes philosophy’s quest for a universal system, or an exhaustive account of reality. Examples of this are Plato’s theory of the forms and Hegel’s absolute idealism. Systems, to be complete, must be purely objective and independent of time. That is to say that they are not subject to change. However, Kierkegaard explains that this is impossible for existing individuals who understand that being in time is an essential aspect of our humanity. Since we exist within a finite period of time and space, we will have a limited perspective of the world. The finitude of this perspective precludes it from being able to explain the whole of the universe. This means that we can never construct an exhaustive account of reality, and thus, an existentialist system is impossible.

If pure objectivity cannot provide the Absolute Truth, Kierkegaard concludes, then subjectivity must provide what is meant by perspectival truth. Objectivity brings endless analysis, but subjectivity brings passion, choice, and truth. Neither reason nor science can

adequately bridge the gap between an objective account of the world and the subjective concerns of the individual.⁷ Objectivity handles the concerns of the subject, such as values, meanings, decisions, abstractly with their most important aspects ignored. A subjective perspective allows these values, meanings, decisions to become alive in the world, along with a framework in which concepts are organized and associations given priority. Kierkegaard's emphasis on subjectivity might seem like a sort of relativism, whereby anything goes and everything is potentially correct. However, there is a stronger relationship between the objective and the subjective, by which Kierkegaard is able to say "subjectivity is untruth if it fails to understand that subjectivity is truth and desires to understand itself objectively" (41). This quote resembles the themes from chapter 4, that pure objective truth or understanding is impossible. Perspectivism requires subjectivity, but remains linked to objectivity because evaluating statements in pursuit of the truth will yield true and false answers.

Just as a purely objective perspective lacks meaning, a purely subjective perspective would be devoid of any meaningful insights. All meaningful statements have content such that there is an objective difference between its correctness and incorrectness. Wittgenstein observed that while concepts are applied from the subjective perspective, they require outward criteria to be meaningful. Without outward criteria, there is no standard by which to judge the content of a statement. Without the standard, statements have no observable difference among any others. This principle, known as Wittgenstein's private language argument, applies to all concepts: "To mean anything in application to oneself in the first person they must also be applicable to oneself and others on circumstantial and behavioral grounds that are not just privately available" (Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* 22). Our subjective experience allows for the creation of meaningful statements, but, due to this principle, they must be available to other perspectives. Put simply,

⁷ This is another way of formulating Hume's is-ought distinction.

meaning is inherently shareable. Even Kierkegaard, who championed subjective truth, was able to relate his ideas in a way that others could understand.

Perspectives consist of many elements, some of which can be evaluated for correctness (beliefs and actions) and others that resist judgment (goals and values). Within a value structure, the actions that further those values are deemed “good” and those that go against the values are considered “bad.” With an ultimate goal in mind, certain actions are better than others to achieve that goal. This allows for the evaluation of beliefs and actions, as they can be judged by how well they align with values and help accomplish goals. However, perspectives cannot be adequately critiqued for their values and goals alone. Consider the troubling conflict within the natural interactions between predator and prey. From the predator’s perspective, they are strong and good and deserve to dominate the prey. From the prey’s perspective, the predators are evil and must be avoided. The conflicting perspectives are locked in a stalemate and must agree to disagree. This is the same for any zero-sum game, where any advance on one side results in a loss in the other. Moral truth exists but only with the perspectives that share the same values. Otherwise, an integrated perspective that considers both must go “beyond good and evil” to understand each moral perspective contextually.

In perspectivism, values are not deduced through rationality, but come first from our subjectivity and give rise to objective moral reasoning. This is evident through the myriad of moral arguments made for and against certain behavior. Coherent moral arguments, however odd, can be deduced from any given value, such as the Jainism commandment to avoid harming microorganisms, which stems from the value of all life as sacred (Mehta). This explains why trying to change someone’s values is much harder than changing their beliefs. When constructing an argument, we need to appeal to some common ground. With a common value, truth for

example, we can appeal to reason and evidence. If the other person has a value that trumps truth, then these same appeals will not be as effective. Without an area of agreement to work from, we can do nothing more but talk past one another. One recourse would be emotional appeals to try to convert another's values in closer accordance with our own. The other, which distinguishes perspectivism from relativism, is to critique a moral system from within⁸, showing that certain values or goals are in conflict, and thus self-defeating.

