

Comments on Philosophy

1. Human beings are fundamentally beings with language, meaning, and the ability to inquire and conceptually organize, to recognize existing orderliness and to impose order that was not there before. This gives humans the ability to stand outside immediate experience and value it, judge it, make inferences, provide theoretical explanations and predictions, and project a past and future that are not phenomenally present. But most fundamentally human meaningful awareness is a felt sense of presence, importance, equilibrium or disequilibrium, things matter to us. Meaningful awareness is the “place” where “the world” reveals itself. Everything we think, say or do is in the context of a sense of things, a meaningful world. Every meaningful world is always already underway and any new perspective arises out of an individual perspective within a collective legacy we call family, culture, civilization. ... Sense making is our fundamental trait and our fundamental task, if we are sufficiently prepared, is self-understanding. All meaning whether common sense, religious, scientific, political, economic, etc., arises in the context of this fundamental meaning-making interpretive capacity. We live in our meanings. And we have the creative critical capacity to modify, overturn and create new meaning, new “worlds” rooted in and made possible by previous meaningfulness

Human life is a spiritual not merely a practical or biological journey. It is a journey that can be described and explained in many ways, none of which exhausts the mystery of being here, of having a sense of things, a “world.” “Spiritual” refers to our capacity within a meaningful world to be affected, for things to matter deeply, our capacity for wonder, horror, anguish, awe and our inherent impetus to grow and develop, to struggle with and within the limits of our meaning toward freedom. Freedom is the movement toward our individual and collective possibilities.

Philosophy, literally pursuit of seeing or wisdom, is not merely an intellectual journey but a journey of spirit, the impetus to unrestricted wonder and questioning, willingness to challenge any assumption and habit in order to experience a transformation in attitude and perspective, and thus achieve better understanding and a better life. Both life and philosophy are journeys of meaning and growth. They are the same journey in that life as a spiritual journey of growth is at its core a matter of self-overcoming, seeing through and beyond what we thought we knew, developing new and better perspectives, having our perspectives, attitudes and felt-sense of things transformed.

The human need and desire for security, stability, and equilibrium manifests itself in maintaining and sustaining a way of life. A way of life is expressed in myths, legends, stories, customs, rituals, histories, that situate us in a larger meaningfulness, a sense of overall reality. We are narrative beings, we tell stories to affirm our meaningfulness and identity and to guide us. Even science in which we test hypotheses about the world is a kind of narrative attempt in the form of experimental design to identify and test measurable cause and effect relations among phenomena and on that basis to better understand and predict phenomena.

Philosophy is a narrative or dialogue concerned with the most basic questions about meaning and intelligibility. All philosophical questioning about reality, knowledge, truth, morality, politics, law, art, religion, science, etc. are species of this questioning. Philosophy is the attempt to understand ourselves and what we call the world which leads at its deepest level to the attempt to understand understanding itself, that is, the very interpretive limits and means by which intelligibility is possible. Philosophy involves very careful and rigorous questioning of our most basic assumptions and cherished beliefs, especially about reason and the process of questioning itself.

The very name philosophy, love of wisdom, implies that sentiment precedes reason. We only think because we are motivated to do so within a context of meaningful lived-felt-experience. Both Plato and Aristotle tell us philosophia, the eros of wisdom, begins in wonder, amazement at the ordinary

world we take for granted and, according to Plato, it is a kind of divine madness because it pulls us to seek a divine rather than a merely human perspective. It appears to be madness to relentlessly question the apparently self-evident truths of common sense. This unconditional surrender to wonder and the radical inquiry and love of wisdom it engenders would appear to drive us to madness because it often undermines the comfortable habits and assumptions of common sense. This passion for wisdom, however, is not licentious unbridled passion. Sophia is the most demanding mistress who teaches us that passion alone is utterly destructive to the pursuit of wisdom, that it requires the utmost in patience and careful, sustained skillful thinking, which essentially uses but does not reduce to logical reasoning. It is fundamentally hermeneutical, highly skillful interpretation of meaningful experience.

Philosophy is the most profound activity of discovering new perspectives, new ways of seeing, seeing through what we thought we knew, examining the enabling assumptions and presuppositions of our beliefs and perspectives that can engender a transformative experience that opens new possibilities for how we see and experience. It aims at wisdom. Wisdom is not knowledge. Philosophy is a kind of undoing that can provide a fresh start in how we think and feel. So it never gives us knowledge, but rather insight. If it were merely the pursuit of knowledge it would become indistinguishable from science. Early philosophy in fact was a mix of what we now call philosophy and science as these became an alternative to myths as a way to give an account of ourselves and the world. Myths still provide the most profound poetical and metaphorical way of situating ourselves in meaning.

