The Will To Power Essay, Research Paper

In the Will to Power, Nietzsche claims:

The will to power interprets (-it is a question of interpretation when an organ is constructed): it defines limits, determines degrees, variations of power. Mere variations of power could not feel themselves to be such: there must be present something that wants to grow and interprets the value of whatever else wants to grow. Equal in that- In fact, interpretation is itself a means of becoming master of something. (The organic process constantly presupposes interpretations.)

Part I of this paper unpacks this passage concerning the nature of interpretation to reach the crux of Nietzsche’s argument. Part II then contextualizes this argument with respect to his claims regarding perspectivism and interpretation. Finally Part III raises the most plausible critique of Nietzsche’s claim of perspectivism as possible responses by Nietzsche in his defense.

I. Analysis

In the passage above, Nietzsche claims that it is not human beings which interpret, but rather, it is “the will to power [that] interprets.” As discussed in lecture, the organic process which presupposes interpretation is essentially the very process of adaptation by which an organism tries to fit itself into its environment and to other species around it, such as its predators and its prey. This process is a way in which the organism physiologically interprets the world. So interaction is the fundamental phenomenon of the forces that make up the will to power and these interactions in so far as they are systematically centered around a particular center of power, can be called a perspective or interpretation which that center of force gives of its surrounding environment. And what we think of as this specifically human interpretation is only the conscious psychological realization of this much more fundamental law of nature. Thus it is the will to power that interpreter!

s, and it does so by appropriating, that is, knowledge is a process of appropriation. To understand what Nietzsche means by appropriation here, we can look to section 515 where he states “not ‘to know’ but to schematize-to impose upon chaos as much regularity and for as our practical needs require.” In this statement, Nietzsche claims that interpretation is “to impose upon chaos as much regularity and form as our practical needs require.” So for the plant, or some animal that preys on its environment, they will distinguish only between things that are useful and that which is not useful to the individual. The predator has no sense of distinction between this or that individual fly; one fly is all the same because it is simply food. However, in treating these different bits of prey as equal, it schematizes and organizes, and simplifies the world for itself. That is, once we start to recognize them as equal-this is the same as that-we begin to categorize them accordingly. !

Sluga illustrates how as human beings we say: “that this person which I just met a couple days ago is still the same person, although he has changed in slight ways, maybe he was wearing a cap back then.” As human beings, we recognize there is a difference, but the difference is not important to us. In this process of equalization, man imposes schema and order on the world; and that is really the nature of interpretation and the will to power.

II Contextualization of Nietzsche’s Argument

Having completed my analysis of Nietzsche’s discussion in section 643, I would now like to move on to contextualize the implications of this claim with respect to perspectivism. To begin, section 636 we see how Nietzsche connects the concepts of perspective and interpretation with the concept of the will to power. According to Nietzsche,

Physicists believe in a “true world” in their own fashion: a firm systematization of atoms in necessary motion, the same for all beings-so for them the “apparent world” is reduced to the side of universal and universally necessary being which is accessible to every being in its own way (accessible and also already adapted- made “subjective”).

Physicist, in other words, are inclined towards a kind of metaphysics which says that there is a true reality different from the way it looks to us, namely, for physicist, it is the reality of atoms and their properties. Physicists believe that this picture of reality is the objectively true one. So if there were Martians and they developed their own physics, they would come up with the same theory that we have come up with as human beings. Thus for all beings, Physics would be the same. Nietzsche claims,

but they are in error. The atom they posit is inferred according to the logic of the perspectivism of consciousness-and therefore itself a subjective fiction. This world picture that they sketch differs in no essential way from the subjective world picture: it is only construed with more extended senses, but with our senses nonetheless- and in any case they left something out of the constellation without knowing it: precisely this necessary perspectivism by virtue of which every center of force- and not only man-construes all the rest of the world from its own viewpoint, i.e., measures, feels, forms, according to its own force.

