

The Dialectic of Perspectivism, I

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Philosophers ... always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing something, are supposed to be lacking; they always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Nietzsche, throughout his writings, chides other philosophers for not placing their question marks at a deep enough place – for breaking off their inquiries prematurely, rather than pressing their questions all the way to the end, allowing themselves to discover where their questions, if pressed, might eventually lead¹. In one of his posthumously published manuscripts, the following series of questions is posed:

Basic question: whether the *perspectival* is of the *essence* of the matter? Rather than its merely being a form of viewing that which is essential, a mere relation between distinct entities? Might the various terms of this relation be related to one another in such a way that the relation itself is bound up in the optics of perception? (1967, VIII, 1. 5. 12, my translation)

This passage seeks to explore a philosophical question through the employment of a metaphor. It is with the philosophical employment of this metaphor and the questions to which it gives rise that this paper is concerned². What one takes the “basic question” here to be will depend upon how one unpacks the metaphor. The metaphor is drawn from *the optics of perception*. But how is it supposed to work? How parallel to the optical case is the philosophical? Is, for example, the fact that, in the literal case, one’s perspective on an object is the

¹ This is the first half of a paper that will be published in two parts.

² I take the following to be one of the guiding precepts of Nietzsche’s own practice of philosophical criticism: one cannot come to grips with a philosopher’s philosophy without also coming to grips with the *philosophical problems themselves* with which that philosopher wrestles. This paper takes this precept to heart and consequently is addressed only secondarily to scholars of Nietzsche’s work and primarily to those who are interested in philosophizing about certain topics in the wake of Nietzsche. That these two sorts of audience may have conflicting requirements is a point that Nietzsche himself frequently has occasion to emphasize.

sort of thing that one can *alter at will* a feature of the concept of perspective that matters for how the metaphor works? Is, for example, the fact that there are *laws* of optics relevant or incidental to how the metaphor is to be unpacked? Is it pertinent that, in the literal case, perspective involves a *perceptual* (as opposed to some other form of cognitive or intellectual) relation?

The philosophical question which Nietzsche's employment of the metaphor in such passages seeks to address might provisionally be formulated as follows: To what extent do our experiences (and/or thoughts) permit us to perceive (and/or conceive) the true nature of reality, and to what extent do they prevent us from doing so by merely reflecting features of our modes of perception (and/or conception) which we are prone to mistake for features of reality? Or, making use of the metaphor, the question may be put more succinctly as follows: What belongs to the essence of things and what *merely to our perspective*? The relatively recent vintage of philosophical exploitations of this metaphor notwithstanding, the question here posed is arguably as old as philosophy itself. Once, however, it comes to be (re)formulated in terms of this metaphor, new forms of pressure are brought to bear on the old question, enabling its inflection in some philosophically comparatively modern directions. The tendency of the above passage from Nietzsche's *Nachlass* is to encourage philosophers to press this question in ways they never have before – to consider the possibility that the essence of things and our perspective on them might be *inextricably* bound up with one another in a manner hitherto unappreciated and still urgently in need of philosophical elucidation. But, if so, what is the right way to understand the unity of the nexus in which they are thus bound together? And what sort of elucidation – what sort of exercise of philosophy – does this task of understanding call for?

One tendency among commentators on Nietzsche's work is to strip the question marks off of sentences in a quotation such as the above, converting them into statements of doctrine for the commentator to expound. Remarks such as the above will be particularly eagerly pounced upon by those commentators who hold that Nietzsche subscribes to a doctrine known as *perspectivism*. Having adduced such a text, the commentator will go on to explain how it is an expression of "Nietzsche's perspectivism" and what the subsidiary commitments of such a doctrine are. If one reviews such performances, it is difficult not to be struck by the following: Hardly any two commentators ever seem to agree on just what the doctrine in question is supposed to be. According to some commentators, the term 'perspectivism' stands for something quite banal and platitudinous; according to others, for something quite eye-opening. According to some, it stands for some form of

realism; according to others, for some form of anti-realism. According to yet others, it stands for some extreme and perhaps wonderful or perhaps disastrous form of relativism or skepticism. These differences in the interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy are, no doubt, to be attributed in part to the formidable exegetical challenges facing any attempt to synthesize Nietzsche's deliberately provocative countervailing formulations on almost any topic into a unified philosophical doctrine. But, in the case of this particular topic, they can be traced to an additional complication: to differences in which features of the non-metaphorical application of the concept of a perspective are retained and which are jettisoned in its philosophical employment – thus to differences in how the metaphor of perspective is unpacked – not only in the work of various commentators on Nietzsche's philosophy, but also in that of Nietzsche himself through the various phases in the development of his philosophy.

Rather than taking the preceding quotation to express a stable and enduring doctrine to which Nietzsche subscribed throughout his life, one might take it instead to be doing just what it appears to be doing: namely, *asking a question* – a question with which, as I will try to show, Nietzsche wrestled throughout his life. In this paper, I will offer a reading of Nietzsche that presents him, over the course of his philosophical career, as struggling to heed his own advice with regard to this “basic question”. I will present him as laboring to place the question mark here at a deep enough place – returning over and over again to his previous conclusions in order to try to press the question further, thereby allowing himself to discover where such a question, if pressed hard enough, might eventually lead. I will argue that this process of self-interrogation leads Nietzsche to question many of the philosophical commitments often associated with the so-called doctrine of “perspectivism”. Along the way, I hope to shed some light on why it is that “perspectivism” can be, and has been, so variously construed – as both realist and anti-realist, platitudinous and surprising, wonderful and disastrous.

In order to do this, before turning to an examination of Nietzsche's own texts, it helps to have a perspicuous overview of how the metaphor is supposed to function and the diverse ways in which it lends itself to philosophical exploitation. It is the burden of the first third of this paper to supply such an overview – an overview of (what I will call) *the dialectic of perspectivism*. Part I explores the roots of the metaphor; this prepares the way for Part II which distinguishes some varieties of philosophical perspectivism; while Part III touches briefly on how, in discussions of “Nietzsche's perspectivism”, these varieties tend to get unhelpfully run together. The remainder of the paper traces the stations through which Nietzsche's own thought on this topic passes. The

middle third of the paper takes a close look at his first sustained defense of a perspectivist doctrine – at (what I will call) *Nietzsche's early perspectivism* – and at its comparatively unbridled employment of the metaphor. Part IV outlines the overall shape of this doctrine; Part V canvasses his early attempts to come to terms with it, and Part VI identifies its underlying fundamental commitments. The final third of the paper charts the subsequent progress of his thought, from his middle-period writings onwards, culminating in the philosophically far more circumspect employment of the metaphor in his later writings – in (what I will call) *Nietzsche's mature perspectivism*. Part VII focuses on one characteristic example of his middle-period attempts to bypass his early perspectivism while retaining its fundamental commitments; Part VIII sketches a dilemma such attempts face and points to the beginnings of the path he takes out of the dilemma; finally, Part IX describes the concluding stretch of the route Nietzsche travels in arriving at his mature conception and the alteration in his employment of the metaphor that this transformation in his philosophy occasions.

I. The Roots of the Metaphor

Before we inquire into Nietzsche's perspectivism(s), we do well first to reflect on the following question: If one came upon it in some other philosopher's writings, without yet having encountered it in Nietzsche's writings, what might one naturally take the term 'perspectivism' to mean? When might a philosopher be drawn to call upon this particular locution and what, in so doing, might he naturally be taken to mean? Here is a sketch of something fairly tame that someone might already want to call a variety of "perspectivism":

Naive perspectivism. Objects look different depending upon the perspective from which they are viewed. Something that is round can appear elliptical. If I look at something in one light it will appear green, in another it will appear blue. And so on. This gives rise to distortions that are due to the circumstances under which objects are perceived. We must correct for these distortions, if we wish to judge correctly.

It is none too clear what, if any, philosophical commitments are in play in the preceding recital. I call it "*naive* perspectivism" because I take it to turn on a set of observations that can seem to be truisms. Indeed, depending upon how one takes the preceding, it may not look to be the statement of a philosophical position – as opposed to the recital of some platitudes about the nature of perception. So construed, "perspectivism" would turn out not to be a philosophical position at all, but merely a set of reminders about some of the

potentially deceptive circumstances under which objects can be perceptually encountered. Many philosophers – sometimes in Nietzsche’s name – offer a recital of considerations that pretend to trade initially on little more than just such platitudes; but these are then arranged and further elaborated so as to give the impression that they license an inference to a substantial metaphysical conclusion about the nature of reality and our possible knowledge of it. How do philosophers manage to pull such a sizeable metaphysical rabbit out of the perfectly ordinary hat of our everyday concept of a perspective?

In the first two sentences of the above statement of naive perspectivism, the concept of perspective is employed in a comparatively literal way. Yet it is worth noting that, even in the seemingly innocuous statement offered above, the concept of a perspective is, by the time we reach the third sentence of the statement, already employed in a metaphorically extended way³. What features of the original concept underwrite this metaphorical extension? Before we can answer this question, we first need to be reasonably clear about what “the original concept” is (or was). Before considering how the metaphor functions in (what we still take to be) relatively metaphorical uses of it, let us briefly explore the etiology of the dead metaphor or metaphors that lie buried in (what we now take to be) relatively literal uses of the word.

This, of course, requires that we look briefly at the original home of the concept of perspective – namely, painting. This original context of the concept is often invoked by Nietzsche as a point of departure for his own further philosophical inflection of the concept. Section 299 of *The Gay Science*, for example, is titled ‘What one should learn from artists?’ and we find there the following injunction:

³ It may be that, at this point in the history of our language, the metaphor at issue here, in this first extension of the term, is a dead one – one that has become incorporated into our everyday uses and dictionary definitions of the word and is now part of ordinary language. If true, this in no way detracts from my point. To claim that a subsequent use of a term depends upon a metaphorical extension of its prior use does not commit one to a claim, one way or the other, about whether the subsequent use in question might or might not eventually become incorporated into the language. In what follows, I will not attempt to adjudicate which metaphorical extensions of earlier uses of the term ‘perspective’ are now dead metaphors and which are living. In what follows I do present distinctions between (what I will call) more and less “severe” metaphorical employments of the concept of a perspective. These distinctions depend on no particular view about how one ought to distinguish dead from living metaphors. All they depend on is the claim that, in each such case, as the extended use gives rise to a term of art, the sense and reference of the expression ‘perspective’ is altered. At no point, however, should any of my remarks be taken to advance a view about where we, today, ought to draw the line between the living and the dead cases – between those employments of the term that should and those that should not still be taken to involve a metaphorical inflection of the concept. (Indeed, I am inclined to favor the view that there is no sharp line to be drawn here at all. But this paper contains no brief for that claim either.)

To distance oneself from things until there is much in them that one no longer sees and much that the eye must add *in order to see them at all*, or to see things around a corner and as if they were cut out and extracted from their context, or to place them so that each partially distorts the view one has of the others and allows only perspectival glimpses, or to look at them through colored glass or in the light of the sunset, or to give them a surface and skin that is not fully transparent: all this we should learn from artists while otherwise being wiser than they. For usually in their case this delicate power stops where art ends and life begins.

An analogy is here proposed between the painter's mastery of perspective as a device for faithfully rendering the diverse guises in which things appear depending upon the optical conditions under which they are viewed and a further sort of mastery – one to which the accomplished philosopher can attain – a mastery that allows the thinker in his understanding of the nature of things not to gainsay the diverse guises in which things appear depending upon the cognitive conditions under which they are apprehended or comprehended. But how exactly is the analogy supposed to work and what are its philosophical implications?

In the Renaissance, the term 'perspective' referred to a technique for representing three-dimensional objects and depth relationships on a two-dimensional surface⁴. Its Latin etymology suggests that the word 'perspective' ought to mean just what Albrecht Dürer thought it did mean when he sought to define it as follows: '*Perspectiva* is a Latin word which means 'seeing through'' (von Lange K, Fuhse F, 1993, p. 319). The art historian, Erwin Panofsky explains how Dürer's definition of the term was connected to a technique of pictorial representation:

We shall speak of a fully "perspectival" view of space not when mere isolated objects, such as houses or furniture, are represented in "foreshortening", but rather only when the entire picture has been transformed [...] into a "window", and when we are meant to believe we are looking through this window into a space. The material surface upon which the individual figures or objects are drawn or painted or carved is thus negated, and instead reinterpreted as a mere "picture

⁴ This is a *de re* description of the technique in question, not a *de dicto* description of how the earlier practitioners of this technique would themselves have been inclined to characterize their pictorial practices – a matter far too complex to be broached here.

plane". Upon this picture plane is projected the spatial continuum which is seen through it and which is understood to contain all the various individual objects (Panofsky, 1991)⁵.

According to Panofsky, what we were originally meant to "see through" was the two-dimensional plane of a picture⁶. The artist sought to offer a depiction of a vista of a three-dimensional space and the objects in it that was so convincing that someone looking at the resulting image would seem to be able to *see through* the plane of the picture and *into* that space. The plane surface of the picture was to be like the transparent glass pane of a window, framing and disclosing a view of a scene that lay beyond it⁷.

