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**Analysis of Nietzsche’s Doctrine of Perspectivism**

*“There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective ‘knowing’; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity,’ be.”* (GM III, 12)

**Explain in detail Nietzsche’s doctrine of perspectivism. Does this doctrine imply that truth does not exist? Why, or why not? Does this doctrine lead to epistemological skepticism? Why, or why not? Do you agree with Nietzsche’s perspectivism? Explain.**

There are two ways of interpreting Nietzsche’s doctrine of perspectivism: 1) the moderate interpretation and 2) the radical interpretation. The moderate interpretation states that Nietzsche is calling us to reevaluate our human tendency to claim that there is only one way of perceiving an object. In other words, Nietzsche wants us to reconsider the different modes of interpretations. “Interpretation” is a way of knowing the world from a particular point of view[[1]](#footnote-1). The metaphor of “eyes” when speaking of looking at things from different angles invites one to take serious different perspectives seriously. Just as all visual perspectives are limited due to our being situated in a specific location, time, and place, so too are our beliefs about certain truths. We perceive the world not as it is but selectively. We select what we take in. Some of these selections are tainted by our fears and desires. Hence, we are not able to perceive the whole. It is only years of contemplating the experience, or the idea, that we are eventually able to understand the whole, maybe.

The radical interpretation of his doctrine is that Nietzsche is making a claim about truth. Specifically, that there is no objective truth existing outside the mind. And thus, presumably, there is no objective knowledge. Such a view goes against the traditional understanding of truth (Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas). This interpretation can be seen in different parts of the reading in which Nietzsche claims that philosophers, historically speaking, make the mistake that their beliefs about truth are value-free, objective, disinterested, and able to be attained by all. The belief that one can attain an objective truth that is free from bias, prejudices, and values is a perspective filled with short-sightedness and distortions, according to Nietzsche. Furthermore, the radical interpretation of the doctrine of perspectivism taken from different works of Nietzsche seems to imply that truth is dependent on the mind. That there is no objective fact existing on its own. All truths are interpretations of what enters through the five senses. When the doctrine of perspectivism is taken this way, it means that there is no such thing as an objective truth, no beyond, no being, and no permanence. These are all metaphysical interpretations filled with biases and values. In order to have a better understanding of our belief, we should look at them from a different angle or perspective.

Whether Nietzsche is implying that there is truth, or no truth depends from which perspective we take to analyze his doctrine of perspectivism. If we take the moderate interpretation, then no. If his doctrine of perspectivism means that we should come to view things from different angles, then I do not think that his doctrine of perspectivism implies a denial of the existence of truth. Interpreting things we look at with different lenses or from different angles does imply that there are truths (or a truth).

On the other hand, if we take the radical interpretation of the doctrine of perspectivism, then he is implying that we do not discover truth, but rather we create truths. The reason that this interpretation leads to the denial of truth is because truth, understood in the traditional sense, is extramental. That is, truth is independent of the mind and world. Therefore, it is the mind that discoveries truth through reasoning or divine illumination. Therefore, traditionally, truth is not contingent on our minds. As stated before, there are numerous places in Nietzsche’s work that we seem to hear him say that truth is not “eternal”, “beyond”, “the-thing-in-itself”, and “divine”. Rather, according to Nietzsche, truth is contingent. It is contingent on one’s culture and what follows from one’s culture. His doctrine can be interpreted to imply that truth is relative and historical. That there is no objective truth but only one’s perspective of things in the world.

I don’t think this doctrine leads to an epistemological skepticism because it invites us to look at other interpretations. Instead of accepting our own particular perspective on something, we should try to see it, whatever it may be, from different angles. His doctrine is not stating that we cannot know anything for certain, but that our view is just one type of view. There are many interpretations. Furthermore, these interpretations are from people who are situated in a specific time and place. His doctrine would only lead to epistemological skepticism if he would claim that because we have different interpretations, therefore we can’t know whether our interpretation is right or wrong. It is true that most people do have different interpretations, but it does not follow that because of our different interpretations that we are not able to have an objective knowledge. Yes, we cannot know for certain whether our view is the right one. Nonetheless, we should still strive to seek knowledge.

I do agree with Nietzsche’s perspectivism if he is promoting a diverse way of looking at things. I do believe that when one looks at a particular thing from different angle, he/she is able to have a better understanding of what they believe. For instance, I noticed that when I read or listened to different points of view, I was confronted to ask myself: “What do I believe?” By reading things that are contrary to my belief, I was able to question and sharpen my own beliefs.

If, on the other hand, Nietzsche is promoting a doctrine in which we accept other people’s belief and acknowledge that there is no right or wrong belief, I would be quick to disagree. For this view would be self-defeating since the one who is making the claim is admitting that their claim is an objective truth. Second, if Nietzsche’s doctrine is interpreted this way, then it is problematic to what I believe to be true. Why? Because this would imply that what I believe is not objectively true. In another words, my belief is subjective, and we interpret things based on our biases and experiences. Understood in this way, truth becomes something that is constructed and culturally relative.

I believe that truth is independent of one’s mind and belief. If you believe something to be, it can either be discovered or created. For it to be discovered is for it not to be created. By discovering truth, you come to an objective truth. A truth that is value free and objective, which all people can come to know. On the other hand, truth that is created is a truth that is dependent on place, location, origin of birth, and so on. For instance, the foods that we enjoy are determined by our cultural upbringing. Therefore, that preference in food is subjective.

When it comes to religious beliefs, whatever they may be, they are claims that deal with objective truth. In other words, religious beliefs deal with objective truth. For instance, the teachings of Christianity are not a perspective filled with biases, prejudices, and distortions. Rather, it is a truth that one can come to believe independent of one’s value, upbringing, culture, etc. Christianity is a religion that makes claims in which they are value-free and objectively true. For example, the incarnation is a dogmatic teaching of the Church. It is a teaching of the faith in which Christians believe to be true. Now, just because a Christians believe it to be true, does not make it true. It is a truth that is independent of one’s desire or wish to believe it or not. One’s causes of believing that religion can be because of their culture, parents, and so on. But that is not what makes it true.

Overall, Nietzsche’s doctrine of perspectivism is epistemologically controversial. It is not clear whether Nietzsche wants us to have a moderate interpretation or radical interpretation. If one takes the moderate interpretation, I don’t think his doctrine would be that provocative or worth entertaining. I think there is a lot of truth in the moderate interpretation of the doctrine of perspectivism. If, however, we take the radical interpretation, then we have a reevaluation of truth. This reevaluation gives rise to engaging and stimulating thoughts on knowledge, belief, and truth. Essentially, I prefer the radical interpretation for it leaves room for disagreements and debates. Being a provocative man himself, I think Nietzsche would have approved.

1. Lacewing, Michael. (Accessed December 3, 2019). *Nietzsche’s Perspectivism*. <http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/alevelphilosophy/data/A2/Nietzsche/NietzschePerspectivism.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)