This passage illustrates the world of physics as one which in some sense is a subjective picture; something constructed and made by us. We abstract from the particular of our laws of taste and smell in physics, but still we work with human concepts, even though they are generalized and more abstract, but they are still human concepts. Furthermore,

They forgot to include this perspective-setting force in “true being”-in school language: the subject. they think this is “evolved,” added later; but even the chemist needs it: it is being specific, definitely action and reacting thus and thus, as may be the case. Perspectivism is only a complex form of specificity. My idea is that every specific body strives to become master over all space and to extend its force (-its will to power:) and to thrust back all that resists its extension. But it continually encounters similar efforts on the part of other bodies and ends by coming to an arrangement (”union”) with those of them that are sufficiently related to it: thus they then conspire together for power. And the process goes on-

At this point we see how he generalizes by jumping from a discussion of physics, to something much more general, namely, this necessary perspectivism by virtue of which every center of force, not just human beings construes the world from its own view point. This leads one to question, what is this “center of force” which Nietzsche is describing? Not only are human beings, as creatures of the world, centers of force, but also, chairs and stones because the concept of center of force is his analysis of what we have meant as object. Every object is a center of force, and every object construes the rest of the world from its own view point. Therefore, every object has its own perspective and interpretation. Physicist claim that perspective interpretation only appears when you have conscious creature like human beings, but what they overlook is that perspective interpretation is a metaphysical feature of the world as a whole. Chemist cannot understand Chemistry because to un!

derstand that feature is to understand perspective interpretation. Nietzsche wants to say that what we call the molecular bond is really the mutual interpretation that the atoms-these centers of force-give each other. So action and reaction in chemistry has to be interpreted as the result of a viewpoint of perspective within centers of force. Therefore, the interaction of bodes in the world, the union and the arrangements are really arrangement of perspectives and interpretations.

III. Is Nietzsche a Relativist?

Some have claim after reading these sections on perspectivism and interpretation that Nietzsche is a relativist. This, I believe, is a misreading of Nietzsche because these interpretation of perspectives do not simply function at the level of subjective arbitrary consciousness. We do not want to multiply these readings, but rather, Nietzsche wants to say that interpretations are fixed by relations of power between myself and the world and they are expressions of direct means and requirement in the world. If we look to section 481, we get an summary of Nietzsche position on interpretation. Nietzsche states: “against positivist, which halts at phenomena-’there are only facts.’” Here, Nietzsche is quoting the positivist as saying that what we have to do is ignore values, subjective human feelings, and just look at the facts. By describing and generalizing over these facts, we arrive at objective science. Nietzsche claims, “no, facts is precisely what there is not, , only!

interpretations. We cannot establish facts ‘in itself’: perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing,” because in some sense, everything we say about the world depends on who we are, where we are, what our needs are, and what our perspectives are. Hence, what the positivist assume, namely, that these raw facts that we want to approach and generalize do not exist. In the next passage, Nietzsche quotes the interlocutor-the one with whom he is debating-as saying: “everything is subjective.” Once one says “facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations;” it looks as if “everything is subjective” is the thesis, but this view is not adopted by Nietzsche. Rather, this view is put into the mouth of his opponent, an interlocutor. Nietzsche then claims that this statement by the interlocutor is interpretation. Both the physicist’s view of the world as well as the positivist’s view of the world are simply interpretation Therefore, subjectivism is a form of interp!

retation. In addition, “the ’subject’ is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is.” Nietzsche claims that the subject or the self for which things are supposed to be relative-”the world relative to me or as it appears to me”(relativist claim)-is an interpretation because the subject is not given. Therefore, the assumption that there is a subject which interprets willfully and arbitrarily is itself an invention. Furthermore,

In so far as the word “knowledge” has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is interpretable otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings.- “Perspectivism.”

“The world is knowable;” he is not saying anything goes, or we cannot know the world, but rather, we have to force ourselves to commit to reality as it is, and to recognize the world as it is. So one can describe the world through interpretation, but you have to realize that every interpretation has alternatives to it. The truth about perspectivism is that the world is describable and must be described from many perspectives. But is not this claim arbitrary? If we look to the next section we see that:

It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm.

So one does not just make up something and claim that this is reality; but instead, one must recognize that these interpretations came from deep down from the reality that one is, namely, from ones drives and needs.

Therefore, knowledge is a perspective and an interpretation, and when one understands that one can recognize and grasp the world, but we have to realize that each understanding is an understanding from a particular location, and that this particular interpretation is one of which there can be others. Recognizing that what we call knowledge is the imposition of schema on the chaos of the world, we then begin to realize that knowledge is a kind of artistic creation, thus taking us back to the Birth of Tragedy.