The fact that a coin looks round when viewed head-on and elliptical when viewed from an angle is evidently an example of the sort of fact that matters for those involved in this practice of depiction that formed the context in which the Latin equivalent of the term 'perspective' was employed by people

⁵ Panofsky's argument takes its point of departure from the following passage from Alberti: 'I draw a rectangle of whatever size I want, which I regard as an open window *through* which the subject to be painted is *seen*' (1973, p. 55, my emphases). In a footnote, Panofsky expands on the definition of perspective offered in the main body of his text: 'For us, perspective is quite precisely the capacity to represent a number of objects together with a part of the space around them in such a way that the conception of the material picture support is completely supplanted by the conception of a transparent plane through which we believe we are looking into an imaginary space' (p. 77, n. 5). Panofsky here expands considerably on anything Alberti himself says, as well as arguably alters the original definition offered in the main body of his own text, by introducing a reference to what is *believed* – a reference that is not easy to unpack. What does it mean to *believe* that one is looking into an *imaginary* space? Some will think that Panofsky is on the right track here. They will say: When we look at a painting of a landscape we *make believe* that we are looking at a real landscape. Others will say: No, we don't. One way to come to see that Panofsky's two definitions of perspective differ significantly is to notice that one of them encourages the line taken by the former side in this debate in a way that the other does not.

⁶ Though still widely accepted, Panofsky's account of these matters has been subjected to a searching criticism by Joel Snyder (1995). After citing the passage quoted in the previous note, Snyder goes on to comment: 'This strikes me as a troubling way of going about opening a discussion of perspective. [...] It is troubling because it dislocates the term from the historical setting that gives it a determinate sense, and places the burden of its use, not on the specific (and, say, measurable) qualities of a given picture, but on the formation of a belief on the part of viewers – a belief that when they are looking at a picture, they are viewing a transparent plane through which they see into an imaginary space. And so the concept of perspective, which makes its debut in the quattrocento as a term of painters' practice (together with a constellation of concepts and practices that give it meaning), is reformulated by Panofsky in such a way that it can be stretched across the history of Western art' (p. 338).

⁷ The identification of the picture plane with a window pane is my literary flourish. The passage in question from Alberti (that Panofsky bases his account of the analogy between picture and window on) concerns an ordinary Renaissance window. Most windows in the Renaissance did not have glass panes and the few that did were not of the requisite quality and transparency to make the addition of this flourish to the analogy at all historically apt. Renaissance windows did, however, tend to come equipped with shutters. This is why Alberti (in the passage quoted above) speaks of an open window.

such as Dürer. This is the sort of difference in appearance that Alberti – in his *De Pictura*, the first treatise on linear perspective as a technique of pictorial representation – aimed to teach painters how to capture on canvas. ‘The painter’s duty’, Alberti wrote, ‘is to inscribe and paint any given bodies on a surface, with lines and colors, at a fixed distance, and with such a fixed positioning of the centric ray, that everything which you see in the painting seems exactly like the bodies in question, and in the same relief’ (1973, pp. 88–89)⁸. Alberti, in his treatise, seeks to formulate a set of objective rules for depicting how things subjectively appear when viewed from a particular vantage point. The concept of perspective, therefore, from its very beginning, involves an internal relation between objective and subjective moments in a perceptual encounter between a perceiving subject and the object(s) of his perception. The objective moment is tied to a larger enterprise of achieving faithful representations of reality, the subjective moment to one of mastering techniques of pictorial illusion. The objective dimension of the art of perspective lay in its quest to codify a rational technique for representing the spatial properties and relationships of objects – a quest that drew on and occasioned developments in the sciences of optics, geometry, and physiology. The subjective dimension lay in its quest to capture

⁸ The translation has been modified by Anthony Grafton; see his *Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance* (2002, p. 123). As this quotation makes clear, the art of perspective in the early Renaissance was thought to consist in a technique for representing how an object or set of objects would appear if viewed from a single fixed point. Brunelleschi is often credited with the discovery of this technique; and in an influential biography of him by one of his contemporaries, the importance of fixing such a “point of vision” is emphasized: ‘The painter of such a picture assumes that it has to be seen from a single point which is fixed in reference to the height and width of the picture, and that it has to be seen from the right distance. Seen from any other point there would be distortions. [...] The fixing of the point of vision made the scene absolutely real’ (Manetti, 1981, pp. 171–172). It was originally held that a painting could seek to depict only one such point of vision at a time. For as the fixed point from which an object is viewed shifts so does its appearance. Alberti taught that these shifts in appearance were not haphazard, but systematic in nature and could be captured by a set of rules akin to and no less objective than the principles of geometry: ‘Our instruction in which all the perfect absolute art of painting is explained will be easily understood by a geometrician, but one who is ignorant in geometry will not understand these and other rules of painting’ (*op. cit.*). Alberti also famously proposed the employment on the part of the painter of the following device (which he may well have invented himself): the hanging of a net of extremely fine thread at an intermediate set distance between the painter and the objects he sought to represent. After carefully attending to which portions of the objects fell into which squares of the grid formed by the net, the painter’s task was one of transferring those portions of the objects that fell within a given cell of the grid to the corresponding segment of the square of the picture. This device was to furnish the painter with a procedure that enabled him to break down into a precise and methodical series of steps the task of transposing onto the flat surface of the painting the round projecting surfaces of the objects he sought to depict without in any way distorting the spatial relationships that obtained among them. This procedure, however, evidently presupposes the fixing and holding of a single governing “point of vision”.

how things visually appear to a viewing subject from a freely chosen point of view on the world – a quest that initiated increasingly probing explorations of the realm of visual appearance on the part of painters, architects, and philosophers⁹. It is this double-sidedness of the concept of perspective – this interplay of mutually interdependent moments of objectivity and subjectivity – that makes it both such an attractive and such a treacherous metaphor for philosophy¹⁰.

⁹ The objective dimension of the study of perspective was tied to the aspiration to arrive at a *science* of perspective, the subjective dimension to the aspiration to capture *how things look* to a viewing subject. These aspirations often collided – requiring the artist to cheat on the “laws” of perspective – as, for example, when the task was to represent how the most distant columns in a colonnade look from an oblique angle. (Ancient architects were already familiar with the fact that they had in various ways to deviate from the dimensions of a strictly geometric form if they wanted the resulting structure to *appear* to be of the form in question.) Panofsky discusses some of the difficulties that arise in the attempts of the early theorists of perspective to bridge this gap between (what Panofsky calls) ‘the actual subjective optical impression’ we have when looking at a constellation of objects and the sort of representation thereof achieved by means of a formal construction in linear perspective. Thus, for example, he writes: ‘The vanishing lines of a building, which are represented as straight lines in a perspective picture, would have to be drawn as curves to correspond to the retinal image’ (1991, p. 33, I have modified the translation). Panofsky is himself here no less entangled in the philosophical problems that vex the Renaissance authors he discusses than they are. This can be seen in the suggestions that flow from his characterizations of both the objective and the subjective sides of the difficulties that arise in this connection for the Renaissance conception of perspective – e.g., on the one hand, in the suggestion that the “curves” here mentioned are ones that correspond to elements in some alternative “curvilinear” formal construction and, on the other hand, in the suggestion that some quasi-physiological concept of “optical impression” or “retinal image” is able to serve the function of specifying the content of a “subjective” episode of perceptual consciousness.

¹⁰ This is not to say that it has ever been completely clear to anyone just how to understand the relation between these two moments in the art of perspective. Unsurprisingly, Renaissance and early modern attempts to theorize the relation between that which is objective and that which is subjective in the depiction of perspective became quickly and predictably entangled in philosophical questions about what is subjective and what is objective in our ordinary visual experiences of objects. For a penetrating discussion of these problems in the context of Renaissance theories of perspective, see Joel Snyder (1980). These problems are still with us and philosophers and historians of art continue to debate them. Ernst Gombrich dismisses the ‘idea that perspective is merely a convention and does not represent the world as it looks’ and sums up his own position as follows: ‘One cannot insist enough that the art of perspective aims at correct equation: It wants the image to appear like the object and the object like the image’ (1960, pp. 254, 259). Nelson Goodman, in arguing that the art of perspective is indeed nothing more than a mere convention, is no less dismissive of Gombrich’s position than Gombrich is of his, and sums up his own position as follows: ‘[P]erspective provides no absolute or independent position or standard of fidelity’ (1976, p. 19). Nothing I say in this paper (which is about the intelligibility or lack thereof of various *metaphorical* extensions of the concept of perspective) requires that I take sides in this contemporary debate (which is about the conventionality of lack thereof or the application of the *literal* concept to certain practices of pictorial representation). But, for what it’s worth, my own view of this debate (which I cannot defend here) is that the parties to it fall prey to a common confusion. Gombrich is wedded to a philosophically tempting but utterly confused form of “realism” based on an empty claim concerning what it would be for an image to be “like” (or to contain “the same information”) as the perceptual experience that it seeks to

As this practice of pictorial representation flourished in the Renaissance, the employment of the term came to encompass further features of its original context of application, thus engendering a modification of the concept – one that gives rise to the concept that many of us now (especially those of us who are not well versed in art history) are prone to think of as the most literal sense of the term ‘perspective’. When we speak of the coin as looking round from one perspective and elliptical from another, we have shifted from using the term as the name of a technique of pictorial representation, to using it as a term for that which such a technique seeks to represent. The term ‘perspective’, in this modified employment of it, refers to a particular *line of sight* on an object in the real world (not just in a picture) when viewed from a particular angle. As this line of sight varies, so will certain features of the object’s appearance. The term ‘perspective’ here (as an expression for what varies in our experience of the object as the line of sight varies) no longer refers to the aforementioned technique of pictorial illusionism per se but rather to those features of our visual experience of objects that such a technique seeks to represent. (Using the term as an expression for this varying aspect of our visual experience of objects, we can now say that what the aforementioned pictorial technique seeks to effect is an illusion of perspective.) It is unsurprising that the original meaning of the term came to be extended in this way. For in order to be able to master the technique of pictorial representation in question, a painter had to subject himself to a discipline of looking at actual objects, attending to their appearances under varying conditions, and learning to master the sets of relationships involved in the manner in which their appearances undergo alteration as the angle of the line of sight upon them varies.

As the meaning of the term ‘perspective’ thus develops – so as to mean not just the two dimensional surface of a picture plane that appears to disclose a scene in the way it would if, in looking at it, we were looking through a window, but rather the lines of sight that a view through such a window would afford

represent; and Goodman mistakes the claim in question for a substantive one – one that could be negated and whose negation he undertakes to affirm – thereby recoiling into an equally confused form of “irrealism”. A sensible view of perspective ought equally to eschew each of the only two options (‘Perspective furnishes an *absolute* standard of fidelity’ and ‘Perspective is *merely* a convention’) that remain available as long as the terms of this debate are permitted to control our thought about the topic. The art of perspective may indeed manifest certain standards of *fidelity* without its being the case that those standards are therefore in any way “absolute” or “independent” (in the hyperbolic pseudo-employment of these terms from which Goodman recoils), and the practices of picture-making to which that art gives rise may indeed be based on *conventions* of pictorial representation without its being the case that the resulting practices are therefore “merely conventional” (in the hyperbolic employment of this phrase from which Gombrich recoils).

– the concept comes to have built into it the idea that every perspective forms a part of a rational system of determinable relationships between itself and other possible perspectives. This gives rise to the employment of the term that is, arguably, the most literal sense of the term that one is likely still to encounter in everyday discourse today with any frequency. This contemporary literal use of the term involves, among others, the following five features of the concept of a perspective: (1) it is the sort of thing that can be freely *altered*, (2) it affords a *view* of an object, (3) it has a specifiable location in a *matrix* of alternative perspectives, (4) these multiple perspectives share a *common* object (or set of objects), (5) collectively, as a system, they furnish *knowledge* – allowing us to *correct* for distortions and achieve a *true estimation* of the spatial properties and relationships of an object (or set of objects). As we shall soon see in some detail, in subsequent philosophical employments of the term ‘perspective’, these features of the original concept gradually fall or fade away.

In early philosophical employments of the term, however, all five of these features were steadfastly retained. Impressed by the achievements of Renaissance painters whose work exhibited a breathtaking mastery of *ars perspectiva*, a number of early modern philosophers were quick to seize upon the concept of perspective as a metaphor to elucidate the character of the nexus that unites the varieties of epistemic access to the world enjoyed by individual cognizing subjects. Among those most enamored with the metaphor was Leibniz:

It is true that the same thing may be represented in different ways; but there must always be an exact relation between the representation and the thing, and consequently between the different representations of one and the same thing. The projections in perspective of the conic sections of the circle show that one and the same circle may be represented by an ellipse, a parabola and a hyperbola, and even by another circle, a straight line and a point. Nothing appears so different nor so dissimilar as these figures; and yet there is an exact relation between each point and every other point. Thus one must allow that each soul represents the universe to itself according to its point of view, and through a relation peculiar to it; but a perfect harmony subsists therein (1952, section 357).