Despite the complexity and diversity that a perspective's subjectivity brings, every perspective shares the common feature of creating meaning. As mentioned above, perspectives may not necessarily value truth, but they must still value meaning. Consider the hedonist perspective, the highest goal of which is to have pleasurable experiences. To be consistent, the object of belief for the hedonist is to serve this highest goal. Whether or not beliefs correspond with objective reality only matters when it affects the amount of pleasure hedonists experience. Epistemology concerns itself with knowledge, which is basically true, justified belief. For truth seekers, the justification for true beliefs is sought, but hedonists may replace "true beliefs" with "pleasurable beliefs" and use an alternative justificatory method. The usual route of arguing for the falsehood or lack of justification for a proposition may not be enough to change the beliefs of one who does not value truth. However, we can still determine objectively the pleasure-value of their beliefs because they have meaning.

Comparing two perspectives would be impossible if not for some objective way to compare them. Relativism holds that comparing perspectives is pointless because subjectivity cannot escape itself. This is not necessarily the case, because relativism "confuses the inevitability of subjectivity (that there is no Absolute Truth; that each of us is making our own

⁸ Nietzsche conducted his critique of traditional morality by assuming a common value of a flourishing, excellent humanity. Although considered a moral anti-realist, he still has visions of progress towards this goal (Leiter).

truth) with what I believe is the false notion of the impossibility of thereby nonarbitrarily comparing these subjectivities” (Kegan, ch. 9). Are perspectives truly as purely subjective as relativists lead us to believe? Recall from chapter 3 how the individual interior perspective can be integrated with the individual exterior perspective to form a greater understanding. As psychology is linked to neurology, our own perspectives are linked with our brains. This allows for a form of objective analysis, but not in the most meaningful way.

In *The View from Nowhere*, Thomas Nagel argues that physical objectivity is not an exhaustive account of reality. Descriptions of mental subjectivity and subjective perspectives are an irreducible aspect of the real world. Consciousness is perhaps the greatest example of something immediate and real that cannot be described in terms of the physical world. Speaking of perspectives in terms of “brain states” loses the essential characteristics of the perspectives that we wish to evaluate, the mental phenomena of values, goals, and decisions. These phenomena, which may include qualia – subjective sensations of physical phenomena must be included in our picture of what the world consists. Now, just as we can imagine a variety of physical objects, we can also imagine a variety of subjective perspectives. The multiplicity of perspectives actually exists, separated across the many conscious beings.

Exploring these perspectives can be done in a meaningful way, despite our limitations. Nagel proposes we compare perspectives not against their physical components, but as instances of something general (*The View from Nowhere* 18). The individual interior perspective can be integrated with the collective interior perspective, which allows for objective comparison, in the sense that the comparison goes beyond the biases of a single perspective, rather than being compared to physical reality. This intersubjective comparison provides the base for the nonarbitrary comparison we sought. When considering perspectives to be part of the world, there

is no reason to suppose that the human perspective is primary. Our point of view is simply one instance out of the many. Experience is an aspect of the world, and we can imagine other subjective experiences, translating them into terms of our own (Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* 21). For perspectives with differing values and goals, our imagination may be limited to fully understand the changed meaning of so many things. Still, by focusing on what meaning is held, we can translate radically differing perspectives across the range of intersubjective comparisons.

In the following chapter, the link between objective and subjective is explored further. As explained in chapter 4, the objective perspective was found to be meaningless without interpretation. The subjective perspective alone also cannot provide meaningful interpretation, for there is nothing to interpret. The intersection of these two produces the rich meaningful experience allowed by our consciousness of the world. Finally, in chapter 7, I will discuss how to use the meaning made by perspectives to translate into other perspectives.

VI. THE NON-DUALIST PERSPECTIVE

In the 17th century, Descartes split the world in two substances: mind and matter. From then on, this has come to underlie our basic assumptions of the world as we divide the world into these two categories whenever possible. Although first touched upon by Plato in *Phaedo*, “dualism” is most closely associated with Descartes. The separation of subject and object has significant problems associated with it that I will discuss. These problems stem from a misunderstanding of how meaning is created. As explained in chapters 4 and 5, it does not make sense to talk about purely objective or purely subjective meanings. Instead, there are two sides to meaning, which extends to how we should think about the world itself.