The first part of the final sentence of this passage highlights a crucial feature of our collective cognitive situation – one that invites not only the use of the metaphor that Leibniz makes, but also the very different use of it that subsequent philosophers make – to wit: One must allow that each cognizing subject represents the universe to itself according to its point of view,

and through a relation peculiar to it. Leibniz, however, is attracted to the metaphor precisely because he wants to affirm just what many contemporary philosophers who are attracted to the metaphor are eager to deny: namely that each cognizing subject is in principle able fully to transcend the peculiarities of the particular relation through which he happens initially to be drawn to represent the universe to himself. This transcendence, according to Leibniz is to be achieved through a mastery of the corresponding ‘laws of perspective’ that govern our differing epistemic points of view. Just as in optics, so for Leibniz in cognition generally: there is an exact and discoverable relation between each perspective and every other perspective. (The fifth feature of the concept specified above is therefore particularly crucial to the use Leibniz wants to make of it as a metaphor for explicating the character of the relation that obtains between moments of subjectivity and objectivity in human cognition generally.) Leibniz is therefore as eager as any postmodernist to affirm and enumerate the radical differences that obtain across individual points of view, but he sees no fundamental tension between this sort of claim and a claim to the effect that ‘a perfect harmony subsists therein’; and he sees the concept of perspective as furnishing the perfect metaphor for exhibiting why there is in fact no tension between these two sorts of claim:

It is as in those devices of perspective, where certain beautiful designs look like mere confusion until one restores them to the right angle of vision or one views them by means of a certain glass or mirror. [...] Thus the apparent deformities of our little worlds combine to become beauties of the great world, and have nothing in them which is opposed to the oneness of an infinitely perfect universal principle (Leibniz, 1952, section 157)

Leibniz’s philosophical exploitation of the metaphor of perspective thus leads to a radically un-Nietzschean conclusion: Our differing epistemic points of view are not only perfectly commensurable, but are all governed by a single universal principle. What matters for our present purposes is to notice the following: This is at least as natural a way of unpacking the philosophical metaphor here at issue as the presently more fashionable way – one that takes itself to be ineluctably driven to the opposite conclusion: namely, that our differing epistemic points of view on the world are necessarily radically incommensurable.

In its most fashionable and virulent philosophical inflection, the term ‘perspective’ ends up being employed to denote a concept that possesses roughly the negation of each of five logical features specified above. A “perspective”, on this particularly severe (reputedly “Nietzschean”) philosophical employment of the term, is understood to mean a sort of point of view (1) that cannot be

freely altered – so that a subject is *confined* to a single perspective, (2) that the subject *cannot see through or beyond* – so that what the subject perceives is *dictated* by his perspective, (3) that is *epistemically isolated* – standing in no determinable relation to any other perspective, (4) that has *no common object* that it shares with other perspectives, (5) that is *all-encompassing* – so that nothing can be disclosed that is not itself a part or product of the perspective from which it is disclosed. The word ‘perspective’ thus, according to this latter philosophical use of it, comes to mean, not only something very different from what its Latin etymology suggests it ought to mean, but roughly the opposite of what we today ordinarily take it to mean, when we employ it literally in everyday contexts of use. How does the logic of the concept of a perspective come to be so radically altered? It is the burden of the next part of this paper to trace, step by step, how the grammar of this concept gradually comes, under the pressure of philosophy, to implode in on itself.

In the statement of naive perspectivism above, we have taken a small – and in itself philosophically innocuous – step in this direction; but it is a step. As soon as we speak of the mountain as appearing green from one perspective and blue from another, the word ‘perspective’ no longer refers to the concept that forms the common topic of Dürer’s reflections, Alberti’s treatise and Panofsky’s historical inquiry. To speak of the apparent color of an object as something that is ‘due to our perspective’ might well be thought already to constitute an inflection of the original concept of a perspective into a metaphorical register, in as much as color is hardly a geometrical property of an object. (But, even if this is an extension of the original concern of *ars perspectiva*, the step was under preparation very early on: Alberti’s treatise on perspective, for example, concerns itself, directly alongside its treatment of the variation of the apparent spatial properties of objects under varying conditions of viewing, also with the faithful pictorial rendition of variations in the apparent color of objects under varying conditions of shadow and light.) In the context of an ongoing refinement of practices for painting how things visually appear, the original comparatively narrow concept (of a network of lines of sight on an object and what they collectively disclose – shape, relative depth, etc.) has here been extended to encompass the disclosure of all sorts of further (non-spatial) aspects of an object that can come into view under varying conditions of viewing (such as differences in the degree and character of its illumination). I will henceforth refer to this as the *first metaphorical extension* of the concept of a perspective¹¹.

¹¹ In allowing myself to refer to this as the *first* metaphorical extension of the concept, I leave to one side the dead metaphor suggested by the word’s Latin etymology and any other lapsed

The underlying thought that licenses this first metaphorical extension is the following: These further sorts of difference in appearance (e.g., color) are like the original (literally perspectival) sorts of difference in appearance (e.g., shape) in that they, too, can be systematically accounted for through a proper understanding of the systematic relationships that obtain between how objects appear to an observer and the conditions under which they are viewed. So this first, relatively innocent, metaphorical inflection of the concept of perspective still brings with it a correlative metaphorical extension of the idea of *laws of perspective* – not only that there *are* such laws, but that they can be *mastered* by us and that with their aid we can furnish a rational account of the relation between appearance and perspective (of how variation in appearance can be accounted for by variation in perspective).

The statement of naive perspectivism, offered above, contains the words ‘and so on’ in it. Do we know how to go on here? Should we, for example, in extending the concept, take ourselves to be restricted to the sphere of optics? Prior to its first extension, when the concept is still employed literally, it is clear which of the ostensible features of objects can be attributed to perspective and

metaphors that may be folded into what passes today for its literal use. It perhaps also should be noted that, if the concept is taken to encompass solely *visual* aspects of the appearance of an object (such as color) and not other sensuous aspects of its appearance (such as smell or taste), then it is not entirely clear whether we are in fact already dealing with a *metaphorical* extension of the concept. For example, many of the early theorists and practitioners of *ars perspectiva* took changes in apparent color (and, in particular, in the relative proportions of shadow and light) to vary as systematically with changes of perspective as did changes in apparent shape; and hence they often considered the former to constitute as much a proper part of their project of formulating and mastering the laws of faithful pictorial representation as did the latter. Hence in the passage from Alberti quoted above, he says: ‘The painter’s duty is to inscribe and paint any given bodies on a surface, with lines and *colors*, at a fixed distance, and with such a fixed positioning of the centric ray, that everything which you see in the painting seems exactly like the bodies in question, and in the same relief’ (1966, p. 90, my emphasis); and in the subsequent treatise much attention is given to the topic of the faithful pictorial depiction of apparent color. For some, no doubt, this will seem a sufficient ground for concluding that a literal employment of the concept of perspective already includes within its scope at least some non-geometrical visual properties of objects, such as color. Alberti, however, was in no position to formulate “laws” governing the variation in the visual perception of apparent color in anything like the way he did take himself to have successfully formulated laws governing the variation in the visual perception of apparent geometrical shape. For others, no doubt, this will seem a sufficient ground for concluding that a literal employment of the concept of perspective should not be taken to include within its scope such visual properties of objects as their apparent color. Nothing I say in this paper need be taken to constitute a claim as to whether the application of the concept of perspective to certain non-geometrical visual aspects of experience (such as, e.g., color) already involves a metaphorical inflection of the concept or not. In this paper, whenever I speak of ‘the first metaphorical extension of the concept’, I will mean the application of the concept not only to non-geometrical visual aspects but also to non-visual aspects of sensory experience (such as taste, smell, etc.).

which can not. Shape? Yes. Color? No. Is the apparent shape of an object merely due to perspective? Possibly, but not necessarily. (An object can be the shape it appears to be.) Subsequent to this first inflection of the concept, however, it already begins to become less clear how we should now answer questions of this sort. The above statement makes it clear how the naive perspectivist will want to answer such questions for some features of experience: Shape? Possibly, but not necessarily. Color? Again same answer: Possibly, but not necessarily. (An object can be the color it appears to be.) But, in taking note of the ‘and so on’ in the above statement, how far do we take ourselves to be invited to extend the original concept? Which among the many ostensible properties of objects are now to be taken as candidates for features of our experience that are functions of perspective? Color is explicitly mentioned in the above statement. But how about other sensible qualities, such as sound and taste? Surely, variations in such qualities can also be systematically accounted for through a proper understanding of the systematic variations in how objects appear to a subject depending upon the conditions under which the subject encounters them. So, although the above statement explicitly mentions only *visual* appearances of objects as varying with our perspective on them, it is not at all unnatural to interpret the ‘and so on’ here as encompassing at least the auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory appearances as well. How about beauty and ugliness? Perhaps. But we need to extend the concept much further still if we are to make sense of what it is doing in the title of a volume called, say, *Recent Perspectives on Economic Change in France*. How much further? Do Marxist and Keynesian economics represent differences in perspective? How about Christianity and Islam? How about Euclidean and algebraic geometry? How about spatiality and temporality? Quantity and quality? Once we start extending the application of the concept of a perspective, before too long, we find ourselves swimming in philosophical waters.

II. Some Philosophical Perspectivisms

It does take a little philosophical push before one finds oneself not only in, but in over one’s head in such waters, needing to work hard to keep from drowning. To avail oneself of the metaphor in most everyday contexts of use, a speaker neither has nor needs to have ready to hand a principled answer to the persnickety question: ‘Which features of experience are functions of perspective and which are not?’ If, however, we allow the above statement of naive perspectivism to be rephrased as follows, in a more overtly philosophical idiom (engaging the philosophical preoccupations that are insinuated along with such a phraseology), the resulting statement will not only no longer seem naive,

it will now probably seem to be the statement of a philosophical position – one that employs the concept of perspective as a philosophical term of art in a way that may seem to call for a principled answer to the persnickety question:

Non-naive perspectivism. The world, as we experience it, appears to have *contradictory qualities*. A coin appears round when viewed from here, elliptical when viewed from there; the mountain appears green in this light, blue in that light; and so on. But these are not necessarily *intrinsic properties* of the world, but may rather be *perspective-dependent properties* of it – that is, they may not necessarily be properties of the objects we perceive *as those objects are in themselves*. Rather they may just be relative to some point of view or set of standing conditions under which the objects of experience are encountered.

I have italicized some of the vocabulary in the above statement that may cause us to feel that we are now on philosophical ground and that the above statement expresses a philosophical doctrine¹². But what doctrine is this? Is this a form of realism or a form of anti-realism? What may make the above recital sound, to a philosophically sensitive ear, as if it is shading into some version of realism is that it may seem to presuppose a contentious version of the distinction between appearance and reality (between how things are in themselves as opposed to how they appear from a certain perspective), and it may even seem hospitable to a further contentious claim to the effect that the world of appearance is not the true world (that most appearances are misleading and must be penetrated if we are to achieve a view of the world, as it is in itself)¹³.

That realism is the outcome of a philosophical line of thought that draws on the metaphor of perspective ought not to surprise one, as long as one focuses on the structure of the analogy that licenses the first metaphorical extension of the concept. For that initial extension trades on the idea that a distortion due to perspective is something that can be *corrected for* through a proper

¹² Although I label it ‘non-naive perspectivism’, I do not think this statement has to be taken to express anything non-naive. It could, for example, be taken merely to express, in fancy dress, an alternative formulation of naive perspectivism. With this label I mean to suggest only that once naive perspectivism is thus reformulated – with the introduction of locutions such as ‘the way objects are in themselves’ – it is bound to seem to some to be the expression of a philosophical position. There is no easy way to mark the point at which statements which make use of the concept of perspective cease merely to express philosophically innocuous thoughts and begin to express philosophically contentious ones. Nothing I say in this paper should be taken to imply that I think there is some easy way to mark this point.

¹³ Indeed, starting with a recital of roughly the above sort, the American philosopher E. B. McGilvary went on to elaborate something he called *perspective realism* – taking this to be the obvious name for the philosophical position in question (McGilvary, 1956, 1933).

understanding of the laws of perspective. The attempt to formulate a general philosophical doctrine that continues thus to trade on such a metaphorical extension of the concept may therefore naturally lead someone to embrace some variety of realism – one that seeks to account and correct for distortions in appearance by tracing them to systematic variations in perspective. Some variety of realism of this sort has been around ever since the ancient Greeks first started raising philosophical worries about perception. And, in the early modern period, once supplemented with a carefully elaborated distinction between primary and secondary qualities, the above recital was transformed into a general philosophical account of what in our perception of things pertains to their essence and what is merely perspectival. Such an account, in schematic form, goes something like this:

Primary quality realism. Some of the qualities that we perceive objects as having are qualities of the objects themselves, while others are due to features of our perceptual perspective on them. To attain an undistorted conception of the nature of the objects of our perception as they are in themselves, we need to distinguish between those dimensions of our perceptual experience that afford an undistorted representation of the nature of reality as it is in itself and those that are due merely to the peculiar character of our perceptual perspective on reality. Some features of our perceptual experience of the world are also more inherently misleading than other. We must therefore also distinguish between *primary qualities* (i.e., those that objects can have in themselves), and *secondary qualities* (i.e., those that objects appear to have because of the character of our perceptual interaction with them, but do not actually possess in themselves). *All secondary qualities are merely perspectival:* no one such quality is any more “real” than another.

I will refer to this doctrine that ensues when the concept of perspective becomes a metaphor for our forms of sentience generally, as *the first stage* of the dialectic of perspectivism or *stage-one perspectivism*. In stage-one perspectivism, the metaphor of a perspective is put to work to account for the *merely perspectival* nature of some (but not all) of our forms of perceptual sensitivity.