First, I must explain the position of predicate dualism. This view holds that a complete description of the world requires it to be broken down into either physical phenomena or mental phenomena. Additionally, neither description is reducible to the other; they are entirely separate. Predicate dualism introduces a fundamental distinction between the objective physical descriptions and subjective mental descriptions. This assumption promotes primary categories that divide the world into either description from the very beginning. German theoretical physicist Werner Heisenberg found this inherently problematic, writing in *The Physicist's Conception of Nature* that “the common division of the world into subject and object, inner world and outer world, body and soul, is no longer adequate and leads us into difficulties” (Heisenberg qtd. in Nicoletis, ch. 12). The difficulties of predicate dualism have been implied throughout my thesis, and will now be explained more clearly.

The predicate dualism view resembles Wilber's “integral theory” discussed in chapter 3, but with a key difference. Instead of creating a fundamental distinction between objective and subjective perspectives, perspectivism takes an integrated approach, creating more meaning than

the simple combination of each. Each “objective” perspective is recognized as a subjective interpretation of the world. There is no real way to separate these two. The “objective form” is actually an intersubjective agreement, arising from common interpretations of the same phenomena. Perspectivism cannot support a fundamental division between the objective and the subjective because every meaningful perspective is created through an intersection of the two.

To understand how both the objective and subjective perspectives play a role in meaning making, we must ask a rather odd question: what is the meaning of meaning? Meaning is defined as “what is intended to be, or actually is, expressed or indicated; signification” (“Meaning”). Within this definition, the dual aspects of subjective and objective are made clear. Both elements are necessary for the creation of meaning, which happens when we project our (subjective) intentions onto our (objective) expressions. However, this definition is not exhaustive of meaning. Unexpressed intentions (i.e., our thoughts) have meaning in themselves, as long as they have the capability of being expressed in some form or another, at least in principle. Unintended expressions (i.e., the natural world) take on meaning whenever we experience them, so that our interpretations may be expressible. Whether or not the meaning is actually signified or not, it must have this potential, or else there is no meaningful relationship to the individual.

I propose that dual aspect theory, which extends from the perspectivist understanding of meaning, is the best replacement for the predicate dualism of Descartes and Plato. Dual aspect theory, closely associated with Spinoza and Schopenhauer, holds that all of existence can be understood through its objective and subjective characteristics. These are not separate, as in dual predicate theory, but two sides of the same coin, resembling a kind of neutral monism. However, most forms of neutral monism suppose that the objective (physical) and subjective (mental) phenomena are reducible to a third, neutral phenomena which is neither mental nor physical. One

objection to neutral monism is that it proposes the mysterious neutral category of existence, but does not describe anything about what this category is like (Stubenberg). If it is not like anything, then why suppose it exists at all? My strongest objection to this theory is the same as one of my objections to dual predicate theory, among the other problems with considering pure objectivity/subjectivity outlined above. According to Occam's Razor, we should not multiply our assumptions beyond necessity. There is no need to suppose the three ontological categories of neutral monism or the two fundamental categories of predicate dualism when a single category suffices. For dual aspect theory, this single category is existence, which can be analyzed along a spectrum between two perspectives. For certain projects, such as science, the objective qualities of existence are emphasized, whereas in the arts, the subjective qualities are emphasized. Dual aspect theory ascribes equal reality to the objective and subjective perspectives, so that there is no hard distinction at the level of fundamental categories, but only a soft distinction of emphasis.

Karl Popper makes a strong objection to dual-aspect theory that must be addressed. Although he directs this criticism to neutral monism, it affects dual aspect theory as well. Popper objects that these theories are "unavoidably mental; and so is, clearly, the procedure of the 'construction' of physical objects... In fact, it is a subjective idealism, very much in the Berkeleyan manner" (Stubenberg). The assertion that perspectivism is equatable to subjective idealism, which denies the objective quality of existence, was addressed in chapter 5 with the criticisms of the purely subjective perspective. Additionally, the objective quality of universe is not denied. Undoubtedly, existence exists in itself. What we make of existence determines our perspective, so that it inherently has an appearance, a subjective aspect. Nietzsche asks, "What is 'appearance' for me now? Certainly not the opposite of some essence: what could I say about any essence except to name the attributes of its appearance!" (*The Joyful Wisdom* 88). To speak

of how things appear to our consciousness is simply to acknowledge the fundamental principle of perspectivism – all meaningful understandings of existence exist within a certain perspective.

Dual aspect theory is not entirely dependent upon our subjective perceptions, as subjective idealism is, but, instead, depends equally on the objective and the subjective aspects of existence to create an objective-subjective perspective for each individual.

This chapter concludes the themes discussed in chapters 4 and 5. I felt it was important to clarify the role the objective and subjective perspectives play in making meaning, before continuing on to how perspectivism can be used to create meaning beyond that found in a single perspective. The ways multiple perspectives allow for greater meaning was explained in chapters 2 and 3, but will be expanded on in chapter 7. Now, with an understanding of meaning itself and how it is created, I can conclude my thesis with a discussion on the limits of our meaning making abilities and how to possibly overcome these.

VII. MAKING MEANING THROUGH PERSPECTIVISM

I began my thesis with a challenging proposition: according to the perspectivist principle, many truths are possible, and therefore, there is no such thing as Absolute Truth, an ultimate description of reality. These perspectival truths are not always valid, however, since perspectives may have self-defeating components. Then, I explained how exploring other perspectives can lead to a greater understanding. Other perspectives arise from different experiences and elucidate several facets of a concept we might not have noticed. With many perspectives to consider, we can attempt to consolidate each into an integrated perspective. This new meta-perspective allows the recognition of larger patterns within a broader context. Before this chapter, I discussed the roles of the objective and subjective perspectives in making meaning. Neither the objective nor the subjective is capable of doing so on its own. These perspectives must be brought together to create meaning. Not only this, but all of existence can be understood as an integration of its objective and subjective aspects. Finally, in this chapter, I will discuss the limits of our meaning making abilities, even through perspectivism, and how these may possibly be overcome.

The role of language in creating meaning was briefly explored in chapter 1 with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Another aspect of language I want to discuss is how the evolution of language influences how we make meaning. Our only direct evidence of the history of language comes from the invention of the written word, about 5,000 years ago. Indirectly, we can presume our language has undergone drastic changes in the last five million years of human evolution (Jackendoff, ch. 8). One way this happens is through the splitting of words into two separate terms. When a word can be used to mean different things, in the same context, then it is possible for a new word to be invented through a novel speech act. The potential for a more precise way of making meaning was there, and a new word or phrase is able to fulfill that. Over time, our

vocabulary and expressive capacities have dramatically improved, and as a result, we have become better at sharing our perspective and letting others know what we mean. It is important to note that this is not the end of history; our language will evolve, and our vocabulary will expand further.

For now, though, a single perspective has a few constraints on the ability to make meaning that extend beyond linguistic analysis. Meaning in perspectives are formed from the intersection of the objective and the subjective, but also from the particular slices to which that perspective is exposed. We cannot experience every phenomenon, nor consider any phenomenon from every possible angle. Our perspective is a function of our personal history, our place in time and space, or the sum of our experiences and genetics. This is referred to as the *individual history record constraint*. Overcoming this limitation is straightforward: apply the methods discussed in chapter 2 and 3 to consider others' perspectives and integrate them into your own. The next limitation was discussed in chapter 2 when considering the perspective of non-humans. Exploring another perspective comes with a degree of error, but some perspectives come from beings so different such that we cannot even imagine what they are really like to experience. For example, the physiological conditions of humanity allow us to see only a fraction of the spectrum of light. Neuroscientist Miguel Nicolelis refers to this as the *body constraint* (Ch. 12). This limitation seems insurmountable without drastic changes in our biological makeup. The third restriction on our ability to make meaning stems from the fact that our subjective experience is directly related to the physiology of our brain. Nicolelis refers to this as the *fixed energy budget constraint*: "Since electrical signaling through action potentials is very costly in terms of energy, our brains can only produce a finite number of action potentials at each given moment in time to represent a particular type of message" (Ch. 12). Imagine if our brains were substantially larger –

it would seem that we might be able to comprehend the most complex models and manipulate concepts with ease. We must utilize technology to help us with this task. Computational models and calculators may be thought of as an extension of our minds, quite useful for creating meaning with all sorts of applications.