Nothing is said in the above statement about precisely how the distinction between primary and secondary qualities is to be drawn¹⁴. But let us assume that some particular way of drawing the line between primary and secondary

¹⁴ Actually, it is only along with a certain sort of specification of where the boundary line between primary and secondary qualities falls that the preceding statement comes to express a

qualities has been fixed¹⁵. In that case, we have fixed the scope of the ‘and so on’ that troubled us above, making it once again comparatively clear what in my experience of an object is a function of my perspective and what in my experience of it is not due to my perspective. We thereby mark a point at which the first metaphorical extension of the concept comes to a definite halt, thus in effect transforming what was previously merely a metaphor into a philosophical term of art with a clearly demarcated range of employment. The term ‘perspective’ here once again denotes a concept (with reasonably clear boundaries), but it has become quite distinct (with quite distinct boundaries) from the one it was either prior to its first metaphorical extension or immediately after its initial extension in naive perspectivism. In order to see this, consider the following claim (which was endorsed by practically everyone in the early modern period who subscribed to a version of the primary/secondary quality

philosophical doctrine. Although its label is bound to suggest that what is at issue here must be a philosophical doctrine, this statement, too, can be taken merely to express, now in even fancier dress, nothing more than a naive perspectivism. For it to remain naive, however, sentences such as ‘All secondary qualities are merely perspectival’ have to be interpreted as tautologies (or terminological stipulations about how to use terms such as ‘secondary quality’), rather than substantive claims. According to such a naive use of ‘secondary quality’, a quality is secondary if and only if it turns out to be a merely apparent property of an object. (Using the terms ‘primary quality’ and ‘secondary quality’ in this way, the naive perspectivist could claim that the greenness of the grass is one of its primary qualities.) The early modern conception of secondary qualities turns on a non-naive conception of secondary qualities – one that confers an independently specifiable sense on the term ‘secondary quality’. It is only if one has an independent criterion for distinguishing primary from secondary qualities (so that one knows on independent grounds that, e.g., all color properties of objects are to be counted as secondary qualities) that one can convert the sentence ‘All secondary qualities are merely perspectival’ into a substantial philosophical claim (e.g., about the metaphysical status of colors). A version of this sort of point (in connection with the term ‘subjective’) will play an important role later in this paper. Part of what leads to philosophical confusion here is that there are (at least) two distinct ways of using the term ‘secondary quality’ in philosophical currency that are then dovetailed into one another. According to one usage, the sentence ‘All secondary qualities are merely perspectival’ is trivially true. (‘Secondary’ here just means ontologically second class.) According to the other usage, that sentence expresses a substantial claim – one whose truth-value is parasitic on an independent criterion for specifying which qualities are secondary qualities. In Part VI of this paper, we will take up one such way of independently specifying the class of “secondary” properties – which I will call *subjective* properties – according to which a property (or quality) is subjective (or secondary) if its very conception involves essential reference to how a thing which possesses the property affects the subject. Color properties are paradigmatically subjective in this sense: for something to be green is for it to appear green to an appropriately perceptually sensitive subject under appropriately standard conditions. When doing philosophy, it is easy to fall into the assumption that if a property is subjective or secondary in this second sense of ‘secondary’, then it must be secondary in the first of these senses of ‘secondary’ as well. It is just this assumption that we will find the later Nietzsche disputing.

¹⁵ There was no single agreed upon way of drawing this distinction in the early modern period. (Descartes and Locke, for example, differed over which side of the primary/secondary quality divide to place *solidity*.) And it does not matter, for our purposes here, where exactly the partition between primary and secondary qualities is located.

distinction): the roundness of the coin (as the naive perspectivist rightly supposes) is a feature of the coin in itself, but the greenness or blueness or whatever coloredness of the mountain is not a feature of the mountain; the latter sort qualities are all equally products of the circumstances under which the mountain is viewed by a human perceiver. A stage-one perspectivist (who thus employs the term ‘perspective’ as a philosophical term of art) is here in a position to answer a whole range of questions that the naive perspectivist (who employs the ordinary concept of perspective merely as a metaphor) is not equipped to answer; and he is committed to giving very different answers to some of the questions that the naïve perspectivist is prepared to answer. Is the shape of an object merely a function of my perspective? Possibly, but not necessarily. Its color? Yes. (And the same goes for the sound, taste, touch and smell of objects.) How about beauty and ugliness? Yes. Spatiality and temporality? No. Quantity and quality? No.

Two features of stage-one perspectivism are to be noted at this point. The first is that it employs the concept of a perspective in *two different metaphorical registers* at once. To see this, first, recall how the naive perspectivist answered the first two questions above: ‘Shape? Possibly, but not necessarily. Color? Again same answer: Possibly, but not necessarily. (An object can be the color it appears to be.)’ Whereas, here at stage one, what is merely perspectival now is not just the apparent color of an object but also that which we (along with the naive perspectivist) used to be able to call its *real* color. (And, again, the same goes for the sound, taste, touch and smell of objects.) A crucial move in the conjuring game of philosophical perspectivism has just taken place. Distortion arising from *some* of our perspectives (e.g., those pertaining to the spatial properties of objects) – here at stage one in the dialectic – can still be corrected for by shifting to an alternative perspective *within the same matrix* of perspectives (thereby allowing us, to estimate, e.g., the real shape of an object). Whereas those arising from others (e.g., those pertaining to the apparent coloredness of objects) cannot (because objects are now held to be not “really” colored). These latter sorts of feature involve *irremediable distortion*. The naive perspectivist gives the same answer to the questions about shape and color because for him there is only one kind of perspective – a kind that allows for corrections in distortion. For him, no perspective involves irremediable distortion. At stage one of the dialectic, things are different: Some of our perspectives are still held to be of that original kind (thus still possessing all five of the features of the original concept mentioned in Part I) while others now belong to a system of perspectives that *as a whole* offers a cognitively slanted “perspective” on the object. This latter sort of “distortion

in perspective” is corrected for, not by a mere lateral shift in perspective (i.e., to another perspective within the same matrix of perspectives), but by a *shift in kind* of perspective. What is now required is a shift to an *alternative system* of perspectives. There are now two distinct types of “distortion” at issue here – and each requires a distinct sort and degree of correction. So, here at stage one, the expression ‘distortion’ now starts to function in more than one metaphorical register at once and, along with it, so do the expressions ‘shift’, ‘perspective’, ‘correction’, and so on. Here at stage one, the term ‘perspective’ has come to denote two radically different kinds of “perspective” at once: a kind that does and a kind that does not necessarily involve an inherently distorted mode of apprehending an object.

The second feature of stage-one perspectivism to be noted is that, even though it holds that we can fully appreciate the true nature of reality only once we are initiated into the truth of stage-one perspectivism, it nonetheless retains the idea that *certain features of our pre-philosophical experience of the world are free of distortion*. Unlike the varieties of perspectivism we are about to consider, stage-one perspectivism still allows that some of our everyday distortions in perspective are to be alleviated through a shift to a perspective at the same level (i.e., to an alternative perspective that discloses a property of the same kind, e.g., shape, as the one disclosed by the perspective that requires correction), thus allowing that at least *some* aspects of our ordinary perceptual encounters with objects may be altogether free of distortion due to perspective. At stage one, though all of the apparent color properties of objects are merely perspectival, only some of their apparent spatial properties are; and our ability to correct for the latter sorts of distortion does not wait upon our initiation into any particular philosophical (or religious) doctrine. This means that there are two rather different sorts of thing that can be at issue when we speak, at stage one, of a “non-distorting perspective”: a kind of perspective *on an individual object* that we can enjoy without initiation into some form of philosophical perspectivism (e.g., when we correctly perceive that a square object is square) and a kind of perspective *on the nature of reality* that we can enjoy only with the aid of philosophy (e.g., when, through initiation into the truth of stage-one perspectivism, we come to appreciate that objects really have spatial properties, but are not really colored).

Once we find ourselves this far along the way in our employment of the concept, it is difficult not to drift into even deeper philosophical waters. This first philosophical exploitation of the metaphor invites a second, far more radical one. In this second extension of the concept, we no longer confine its application to perceptual points of view and perceptual appearances. We stretch the concept of a perspective, so that it now encompasses not only our forms of sentience,

but also our forms of sapience¹⁶. On this second philosophical extension of the concept, differences in perspective are equated with differences in our particular forms of conception or description – differences in opinion, belief, concept, theory, world-view, overall conceptual scheme, and even language, may all now come to be spoken of as cases of differences in perspective. In the philosophical exploitation of the metaphor we are here considering, the now doubly metaphorically extended concept of perspective is employed as part of an account of the merely perspectival character of some (but not all) of our particular forms of conception. Once this step is taken, it becomes possible to reconfigure the distinction between primary and secondary qualities into a far more encompassing distinction between primary and secondary modes of conception or description – thus giving rise to a robustly realist metaphysical doctrine of the following sort:

Hidden world realism. Some perspectives on the world are to be preferred to others. Perspectives can furnish more or less accurate views of an object. Perspectives on the world are more accurate – i.e., a better mirror the actual structure of reality – to the extent that they are purified of everything in them that is an artifact of our parochial perspectives on reality. Though it is not possible for us to describe reality except from some perspective or other (i.e., without using concepts which we, human beings, can understand), it is possible for us to attain a relatively frontal view – a minimally distorting perspective – on reality (i.e., to use concepts which are *not peculiarly ours* – concepts which every properly conducted enquiry into the ultimate nature of reality, be it conducted by humans or non-humans, is eventually fated to converge upon). In so far as our aim is to achieve a knowledge of things as they really are, what we require is a description of reality formulated solely from such a perspective (i.e., in terms of concepts of this non-parochial sort). Such a description represents a metaphysically privileged perspective on reality – one that provides us with the means to achieve a relatively transparent mode of access to how things really are in themselves. The true nature of reality will remain hidden from us until we arrive at a set of concepts that permit the formulation of such a minimally distorting mode of description.

¹⁶ We, of course, do stretch the concept in this way in everyday speech all the time (as, e.g., when we speak of recent perspectives on economic change in France), but at this stage in our discussion – in characterizing the transition to stage two of the dialectic of perspectivism – we are concerned not merely with such informal uses, but with a further attempt to fashion a philosophical term of art out of our ordinary metaphorical inflections of the concept.

I will henceforth refer to the above robust realist doctrine, that is the product of this second metaphorical extension of the concept of perspective, as *stage two* of the dialectic of perspectivism or *stage-two perspectivism*¹⁷. Plato and Pythagoras are sometimes each thought to have already entertained a version of such a doctrine. Nietzsche thought a good deal of Christian theological doctrine ('Platonism for the masses' as he called it) fell into this category. The currently most fashionable version of such a doctrine is Scientific Realism – the doctrine that a description of nature in terms of scientific concepts¹⁸ limns the structure of the world as it is in itself.

Stage two retains a version of the first feature of stage-one perspectivism noted above: the term 'perspective' simultaneously functions in two different registers, denoting two radically different kinds of "perspective" – a kind that does and a kind that does not necessarily involve an inherently distorted mode of cognition. But the second feature has come under increasing pressure: the concept of a perspective is now subject to a metaphorical inflection of a sufficiently severe sort as to leave it in doubt, whether there still can be features of our ordinary experience of the world that are free of distortion. It tends to look, at stage two, as if we can attain to an undistorted perspective on some feature of reality only through initiation into the truth of some stage-two perspectivist doctrine – be it Platonism, Christianity, or Scientific Realism. Only with the aid of philosophy (or theology) can we enter into communion with any aspect of the "true world".

The underlying idea guiding the initial metaphorical extension of the concept of perspective is preserved at stage two: it still remains possible to furnish a rational account of the relation between appearance and perspective (of how and why appearances vary with perspective). But what 'appearance' here means is no longer clear. The first metaphorical extension of the concept preserved

¹⁷ One peculiar feature of the secondary literature on Nietzsche is that it tends to hurry past this step in the philosophical radicalization of the concept of perspective. It tends to overlook the fact that a doctrine called 'perspectivism' can be elaborated that construes most of our forms of conception as mere perspectives and yet the resulting doctrine can take the form of a view such as the above and 'perspectivism' can still seem to be a perfectly natural label for such a view. Commentators on Nietzsche, that is, often tend to fail to notice that there is nothing that precludes one, if one starts with the thought that what we are given in thought and experience are different perspectives on reality, even when the concept of a perspective is construed in the preceding extraordinarily inclusive manner, from elaborating *that* thought into a form of hardcore metaphysical realism. This is, however, an important thing to notice – to allow oneself to be struck by – if one wants to understand why the mature Nietzsche thought that hidden world realism and his own early perspectivism were dialectical twins: a pair of philosophical doctrines made in each other's image, neither of which could be successfully exorcized, unless philosophically disposed of in tandem with the other.