As humanity matures, the accuracy of our comprehension and the precision of our perspective to reflect the intended meaning will become better. For now, the inherent limitations of our perspectives prevent us from grasping the exact meaning it could have in the future. Within these restrictions discussed above, there are several ways to explain something, and while each retains the core meaning, they inevitably relate imprecise meanings from the different ways it is represented. Perspectives can be translated and compared, in a similar way to how languages are translated, according to the core meaning they both attempt to express. This is possible when we consider perspectives, as Nagel supposes we should, general features of the world, and our intersubjective existence. Over time, a perspective will evolve so that it will approach the core meaning asymptotically, but never quite fully being able to express it. By exploring other perspectives and integrating them, we are able to create meaning and express ourselves more precisely, but an expression of core meaning, the most exhaustive account, would only be possible if every perspective was integrated. If this is the goal, then we must never stop exploring and integrating perspectives, always making more meaning as we evolve. In the far future, perhaps direct brain-to-brain communication could be used to share perspective directly without the confusing jumble of associations that words carry.

To conclude my thesis, I would like to investigate how we can use the methods of perspectivism to make meaning in our own lives. One way to make meaning I have not discussed is through exercises in perspective-taking. Nietzsche's account of the "eternal recurrence," which

I regard as a thought experiment, suggests a possibility that allows us to reexamine our lives from a new perspective. He asks us to imagine how we would feel if we were approached by a demon and told that our lives will be lived not just once, but many times over. In fact, we will continue to our lives, exactly as we are living it now, repeatedly for eternity. Nothing may be changed in our past, but our futures may be reconsidered in this light. Nietzsche wonders whether we would celebrate this opportunity or dread this form of eternal life (*The Joyful Wisdom* 270). If this perspective is too much to take seriously as a real possibility, he has a response. Although Nietzsche could hardly have been said to believe in God, he still smiles at the delusion of secularism: the “belief in the *world* and a deliberate ignoring of the ‘beyond’ and the ‘afterworld’” (“Notes from 1881” 241). The implication is that despite any such lack of evidence, considering the perspective that there might be something beyond the known (or knowable) allows you to live in a way you find the most meaningful.⁹ Nietzsche encourages us to live to the fullest, even if that means living dangerously, so that we may want to live our lives many times over.

The “eternal recurrence” is but one of a great number of exercises in perspective-taking. If that does not suit you, then you are free to consider the multitude of possibilities for our existence beyond the limits of our knowledge. Many faiths around the world have their own ideas of what exists beyond our fleeting existence on earth. A perspectivist approach considers each possibility and how it would change the meaning of what we do with our life. Nietzsche warns against taking certain perspectives *too* seriously, because these may violently disturb all of our meaning we have made so far. For example, he considers the following to be the most

⁹ This is similar, but distinct from Pascal’s Wager. Pascal proposes that our best bet is to believe in God to avoid being damned. The “eternal recurrence” as a thought experiment requires that we merely consider, not believe, in something beyond worldly affairs in order to gain a perspective that allows us to live the most meaningful life possible. The only consequence of ignoring this perspective is a short, fleeting, insignificant life.

dangerous perspective: “What I do or do not do now is as important for everything that is yet to come as is the greatest event of the past: in this tremendous perspective of effectiveness all actions appear equally great and small” (*The Joyful Wisdom* 202). This frightening possibility does not help us make meaning at all, only serving as a pointless distraction. While our actions do influence the future, we can only consider the larger patterns that our experience allows us to ascertain.

As we continue to make meaning, now with the perspectivist methods outlined in this thesis, Nietzsche wishes upon us “the strength to create for ourselves our own new eyes and ever again new eyes that are even more our own; hence man alone among all the animals has no eternal horizons and perspectives” (*The Joyful Wisdom* 180). With every new experience and each perspective we encounter, our own perspective can change and hopefully progress in our understanding of the world. Let our perspectives never stop evolving.

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