¹⁸ Or more precisely: in terms of those concepts that any properly conducted scientific inquiry is eventually fated to converge upon.

the *perceptual* dimension of the ordinary concept: if we speak of an object's appearing green or hard or salty or loud or smelly from a particular perspective, we are still talking about how an object perceptually appears to a particular perceiver when encountered under certain conditions. But, at stage two of the dialectic, this initial idea of a perceptual relation (between a subject and an object perceived from a particular point of view) has itself been subjected to metaphorical inflection. We are now faced with a severe version of the problem of how to interpret the 'and so on' that troubled us earlier. In the above statement of hidden world realism, the concept of a perspective has been extended to mean something like 'a way of conceiving or describing reality'. How do we individuate such perspectives? Are statements that have the same truth-conditions but differ in concepts to be counted as belonging to different perspectives. Do I have as many perspectives as I do concepts? Or do I have just a few perspectives? Or perhaps I can only have one perspective at a time? And, if so, is it to be identified with the entire repertoire of concepts I presently have – so that anyone who has those concepts also shares my perspective? Or is my perspective a function not just of the beliefs I *can* have, but of the ones I *do* have – so that if I and someone who shares my repertoire of concepts have fundamental differences in belief, we then also have different perspectives? Just as unclarity about the scope of the 'and so on' in naive perspectivism helped to push us to stage-one perspectivism, here again, unclarity about how we are supposed to play the language-game of 'perspective' talk at this stage, can help to push us to the next stage of the dialectic (into extending the use of the concept even further), so that we can once again be clear about where we are supposed to draw the line. Only now, at the next stage of the dialectic – stage three – we no longer have to worry about exactly where to draw the line, not because we draw a line at a particular place, but because there is no longer any line to be drawn, because *everything* in my experience of the world becomes folded into my perspective¹⁹.

In the secondary literature on Nietzsche, the term 'perspectivism' is often, of course, taken to denote roughly the opposite of any form of robust realism. To

¹⁹ There are, of course, straightforward strategies for remedying this unclarity. One could simply introduce some form of terminological stipulation that would fix the scope of 'perspective' in this extended employment of the term. But what tends to happen instead, in philosophical employments of the term, is that a philosopher (or a commentator on a philosopher) who employs the term wants to be able to draw on the literal sources of the metaphor (thus requiring that perspectives be local in character) and yet also wants the metaphor, at least part of the time, to be a metaphor for certain fundamental features of our cognitive constitution or conceptual scheme, or sometimes even for the totality of our cognitive constitution or conceptual scheme (thus requiring that perspectives be very global and encompassing in character).

see how one arrives at such an outcome starting with the same metaphor, it will help first to consider the following variation on non-naive perspectivism:

Non-naive perspectivism slightly rephrased. The world, as we experience it, appears to have contradictory qualities. A coin appears round when viewed here, elliptical when viewed from there; the mountain appears green in this light, blue in that light; and so on. However, these are *not* intrinsic properties of the world, but rather *merely* perspective-dependent properties of it. These apparent properties of the world are *not* possessed by the objects we perceive as they are in themselves, but are rather *merely* relative to some point of view or set of standing conditions under which the objects of experience are encountered.

These slight changes (marked by italics) in the emphasis and wording of non-naive perspectivism suffice to render it no longer an incipient version of any of the perspectivisms canvassed above. In the previous versions of perspectivism, not all views of reality afforded by perspectives were distorted – some perspectives afforded a comparatively frontal or transparent mode of access. Now, in this version of perspectivism, *every* perspectival point of view comes to be *merely* perspectival.

Nonetheless, even this rephrased version of non-naive perspectivism can still be elaborated into something that might be considered a “realist” doctrine – albeit of a far more attenuated sort. Consider, for example, the following statement of a familiar sort of philosophical position:

Pseudo-Kantianism. All our experiences of the world are views of it as it appears from some particular perspective. And the only sorts of truths we are able to formulate about the world are truths from within such perspectival views of it. We should not mistake the limitations of our knowledge, imposed on us by our finite cognitive capacities, for limitations that are inherent in the nature of reality as such. The very idea that our experience is *of* the world (that appearances are *appearances* and not mere illusions) – i.e. that there is something which our descriptions are *about* – presupposes the further idea that there is a *way the world is in itself* apart from any merely perspectival view of it – a way the world is when “viewed from nowhere”, i.e., from no particular perspective (or, alternatively, from a God’s-eye perspective). Moreover, though such knowledge of the world (as it is in itself) is in principle unattainable for us, we are able to *think* what we cannot know: we are able to grasp in

thought that there is such a way the world is, apart from the conditions under which we know it. It is only by postulating the existence of such a non-perspectival reality that we render coherent the supposition that any of our apparent knowledge of reality can indeed be *knowledge* of a genuinely mind-independent external reality²⁰.

²⁰ I call this *pseudo-Kantianism* in order to leave room for the question, whether Kant himself held such a view and to indicate that I am inclined to answer it in the negative. Since there will be a good deal said about such a view in this paper, it is worth taking a moment to say why one might not want to identify pseudo-Kantianism with Kantianism. Kant himself rarely speaks of ‘things as they are in themselves’ (though Kemp Smith’s translation (1929) regrettably sometimes does, where Kant does not), but rather usually only of things-in-themselves *simpliciter*. The most generic distinction which this terminology marks in Kant is between the ‘thing-in-itself’ and the ‘thing-in-its-relation-to-other-things’. The distinction between appearance and reality is a special case of this more general distinction. In each case, the ‘thing-in-itself’ is *one and the same thing* as the ‘thing-in-its-relation-to-other-things’, only considered under an abstraction (see, e.g., Kant, 1781/1987, B xxvi–xxvii). The nature and severity of the abstraction varies depending upon the issue under discussion. Thus, although the sense of the expression ‘thing-in-itself’ remains constant, its reference does not. (This is typical of how much of Kant’s vocabulary works – e.g., *synthesis, form, unity*, etc.) Even when the terminology marks a distinction between the ‘thing-in-itself’ and the thing *as it appears to a knower*, Kant will, depending upon the issue at hand, abstract more or less severely from the conditions under which the thing is known, thus altering the referent of the expression. In some contexts in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, the contrast is one that is drawn within our present experience (e.g., the contrast between the rain and the rainbow drawn in A45–46), in other contexts the contrast is between our present and our possible future knowledge of objects (e.g., between the objects of scientific investigation as they are presently known to us and as they might someday, in principle, be knowable to us). In each of these two cases, there is no problem about envisioning the possibility of going beyond knowledge of mere appearances and coming to know (that which is, in each of these contexts, referred to as) ‘the thing-in-itself’. In yet other contexts, notoriously, the abstraction is yet more severe. Sometimes Kant is concerned to abstract from the intelligible but not from the sensible conditions of knowledge, and sometimes the other way around. Sometimes he abstracts just from *our* form of sensibility, and sometimes from conditions of sensibility *überhaupt*. (Some of Kant’s ancillary vocabulary – e.g., *the concept of an object in general, the transcendental object*, etc. – serve to discriminate and help mark some of the distinct possible concepts of a thing-in-itself yielded by these different sorts and degrees of abstraction.) But when the abstraction is of the severest possible sort – i.e., when the thing-in-itself is identified with the object of knowledge considered utterly apart from *any* possible conditions of knowledge – then Kant’s point is precisely that the thing, so considered, ‘is nothing to us’, that such a notion of a “thing” is (as he puts it) ‘without *Sinn* or *Bedeutung*’. Kant thus denies that we can assign any real sense or reference to the minimally intelligible (i.e., non-contradictory) notion of a reality which is utterly screened off from us by the conditions of knowledge. Kant is admittedly not always clear about this issue in the A edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, but his B edition revisions of the chapter on ‘The Ground of the Distinction of All Objects in General into Phenomena and Noumena’ (B 294) are directed precisely at resolutely redressing this unclarity. He there refers to the notion of the thing-in-itself considered utterly apart from our faculty of knowledge as ‘the negative concept of the noumenon’ in order to distinguish it from ‘the positive concept of the noumenon’. And he insists that the former of these notions is the only notion of a noumenon which has any role to play within his theoretical philosophy. (It is only in the context of characterizing the content of the positive concept of the noumenon – whose content derives entirely from the doctrines of Kant’s *practical* philosophy – that it remains permissible, in the light of the doctrine of the B edition, to employ the locution ‘things as they are in themselves’.) Within

This doctrine is the third substantial metaphysical doctrine that one arrives at, when traversing the stages of the dialectic of perspectivism. I will refer to it as *stage three* of the dialectic or as *stage-three perspectivism*. The concept of perspective is here stretched to the point where what is now to be philosophically accounted for is not just the merely perspectival character of some of our particular forms of sentience or sapience, but that of our forms of perception and thought *as such*. It is now no longer – as in stages two and three – just certain kinds of perspectives that involve irremediable distortion, but perspectives as such that do. The resulting doctrine might be termed *irremediably hidden world realism*.

It is worth noticing how different this doctrine is from the form of realism arrived at in the preceding stage of the dialectic. In order to get this into focus, it helps to begin with their most fundamental point of similarity. Stage two (hidden world realism) and stage three (pseudo-Kantianism) have this much in common: they represent two different ways of attempting to satisfy the philosophical desire to give content to an idea of a *way the world is from no particular point of view*. They are, however, mutually inconsistent. Pseudo-Kantianism affirms that the ultimate nature of reality is inherently unknowable; hidden world realism affirms that reality is, at least in principle, knowable. Hidden world realism proceeds from the assumption that the idea – which is central to pseudo-Kantianism – of *the way the world is apart from any perspective*²¹ makes no sense. It identifies the overcoming of the subjectivity of human knowledge with the attainment of that minimally perspectival point of view afforded by a metaphysically preferred description of the world – something which it considers to be, at least in principle, attainable for beings such as ourselves. Whereas pseudo-Kantianism identifies the overcoming of subjectivity with the overcoming of all that is perspectival in our knowledge of reality – something which it considers to be, in principle, unattainable, at least for finite beings such as ourselves.

the theoretical philosophy, the only role that the notion of a noumenon has to play is to signal the emptiness of such a notion and to warn against the philosophical confusion of thinking that such a notion can be put to work in theoretical philosophy. It is, as Kant puts it, an ‘entirely indeterminate concept’; and he rightly argues that fatal confusion results when one ‘is misled into treating this entirely indeterminate concept [...] as if it were a determinate concept of an entity that allows of being known in a certain [purely intelligible – i.e., humanly impossible] manner’ (B 307). The confusion that Kant is here concerned to ward off is, as we shall see, just the one that the early Nietzsche falls into. Nietzsche eventually frees himself from this confusion, but, in doing so, takes himself to be freeing himself from the confusions of the Kantian philosophy. ‘Pseudo-Kantianism’ is my more circumspect label for what Nietzsche has in mind when he speaks in such contexts of ‘the Kantian philosophy’.

²¹ Which for the hidden world realist means: *the way the world is apart from any description of it in terms of concepts*.

The employment of the concept of a perspective in pseudo-Kantianism involves a third metaphorical extension of the concept, so that it applies now not just to *particular* forms of perception and/or conception, but to our *whole cognitive constitution*. This leaves us in a position in which we can no longer compare the views afforded by alternative perspectives and thereby correct for distortion. The metaphor drawn from (what Nietzsche calls) ‘the optics of perception’ is here stretched to the point, where the concept of an *optics* (i.e., a systematic study of the discernible regularities in how appearances vary with perspective) no longer has any clear application. Although “perspectives” are here still understood to be perspectives on an object when encountered or conceived under certain standing conditions, the hitherto previously correlative concept of laws of perspective is thrown out. In pseudo-Kantianism, when it comes to wishing to attain a view of the object as it is in itself, there can be no correcting for distortions due to perspective. The notion of a perspective in this philosophical context is a metaphor for the notion of an inherently distorted view of reality – one which masks the true nature of reality from view. A frontal view of the object is no longer possible. Hence, here at stage three, unlike at the prior two stages, the term ‘perspective’ is no longer called upon to function in two different registers at once, denoting two radically different kinds of “perspective” – one that does and one that does not necessarily involve an inherently distorted kind of point of view. Stage three therefore has this much in common with naive perspectivism: the concept of a perspective operates at a single level. But this conceptual economy is reestablished at the cost of sacrificing the underlying idea hitherto guiding the metaphorical extension of the concept: At stage three it is no longer possible to furnish any sort of systematic account of the relation between appearance and perspective (of how and why appearances vary with perspective). Once the concept of perspective has been thus triply metaphorically extended, it is no longer at all clear how its grammar is supposed to work. When this latter employment of the term is subjected to yet further extension, it is no longer clear *what* concept is thereby extended. It is no longer clear which features of the earlier concept (or concepts) of perspective are to be retained and which are to be jettisoned. This does not mean that attempts are not made to extend “it” further.

This brings us to *stage four* of the dialectic. At this stage, things become philosophically very messy²². All of the varieties of perspectivism canvassed above have this much in common: they are varieties of realism. But pseudo-

²² We will take a closer look at what kind of mess this is in Part VII, when we look closely at a particular example of it – namely section 111 of *The Gay Science*.

Kantianism teeters on the brink of collapsing into a form of anti-realism. It struggles to retain the following logical feature of the original concept: perspectives are perspectives *on* something, so that *the same thing* can appear differently depending upon the perspective, from which it is viewed. The stage-three concept of ‘the thing as it is in itself’ is meant to allow us to hang onto this feature of the original concept – it is supposed to be a serviceable, if eviscerated, version of our original notion of a common factor that underlies and underwrites transitions between perspectives. But, at this third stage in the dialectic, this common factor – the object that supposedly unites our varying perspectives – has been positioned at such a tremendous remove from the cognizing subject that no view of it is any longer attainable. By placing the object of knowledge at such a remove, pseudo-Kantianism strips our criteria for identifying the object in question (and thus determining that there is indeed a common object occasioning our different perspectives of *it*) of all possible application. Once the concept of the object of knowledge has become thus unmoored, it is difficult to keep the concept of a perspective from becoming simultaneously unmoored. And, once the concept of a perspective has been allowed thus to float free, it is difficult to hold on to the idea that there is *anything* that different perspectives are perspectives on.

The attenuated realism of stage three of the dialectic thus naturally issues in a recoil into stage four of the dialectic. Perspectives cease any longer to be perspectives on anything. All there turns out to be are perspectives and more perspectives. To see how this tends to happen consider the following example of a possible recoil from pseudo-Kantianism:

Anti-realist perspectivism. All our experiences of the world are views of it as it appears from some particular perspective. The only sorts of truths we are able to formulate are truths about the world from within a perspectival view of it. We may be tempted, as the pseudo-Kantian is, to think that we should not mistake the limitations of our knowledge, imposed on us by our finite cognitive capacities, for limitations that are inherent in the nature of reality as such. But the idea that our experience is of some inherently non-perspectival reality presupposes the idea of “the way the world is in itself”. But *we can make no sense of this idea*. It is the idea of a way the world is when “viewed from nowhere”, or “from no particular perspective”, or “from a God’s-eye perspective”. And no sense can be made of any of these ways of speaking, because no sense can be made of the “it” here which all of these perspectives are supposed to be perspectives on. A perspective is always someone’s perspective. (If

there were a God then there would be *someone* whose perspective this super-perspective would be; but there is no God.) A perspective is always from some particular, finite, situated point of view, and it is always one among a multiplicity of possible perspectives. Therefore our so-called “knowledge of the world” is never really of something independent, but consists of nothing more than our possible perspectives themselves and *nothing beyond these*.

The last step in the above argument is taken rather suddenly; and there is much that is unclear and confused in it that I will not dwell on now, beyond remarking that it is none too clear where we have landed philosophically, if we stop here. Moving on from here, one could try to go on and articulate some form of anti-realist epistemological doctrine to the effect that there is such a thing as knowledge (some perspectives are genuinely better than others, and these better ones are the ones that are to be called “true”) while insisting that *all knowledge is merely perspectival* in nature. Or, alternatively one could equally easily go on to affirm a skeptical conclusion to the effect that, since we can never overcome the confinement of our mere perspectives, *knowledge is impossible* (there is no such thing as one perspective being better than another, some are just more entrenched or more seductive than others) – all we can attain to is a multiplicity of equally valid (or invalid) alternative perspectives²³. Stage four of the dialectic consequently threatens to issue in some form of wholesale epistemological skepticism.

At stage four in the dialectic, the concept of perspective has been subjected to yet a fourth degree of separation from the language-game in which it was originally at home. In its third metaphorical extension, in pseudo-Kantianism, we held on to the idea that perspectives are perspectives on a perspective-independent object (and thus to the idea of there being different perspectives on the same object), but then allowed that there was no correcting for distortions due to perspective. What happens at stage four is that we continue to permit this last step allowed by pseudo-Kantianism, but we try to think the commitments of such a doctrine all the way through, and thereby arrive at a point where we feel compelled to jettison a very basic feature of the original grammar of the concept: namely, the idea that perspectives are perspectives on something, so that there can be different appearances of the same thing depending upon the perspective from which it is viewed. This idea of there being a same thing,

²³ I don't here mean to assume that such forms of anti-realism and scepticism are genuinely distinct philosophical alternatives. I merely mean to leave it open whether they are.

underlying and underwriting transitions between perspectives, drops out, thereby fundamentally altering the logic of the concept at issue – if there is still a concept at issue.

What happens when perspectivism goes anti-realist in this way is that the third extension of the concept is permitted, but the attempt is then made to combine the grammar of the resulting concept with certain features of the original grammar of the literal application of the concept – features such as the following: a perspective is always someone's perspective, it is always from a particular point of view, and it is always one among a multiplicity of possible perspectives. But the features of the respective grammars of these two profoundly different concepts of a perspective – the pseudo-Kantian concept and our ordinary concept – will not align. If we allow that there is no correcting for distortions of perspective and we continue to insist on the aforementioned other features of the ordinary grammar of the original concept, then we are pushed to the conclusion that no sense can be made of the idea that perspectives are perspectives on anything that is not itself a perspective. But what we have here then is no longer anything that should evidently be taken to be even a metaphorical extension of our original concept. What we have is a word in search of a meaning, figuring in a set of utterances made by someone who wants to continue to use the word 'perspective', even though all of the connections with its original grammar have, one by one, gradually been severed.

If one, nonetheless, takes that word to continue to express a concept at stage four of the dialectic, it will be a concept of perspective according to which it is no longer possible to sort perspectives into those that are merely perspectival and those that afford genuine glimpses of how things are. This makes it difficult to avoid the aforementioned skeptical conclusion – there is no such thing as one perspective being better than another, some perspectives are just more entrenched or more seductive than others. This can appear to be the unavoidable outcome of the dialectic of perspectivism. It can therefore appear – as it does, for a while, to Nietzsche himself – to involve a failure of philosophical nerve to fail to think matters all the way through to the end and acknowledge that such a skeptical conclusion is the inevitable endpoint towards which all one's previous philosophical reflections on this topic were tending. Nietzsche's increasing determination, however, in his later writings, to avoid philosophical nihilisms of every variety, leads him to wonder whether it might not be possible to achieve an understanding of what fuels the foregoing dialectic of a sort that would allow one to head in an altogether different philosophical direction.

III. Getting Nietzsche's Perspectivism into Perspective

The following is an example of what often happens when a commentator – in this case, Arthur Danto – tries to explain Nietzsche's perspectivism:

The doctrine that there are no facts but only interpretations [is] termed *Perspectivism*. To be sure, we speak of seeing the same thing from different perspectives, and we might allow that there is no way to see the thing *save* through a perspective and, finally, that there is no one perspective privileged over any other. These would be logical features of the concept of perspective. The only difficulty here is in talking about the "same thing" on which these are distinct perspectives. Certainly we cannot say what *it* is except from one or another perspective, and we cannot speak about it as it is in itself. [...] We can meaningfully say nothing, then, about whatever it is on which these are perspectives. We cannot speak of a true perspective, but only of a perspective that prevails. Because we cannot appeal to any fact independently of its relation to the perspective it is meant to support, and we can do little more than insist on our perspective, and try, if we can, to impose it on others (1980, p. 77)²⁴.

²⁴ Danto, briefly at the outset of this passage and at much greater length in the surrounding chapter of his book, alternates between the vocabulary of *perspective* and that of *interpretation*. This is a common practice among commentators on Nietzsche's work. (Nietzsche himself also has a tendency to do this; see, for example, *The Gay Science*, section 374.) It involves the interweaving of two different philosophical metaphors, neither of which tends to remain under control when employed in tandem with the other. I have restricted myself in this paper to a discussion of only the former of these two metaphors – that of perspective – leaving discussion of the latter for other occasions. At least three other papers might be written addressing issues that arise in this connection.

There are some important symmetries between our everyday concepts of perspective and interpretation. So some of what is said in this paper about talk of perspective goes for talk of interpretation, too. For example: Just as the concept of perspective presupposes the possibility of a space of alternative perspectives, where what makes the "alternatives" alternatives to one another is that they are alternative perspectives on the same thing, so, too, the concept of interpretation presupposes the possibility of a space of alternative interpretations, where what makes the "alternatives" here alternatives is that they are alternative interpretations of the same sign or text. And just as philosophical trouble ensues when, under the pressure of philosophy, one loses touch with this basic feature of the concept of perspective, so, too, with the concept of interpretation. But there are also some important asymmetries between the two cases that are liable to cause additional difficulties when the two metaphors are treated as if interchangeable. For example: It is true not only of the philosophical, but also of the ordinary concept of perspective, that any seeing of an object presupposes seeing it from some particular perspective or other. But it is not (and, moreover, it is philosophically disastrous to suppose it is) true of our ordinary concept of interpretation that all understanding of a sign (or gesture, or statement, etc.) presupposes an interpretation of it. The ordinary concept of perspective applies *even* in those cases where there is *no* question about, say, what the shape of an object is (because one has – and knows oneself to have – a frontal perspective on the object, permitting one accurately

The entire set of transitions outlined in the previous part of this paper is collapsed into the short space of this passage, without any indication that the passage as a whole equivocates several times over on what is meant by the term ‘perspective’. At lightening speed, all four stages of the dialectic are traversed. The passage collapses the dialectic. Let’s try to spread it back out again – and slow this process of equivocation down – so that we can see how the trick is done. The passage, taken as a whole, beautifully illustrates how the term ‘perspective’ is a peculiarly extreme example of (what Wilfrid Sellars calls) a *philosophical accordion word*: Such a word, when it is first introduced, appears to have a fairly narrow and straightforward meaning, but through the course of its subsequent employment its meaning is gradually stretched. The philosophical employment of this particular term constitutes an extreme example of a philosophical accordion word because, by the time the philosopher is done with it, the extension of the term has been stretched to the

to gauge its true shape). Whereas the ordinary concept of interpretation properly applies *only* in those cases where what is meant by a sign (or gesture, or statement, etc.) *is* possibly open to question. (It requires some philosophical work to insinuate the idea that the meaning of anything, anywhere, at any time, is always possibly open to question – and therefore always involves interpretation. One way this can be accomplished is through a philosophically hyperbolic inflection of how one should understand ‘possibly’ here.) It is this and related asymmetries between the two cases that constitute one of my reasons for separating the two topics from one another and leaving a discussion of the philosophically extended employment of the concept of interpretation for another occasion. A second paper – a companion to this paper – could be written addressing what one might call the question of *Nietzsche’s interpretivism* and the affiliated *dialectic of interpretivism*.

Some commentators, however, who make use of the term ‘interpretation’ in discussions of perspectivism are not, in fact, much interested in the topic of interpretation. They often wind up employing the term ‘interpretation’ in ways that make very little contact with the ordinary concept of interpretation and display little interest in how that concept functions. They are prone to say things such as this: ‘All truths are true only within an interpretation.’ The term ‘interpretation’ in such pronouncements often tends to function as a placeholder for some more encompassing notion of a discursive framework – such as a theory, a system of beliefs, or a conceptual scheme. This raises the further question: In order to believe something is true of X must I subscribe to a theory about X? (In believing that my name is James Conant do I commit myself to a *theory* about names, or who or what I am, or anything else?) This is another topic – one that would require yet a third paper to discuss responsibly.

If the term ‘interpretation’ is exclusively employed in an effort to address that topic then there are points at which such a discussion is bound to make contact with topics that arise in this paper in connection with the concept of perspectivism (once one permits the second metaphorical extension of the concept of perspective). But confusion tends to be introduced into such discussions by attempts to employ the term ‘interpretation’ as a synonym for perspective (in the relevantly extended sense of the concept) while at the same time attempting to employ it in a way that draws on the grammar of the literal (i.e., unextended) concept of interpretation. Discussion of the confusions that ensue when the grammars of the concepts of perspective and interpretation become thus entangled would require yet a fourth paper – one that would presuppose the overviews of the dialectics of perspectivism and interpretivism supplied in each of the first two papers.

point where anything we are able to think or talk about would appear to have to fall under the extension of the concept it attempts to denote.

Danto's passage begins with observations that might lead one to believe that what is at issue is nothing more than a fairly literal application of the concept of perspective: 'To be sure, we speak of seeing the same thing from different perspectives, and we might allow that there is no way to see the thing *save* through a perspective. [...] These would be logical features of the concept of perspective.' Yes, but these are logical features of more than one concept of perspective, including the literal one. In subsequently taking *all* aspects of what is seen (thus not only the seeing of, say, shape, but also that of, say, color) to be cases of perspectival seeing, the passage goes on to elaborate the second feature mentioned here in a manner that presupposes at least the first metaphorical extension of the concept. While the third (putatively "logical") feature mentioned at the outset of the passage – 'there is no one perspective privileged over any other' – is not a logical feature of the original concept at all. It requires a far more severe metaphorical extension of the concept – one according to which there can be no correcting for distortions of perspective. And some of what is said further along (e.g., 'we cannot *say* what it is except from one or another perspective' [my emphasis]) indicates clearly that somewhere along the way we have passed through the second metaphorical extension of the concept as well. By the time we have thus begun to focus on what we can *say* (rather than on what we can *see*), talk of perspectives has come to pertain not only to episodes of seeing, but also to possible ways of speaking or conceiving of an object. And, by the time we get a little further into the passage, we have clearly performed the third metaphorical extension as well; we now embrace the conclusion of pseudo-Kantianism: 'we cannot speak about it as it is in itself'. This still presupposes at least some of the logical features of the concept stipulated at the outset of the passage. This last attenuated note of realism then gradually dies out, and the rhetoric gradually shifts into an anti-realist register. The forthcoming revocation of the first of the supposedly "logical" features of the concept mentioned at the outset ('we speak of seeing the same thing from different perspectives') is prepared by remarks such as the following: 'the only difficulty here is in talking about the 'same thing' on which these are distinct perspectives'. And, by the end of the passage, the fourth and final extension of the concept is clearly well underway: 'We cannot speak of a true perspective, but only of a perspective that prevails.' We thus wind up with something that is at best a form of anti-realism, and at worst a form of skepticism – without any indication that the subject of this brief passage has changed several times over, as the concept of perspective shifts from an

initially relatively literal application, through several registers of increasingly severe metaphorical inflection, to a final employment of the concept according to which there is nothing for a perspective to be a perspective on.

I take the passage from Danto above to be fairly representative of something that happens when commentators on Nietzsche's work attempt to tell us what perspectivism is²⁵. Do such commentaries faithfully reflect a state of disarray in Nietzsche's own thinking? Before we attempt to answer this question, we must first ask: *which* Nietzsche? This is a question Danto has excused himself from having to ask. His book on Nietzsche begins with the following remark:

Nietzsche's books give the appearance of having been assembled rather than composed. [...] [A]ny given aphorism or essay [in one of Nietzsche's books] might as easily have been placed in one volume as in another without much affecting the unity or structure of either (1980, p. 19).

Danto should be applauded here for his candor – for being explicit about the manner in which he goes about piecing together his interpretation of Nietzsche's texts – forthrightly stating an exegetical assumption that is presupposed with far less candor in a great deal of the secondary literature on Nietzsche. Accounts of Nietzsche's thought, and in particular of his so-called "perspectivism", tend to draw bits of doctrine – and bits of quotation which allegedly support those bits of doctrine – indiscriminately from the entire range of his writings, from the early 1870s to the late 1880s, as if Nietzsche's entire corpus gave seamless expression to a single unified epistemological and metaphysical conception. Nothing could be further from the truth. Nietzsche's writings on such topics not only do not form a homogenous doctrinal whole, but his thought in these areas passes through a series of dramatic transformations. It is these that the subsequent sections of this paper will now trace, highlighting, in schematic

²⁵ For an example of a different sort of thing that can happen in this connection, consider the definition provided under the entry for "perspectivism" in Simon Blackburn's *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*: '*Perspectivism (perspectivalism)*. The view that all truth is truth from or within a particular perspective. The perspective may be a general human point of view, set by such things as the nature of our sensory apparatus, or it may be thought to be bound by culture, history, language, class, or gender. Since there may be many perspectives, there are also different families of truths. The term is frequently applied to Nietzsche's philosophy. See also *relativism, scepticism*' (1994, p. 294). Though it ostensibly furnishes a definition of a particular philosophical position, the above passage actually does no such thing. It artfully avoids the equivocations and confusions one finds in Danto's passage by remaining sufficiently inclusive and vague, so as to leave it wide open whether what is at issue is the perspectivism of stage one ('the perspective may be [...] set by [...] the nature of our sensory apparatus') or stage two ('or [...] by culture, history, language, class, or gender') or stage four (as implied especially by the suggestion that we ought also to consult the dictionary's entries on relativism and skepticism).

and summary fashion, the broad contours of the dialectical path along which Nietzsche's thoughts travel en route to his mature perspectivism²⁶.

I would be among the last to want to deny the unique and extraordinarily individual, and at times idiosyncratic, character of many aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy. Nonetheless, as will soon be evident, the aim of this paper is to show that, at least with respect to the topic of this paper, the large-scale curvature of Nietzsche's epistemological thought, for all its ambition to describe a philosophical arc that is *sui generis*, traces a philosophically archetypical trajectory – passing through the stations of a dialectic, different segments of which have been repeatedly enacted throughout the recent history of philosophy. The dimension of uniqueness in Nietzsche's early and middle-period contributions to philosophy that hereby comes to light, therefore, lies roughly in the opposite direction from that in which most commentators (following Nietzsche's own instructions for where to look) have sought to look for it: not in the uniqueness of the substance of the thought, but rather in the extraordinary scope and volatility of the movement of the thought – in its managing to traverse, over the space of a single philosopher's career, practically all of the stations of the dialectic outlined in Part Two of this paper.

Our tale has a happy ending. For the interest of Nietzsche's mature philosophy, lies, *pace* Danto, not in his having come to rest at the apparent terminus of the preceding dialectic, but in his having found a way to alleviate the pressure to move in that direction and thus to avoid being a perspectivist of any of

²⁶I can well imagine that the remaining portions of this paper will make a certain sort of scholar of Nietzsche's work uncomfortable. In order to fit into the space of a mere paper, this paper has to permit itself degrees of latitude that are bound to cause such forms of discomfort. First, it permits itself a margin of exegetical dogmatism: baldly asserting a number of barely supported interpretative claims – claims about how to read certain texts, claims about what Nietzsche thought at various periods in his philosophical development, and claims about there being such periods over which his thought is distributed. Second, in the interest of highlighting these topics. In the case of a thinker such as Nietzsche (in whose writing the mode of philosophical presentation and the substance of philosophical thinking are perhaps more inextricably intertwined than even in the case of a Plato, or a Kierkegaard, or a Wittgenstein) any attempt to do what this paper aspires to do – to abstract the overall shape of the thinking from the concrete and variegated manner in which that thinking is enacted, page by page, in the nuances of the writing – is bound to be fraught with dangers. As a partial and inconclusive defense of these procedures, it is worth noting that philosophical caricature in the interests of highlighting the ultimate tendency of a philosophy – especially when the tendency in question is one that tends to remain camouflaged in typical scholarly expositions – is a characteristically Nietzschean mode of criticism. The vindication of such a procedure (and its apparent lack of justice towards its object) lies in what it is able to reveal about the philosophy in question – whether the latent philosophical commitments that thus come to light, when the object of criticism is contemplated through the magnifying lens of the caricature, are one's philosophically worth having brought out into the open. There is no reason to suppose that Nietzsche's own philosophy should be immune to Nietzschean modes of philosophical critique.

the aforementioned sorts. One reason for using the term ‘perspectivism’ here (despite all of the unclarity it invites) is that, along the way, we will encounter Nietzsche himself tempted by a number of the doctrines that his commentators have attributed to him under the rubric of ‘perspectivism’. All but one of these, as we shall see, Nietzsche himself will eventually (at a yet later stage in his development) be concerned to identify as a species of confusion which calls for philosophical diagnosis and exorcism. We shall begin by picking things up some way into the dialectic, but at the beginning of Nietzsche’s own philosophical journey. Thus we take off at a stage where Nietzsche’s own thought remained, for a time, firmly stuck – namely, at stage three.

IV. A First Look at Nietzsche's Early Perspectivism

Before exploring the subsequent stations through which Nietzsche’s thought passes, it is worth lingering over his early essay *Truth and Lie in Their Extra-Moral Sense*; for it affords a usefully vivid depiction of the first stretch of the philosophical path along which he travels. The punch-line of Nietzsche’s early thought is epitomized by the following aphorism from that essay: ‘Truths are illusions we have forgotten are illusions’ (1979, p. 84). The actual doctrine to which Nietzsche subscribes in this early essay might perhaps be even more faithfully summarized by introducing scare-quotes around the first word in that aphorism and paraphrasing it as follows: ‘Those things which we call – and believe to be – “truths” are in fact nothing more than illusions we have forgotten are illusions.’

In order to see how the early Nietzsche arrives at this conclusion, let us look at a few passages from the essay, beginning with the following:

[T]he insect or the bird perceives an entirely different world from the one that human beings do, and the question as to which of these perceptions of the world is the more correct is quite meaningless, for this would have to be decided by the standard of *correct perception*, which means by a standard which is *not available*. But in any case it seems to me that “the correct perception” – which would mean “the adequate expression of an object in the subject” – is a contradictory nonentity [*ein widerpruchvolles Unding*] (1979, p. 86 – I have amended the translation.)

This passage quickly arrives at the conclusion that the very concept of *correct perception* involves an inherent contradiction. Nietzsche’s gloss on what the concept requires is ‘the adequate expression of an object in the subject’; and the rest of the essay makes clear what such a relation of ‘adequate expression’

would require: a mode of representation of the object by the subject in which the process of representation in no way alters or distorts the nature of the object. What Nietzsche here designates by means of the concept of *correct perception*, he also calls, elsewhere in the essay, ‘pure knowledge’. *Purity* here means pure of any cognitively perspectival element. The point of the early essay as a whole is to argue that the attainment of the requisite purity in our modes of perception or knowledge is impossible. Nietzsche employs a raft of arguments to this end. The one in the above passage tries to derive this conclusion from the observation that ‘the insect or the bird perceives an entirely different world from the one that human beings do’. I will not pause over the specific shortcomings of this argument (or over those of most of the other specific arguments deployed in this early essay). What I will do instead is to lay bare (what I will henceforth call) *the early Nietzschean argument-form* of which this specific argument – along with so many others in Nietzsche’s early writings – is an instance.

The argument-form in question, when broken down into its ingredient steps, involves the following eight-step movement of thought: (1) in order for a cognizing subject to come into cognitive contact with a potential object of cognition, some transaction must take place between the cognitive equipment of the subject and the potential object of cognition, (2) in every such transaction, in order for the object to come into view for the subject, certain structural features of the cognitive equipment of the subject must come into play and mediate the subject’s encounter with the object, (3) these structural features of the cognitive apparatus furnish the cognizing subject with a cognitively slanted perspective on the object, (4) the ensuing manner in which the object appears to the subject necessarily reflects an ineliminable contribution on the part of the subject due to contingent features of his cognitive perspective, (5) when viewed by other sorts of subject (or by the same subject, from other, cognitively equally parochial, perspectives) the same object will appear different, (6) all humanly available perspectives on the object are cognitively equivalent in this respect – are equally subjective – there is no such thing as a cognitive perspective on the object that is unmediated by any structure of human subjectivity, (7) objective knowledge – knowledge of the object as it is in itself – would be knowledge of the object as it is apart from the mediating agency of human subjectivity, (8) it is humanly impossible to attain such knowledge²⁷.

²⁷ A comment is in order about how the preceding argument-form is to be construed. I intend it to range over a great many superficially apparently distinct modes of argument which Nietzsche

It is possible to show that the majority of Nietzsche's arguments concerning the "illusory" character of what we take for "truth" or the "impossibility" of attaining "pure knowledge" are simply instances of this argument-form. Most of the time, in his early writings, he is caught up in some specific instance of the argument-form – drawing attention, for example, to the mediating role of the physiology of the eye in visual perception or the abstraction underlying all concept formation – but sometimes, Nietzsche manages to step back a bit and outline the generic structure of his reflections on these topics; as, for example, in the following passage:

As a genius of construction man raises himself far above the bee in the following way: whereas the bee builds with the wax he gathers from nature, man builds with the far more delicate conceptual material which he first has to manufacture from himself. In this he is greatly to be admired, but not on account of his drive for truth or for pure knowledge of things. When someone hides something behind a bush and looks for it again in the same place and finds it there as well, there is not much to praise in such seeking and finding. Yet this is how matters stand regarding seeking and finding "truth" within the realm of reason. [...] That is to say, it is a thoroughly anthropomorphic truth which contains not a single point which would be "true in itself" or really and universally valid apart from man. (1979, p. 85)

The last sentence makes clear the general thrust Nietzsche's early philosophy: all truth is a product of a human perspective. Since Nietzsche takes the goal of all-truth seeking to be the transcendence of distortions due to perspective, he concludes that all forms of seeking and finding "truth" must fall short of their goal. Any candidate "truth" is to be unmasked as 'a thoroughly anthropomorphic truth': one which involves an ineffaceable admixture of human subjectivity. Every such candidate can be subjected to the eight steps of the early Nietzschean argument-form and thus shown to be something that can

employs. Thus when I speak of 'a cognizing subject coming into cognitive contact with a potential object of cognition', I mean the terms 'cognizing', 'cognitive', and 'cognition' in this formulation to function as variables which can be instantiated by terms such as 'representing', 'representation', etc. or by 'thinking', 'thought', etc., or by 'linguistic', 'language', etc. or by any other terms which designate forms of human perceptual, intellectual or discursive activity. Similarly, when I say 'some transaction must take place between the cognitive equipment of the subject and the potential object of cognition', the term 'cognitive equipment' is meant to range over everything from the structure of the optic nerve to the capacity to form and use concepts. And so on, for each of the business terms in the subsequent steps of the argument-form. Each is to be construed as a schema to be filled in by the aforementioned sorts of term.

never be ‘really and universally valid apart from man’. It can never contain anything ‘which would be ‘true in itself’; for it to be ‘true in itself’ would be for it to be free of any admixture of subjectivity.

Nietzsche is certainly aware that not all features of our subjectivity are on a par. Certain features of our subjectivity are apparently comparatively susceptible of transcendence (we seem to be able to correct for the distortion introduced by an awkward angle of vision; we learn that the moon only looks larger when it is on the horizon than in the middle of the sky, etc.), and other features of our subjective constitution do not even seem to be thus susceptible to transcendence (we cannot help but perceive things in space and time, categorize them in terms of quantity and quality, etc.). We will return to this topic of transcendence in a bit. All that needs to be noted, for our present purpose, is that Nietzsche thinks that the source of our conviction that certain of our beliefs must be true, can be traced to the fact that they belong to that stratum of belief and experience which appears to defy such transcendence – which presents itself as being, for practical purposes, all but inescapable:

[T]o be truthful means [...] to lie according to a fixed convention, to lie with the herd and in a manner binding upon everyone. Now man of course forgets that this is the way things stand for him. Thus he lies in the manner indicated, unconsciously and in accordance with habits which are centuries’ old; and precisely *by means of this unconsciousness* and forgetfulness he arrives at his sense of truth (1979, p. 84).

At any given time, there will be certain processes of thought which will appear to us to be ones in accordance with which we cannot help but think. Through a process of forgetfulness in which we ignore the way in which the apparent necessity of these processes is a function of our subjective contribution to the cognitive enterprise, we arrive at the conviction that the inescapability of these forms of thought is a mark of their truth²⁸. If these seemingly binding regularities in our collective modes of judgement and sense perception (which permit us to mistake certain illusions for truths) were to cease to obtain, then, Nietzsche suggests, the pervasive subjectivity of all of our forms of cognition would suddenly become undeniably evident to us²⁹.

²⁸ Hence the reference to what we have “forgotten” in the aphorism which I highlighted as epitomizing the conclusion at which the early Nietzsche arrives: ‘Truths are illusions we have *forgotten* are illusions’ (1979, p. 84).

²⁹ I postpone until later the topic of what is involved in any such attempt to imagine the abrogation of *all* of the regularities in our collective modes of judgement and sense perception.

Nietzsche has a variety of ways of arguing for his conclusion, some of which seek to cut deeper than others. Consider the following passage:

[I]f each of us had a different kind of sense perception – if we could only perceive things now as a bird, now as a worm, now as a plant, or if one of us saw a stimulus as red, another as blue, while a third even heard the same stimulus as a sound – then no one would speak of [...] a regularity of nature, rather nature would be grasped only as a creation which is subjective in the highest degree [*sie nur als ein höchst subjectives Gebilde begreifen*] (1979, p. 87).

The intended upshot of the passage is boldly declared at the end: nature is to be ‘grasped only as a creation which is subjective in the highest degree’. But notice: the argument for this conclusion here rests on premises that even a stage-one perspectivist could accept. A stage-one perspectivist can happily concede that if each of us did indeed have a different kind of sense perception, then one of us might experience the stimulus provided by a particular object as red, another as blue, and yet a third might not be able to see the thing at all, but instead would hear the stimulus occasioned by that same object as a sound. But such a perspectivist would insist that none of this goes any way towards showing that the primary qualities of objects are as tainted with the distorting features of our subjectivity as are secondary qualities such as sound and color.

However, it is clear that, given the role of this passage within the context of Nietzsche’s essay as a whole, such objections are beside the point. For the point of passages such as the above is to furnish analogies for understanding the more wholesale form of perspectivism which the author seeks to recommend. The perspectival character of our particular forms of sense perception are adduced here as a model for understanding that of our particular forms of conception (thus executing the second metaphorical extension of the concept), and the perspectival character of the latter are adduced, in turn, as a model for understanding the perspectival character of our entire faculty of cognition (thus executing the third). Let us look at a passage in which the first metaphorical extension of the concept is in place, the second underway, and the third about to take place. The following passage takes as its example (of a mediating – and therefore, for early Nietzsche, *a fortiori* distorting – element in cognition) the role of *concepts* in our thought about the world:

[L]et us [...] consider the formation of concepts. [...] Every concept arises from the equation of unequal things. Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept “leaf” is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences

and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects. [...] We obtain the concept [...] by overlooking what is individual and actual; whereas nature is acquainted with no forms and no concepts, and likewise with no species (1979, p. 83).

Nietzsche's argument, the moment it moves from perception to conception, immediately becomes much more confused. Though it may be true that one leaf is never *totally* the same as another; any two leaves are the same in respect of both being *leaves* – that is, in being similar in the respect that licenses the application of the concept *leaf* to each. In passages such as the above, Nietzsche's attempts to insinuate that a certain failure of attention to what differentiates individuals is required to effect the transition to the level of the concept and the subsumption of individuals thereunder – a level that can be achieved only through introducing an element of “arbitrariness” into our characterizations of individuals – and that this requires a falsification of the nature of the individuals in question considered in themselves. But it is hardly the case that we form the concept *leaf* by ‘arbitrarily discarding’ the individual differences between leaves. On the contrary, we can only form the concept by abstracting from the differences between individual instances in a manner that is not at all arbitrary. The opposite of grouping things arbitrarily is grouping them in accordance with a concept. To suggest that even this latter way of grouping things is still *merely* arbitrary is to deprive the term ‘arbitrary’ of the contrast that gives it its sense. The grouping of things together under concepts in no way causes us, as the passage suggests, to be unable to attend to what is individual in each – as is readily evidenced by our willingness to accede to the thought that any two randomly selected leaves are not likely to be very similar – i.e., similar in respects other than that of their both being instances of the concept *leaf*³⁰.

The preceding sort of confusion tends to crop up in Nietzsche's early writing whenever the topic of concept formation comes up. The reason he wants to emphasize the thought that every concept “arbitrarily” leaves out important

³⁰ Indeed, one of Kant's deepest insights is precisely what goes missing here in the work of the early Nietzsche. Kant puts it this way: Intuitions without concepts are blind. Or to put the point in an idiom more congenial to the early Nietzsche: Apprehension of particulars presupposes the ability to use concepts. Kant's argument, very briefly and roughly, goes like this: Our capacity to apprehend particulars presupposes our capacity to identify and re-identify them; this, in turn, presupposes our capacity to recognize them as the same again; and this, in turn, presupposes (what Kant calls) ‘recognition in a concept’ and thus our capacity to deploy concepts. Nietzsche talks as if we were able to enjoy an apprehension of the rich and variegated character of individual things prior to any recourse to concepts – an apprehension that we then falsify in subsuming those richly variegated individuals under concepts.

aspects of the individuals subsumed thereunder is to encourage a certain moral about the merely perspectival character of all our modes of conception. Picking up the thread a bit before where we left off, this is how the above passage continues:

We obtain the concept [...] by overlooking what is individual and actual; whereas nature is acquainted with no forms and no concepts, and likewise with no species, but only with an X which remains inaccessible and undefinable for us. For even our contrast between individual and species is something anthropomorphic and does not originate in the essence of things; although we should not presume to claim that this contrast does not correspond to the essence of things: that would of course be a dogmatic assertion and, as such, would be just as indemonstrable as its opposite. (1979, pp. 83–84)

This makes explicit something which is just below the surface in much of the argument elsewhere in Nietzsche's early writings: namely, that his account of human cognition (as hopelessly tainted by the distorting lens of subjectivity) presupposes an implicit conception of how the contrast between subjectivity and objectivity is to be drawn (and thus how the relation between the cognizing subject and the object of cognition is to be conceived). The picture here (of all human cognition as hopelessly 'anthropomorphic') turns on an implicit conception of what it would be to know (what the early Nietzsche can still unabashedly call) 'the essence of things'. The claim that we distort nature in subjecting it to the mediation of, say, concepts presupposes a notion of nature as it is prior to our distorted representation of it – a notion about which already the early Nietzsche realizes he is in no position to say anything more than the following: "nature", thus understood, corresponds to 'an X which remains inaccessible and indefinable for us.' As thin as Nietzsche's conception of this X is, it plays a central role in shaping his early epistemological thought. The picture at the center of Nietzsche's early philosophy – one of cognitive confinement within our forms of human subjectivity – presupposes that at least some minimal degree of sense can be made of talk about such an X. It thus presupposes – to borrow a formulation which only the mature Nietzsche is in a position to attack with a clear conscience – that we can at least *think* such an X, even if we cannot know it³¹.

³¹ We have here an instance of a pervasive tendency in Nietzsche's less mature writings – a tendency to try to extract a substantive philosophical conclusion from something which (he himself must concede) is barely thinkable. We will soon encounter further examples of this

This claim about our inability to know such an X leads directly to his early essay's far-reaching conclusions concerning everything which we might previously have (mis)taken for "knowledge" – even though the account of the ostensible referent of 'X' here constantly hovers on the verge of turning the 'X' into a mere mark or noise which does not symbolize anything. Nietzsche is driven, at the conclusion of this passage, to concede that he himself, strictly speaking, should not go so far as actually to deny that our manner of conceiving of things is a distortion of their real essence; for such a denial would itself pretend to be able to attain to some minimal knowledge – albeit of a purely privative sort – of the true nature of the X here under discussion. All we can do, in our present state of confinement within the bounds of our own subjectivity, Nietzsche concludes, is to *suspend judgement* as to whether our manner of conceiving of things does or does not correspond to the essence of things. For to affirm outright that it does not thus correspond would be to overreach in the other direction – to enter 'a dogmatic assertion' – to assert something that would be 'just as indemonstrable as its opposite'.

In arriving at this conclusion, the early Nietzsche places himself squarely within the bind of pseudo-Kantianism, leaving himself with a philosophical position that threatens to plunge him into some variety of stage-four perspectivism. As long as he remains at this early juncture in his thought, trying to come to a stable philosophical resting place at stage three of the dialectic, he finds himself saddled with a notion of "objectivity" (of the bare X, the thing-in-itself) that is, to say the least, extraordinarily *thin* – 'almost empty', he says. He can stay aloft, walking the tightrope of stage-three perspectivism, only for as long as he can keep the last remaining bit of air from going out of this highly deflated concept of an object. However close to empty this concept threatens to become, it must continue to retain a modicum of content for it to be able to perform the central structural role, it is called upon to play in anchoring Nietzsche's early arguments concerning the merely perspectival character of all human cognition. Its role is to complement the concept of subjectivity with which he here works (according to which all exercises of human subjectivity yield representations that are merely subjective) and to cast a shadow back over every cognitive achievement that exhibits the least admixture of subjectivity, thus licensing the conclusion that all such achievements amount, in the end, to nothing but "illusions".

tendency in his thought; and, somewhat later, we will encounter him beginning to wonder about the integrity of such a procedure.

This is a familiar position in the recent history of philosophy. Its central doctrine – that all human knowledge is merely perspectival – is identified by Nietzsche (and by no means only by Nietzsche) as that of ‘the Kantian philosophy’. (Since I think it figures in Kant’s mature thought only as an object of critique, I have preferred to call it pseudo-Kantianism³².) All his vitriolic diatribes about what a cold fish Kant is notwithstanding, Nietzsche (early and late) thought that Kant himself was a pseudo-Kantian and early Nietzsche wants to follow him (at least in this regard). The pseudo-Kantianism of *On Truth and Lie in Their Extra-Moral Sense* is evident in a passage such as the following:

All that we actually know about these laws of nature is what we ourselves bring to them – time and space, and therefore relationships of succession and number. But everything marvelous about the laws of nature, everything that quite astonishes us therein and seems to demand our explanation, everything that might lead us to distrust idealism: all this is completely and solely contained within the mathematical strictness and inviolability of our representations of time and space. But we produce these representations in and from ourselves with the same necessity with which the spider spins. If we are forced to comprehend all things only under these forms, then it ceases to be amazing that in all things we actually comprehend nothing but these forms. [...] All that conformity to law, which impresses us so much in the movement of the stars and in chemical processes, coincides at bottom with those properties which we bring to things. Thus it is we who impress ourselves in this way. (1979, pp. 87–88)

This is as vivid a statement of the (pseudo-Kantian) doctrine in question as one is likely to find anywhere. If one wanted to sum up the central non-sequitur in the argument for the doctrine in a single sentence, one could hardly do better than the following: ‘If we are forced to comprehend all things only under these forms, then it ceases to be amazing that in all things we actually comprehend nothing but these forms’³³.

³² If some of his misleading Copernican rhetoric is inflected in a certain way, then certain passages of Kant’s are, admittedly, easily read as espousing pseudo-Kantianism.

³³ As we shall see in Part IX, this move – from the claim that ‘certain things can be comprehended only under certain forms’ to the conclusion that ‘therefore we actually comprehend nothing but these forms’ – is one of the steps in his earlier arguments that later Nietzsche will eventually be concerned to expose as a misstep.

Nietzsche here sums up in a single striking sentence the step that is central to pseudo-Kantianism. The crucial move here can be reformulated as the transition from the first of the following two claims to the second:

- (1) All cognition involves (Kantian) forms of subjectivity.
- (2) All cognition is (merely) subjective.

The transition, thus represented, is, of course, an innocuous one, if the terms ‘subjective’ and ‘subjectivity’ are employed in the same sense in both (1) and (2) above. The transition, in the hands of an author such as the early Nietzsche, involves a slide because the initial (genuinely Kantian) thought in (1) involves a conception of what makes a form of cognition a ‘form of subjectivity’ that leaves open the possibility that a subject whose “knowledge” is mediated by such forms might yet still be a knower – a possibility that is closed off through the epistemically anemic sense that the term ‘subjective’ is required to take on in the (pseudo-Kantian) conclusion of (2). The slide can be made more explicit by reformulating (1) and (2) as follows

- (1′) All cognition involves forms of subjectivity, i.e., forms of apprehension and/or comprehension that can be enjoyed only by a cognizing subject antecedently constituted in particular ways.
- (2′) All our cognition is merely subjective, i.e., does not yield genuinely objective knowledge.

As we shall see in the sequel, Nietzsche first worries about what it would mean to try to take this conclusion seriously, then becomes increasingly suspicious of the route via which he earlier allowed himself to reach it, and, finally, becomes centrally concerned to expose and criticize both it and the tacit opposition between the subjective (or affective) and the objective (or knowledge-involving) that he comes to diagnose as its crucial presupposition.

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