Science, religion and philosophy are complementary, not at odds. They do different things using different kinds of discourse for different purposes. Science uses literal discourse and tests cause and effect relationships via mathematization of space and time. Science aims at testable knowledge, religion is based on a transformative salvational experience that is preserved in ritual, myth, and doctrine. Its primary discourse is mythopoetical, not literal. Philosophy is a kind of undoing, rigorous inquiry that allows us to see through what we thought we knew, what we take for granted, and provides a kind of fresh start in how we feel, see and understand. Insofar as philosophy engenders a kind of awakening experience, a gestalt shift in how we see things, it has similarity with religious experience. But religion typically moves toward preserving such experience in myths, rituals, and dogma, an attempt literalize and rationally support dogma. But the sacred cannot be approached via any literal truth, only language of the heart, poetical discourse.

Science, religion, and philosophy when operating within their own boundaries are not competitors. In overall human understanding they can complement each other insofar as they remain true to their respective purposes, limits, and types of discourse. The discourse proper to science is literal discourse and aims at conceptual clarity and measurement of phenomena in space and time. The discourse proper to religion is mythopoetical and aims at a felt sense of connection to the possibility of a transformational salvational experience. Philosophy uses primarily literal discourse but often effectively uses metaphorical or poetical discourse, as well, to achieve both conceptual clarity and intuitive understanding. The domain of philosophy is primarily concerned with issues science and religion as such cannot address, such as justice, the nature of meaning, and reflection on the nature and limits of science and religion.

Religion that turns dogmatic using literal discourse aimed at literal truth is an attempt to preserve its founding impetus. But this leads instead to "idolatry of doctrine" (www.deanpickard.com) rather than remaining true to the transformational experience that is the core of religion. Similarly, a scientist who goes beyond the methods of science and proclaims an overall privileged place for science is *scientistic*. It is in scientism and religious literalized doctrine that we find the conflict between science and religion that simply arises due to arrogance and a profound lack of understanding of our finitude

and the basic difference of function between literal and symbolic or poetical discourse. Religion and science cannot replace each other. They meet very different human needs.

In contrast, philosophy is radical inquiry that operates at the boundary between the known and the unknown. It presupposes that one already has a known lived-world and sense of identity, a sense of being at home in the world that can be overturned. No human can live without a sense of the ordinary, an equilibrium, a sense of being meaningfully situated. The possibility of having one's world overturned, whether by the practice of philosophy or the vicissitudes of life, is a manifestation of our basic condition as finite, vulnerable, interpreting, meaning-making beings. For a philosopher or lover of wisdom, this overturning is not merely a shift of understanding or transformation within a world of meaning and is not turning from one world of meaningfulness to another, as in a religious conversion, a scientific paradigm shift, or the experience of falling in love. To be a lover of wisdom, to inquire radically, is to be caught up in this turn itself. It is to be in a perpetual state of self-questioning and self-overcoming in order to have insight, to "see into" things in a way that can transform the perspective and attitude of the thinker. Any theory is an attempt to form and explain a world; any belief is a kind of holding on to a world. These are not what are essential to philosophy, though much of philosophy has been the pursuit of theoretical understanding. It is commitment, come what may, to radical inquiry and this turning itself that distinguishes the love of wisdom. So philosophy begins in passion, a sense of wonder, and it requires faith that philosophical inquiry is of great even indispensable value.

Though we habitually refer to the writings of such figures as Plato, Aristotle, Hume and Kant as philosophy, strictly speaking they are not philosophy. They are by-products of philosophy which is an activity, not a body of knowledge or a canon of reflections. It is an activity of careful inquiry even if also mixed with the desire to know and produce reliable results. If we turn to these writings in a way that is appropriate to philosophy, we do not read them to find final answers to philosophical questions, but to be drawn into the dialectic of philosophical inquiry that produces ever greater clarity of thought and insight. Philosophy is always underway. Philosophical writings are the by-product and trace of the love or passion for wisdom. It is this eros, this yearning and distension of the soul, as Augustine calls it, which, when it is caught in "the throes of wonder," draws us into radical inquiry. Philosophy is an impetus to language in the pursuit of insight or wisdom through radical inquiry whose identity is not restricted to and does not depend upon the extant works produced by that inquiry

Philosophy is a confrontation with the mystery of being, that there is anything at all, which is the mystery of intelligibility. That there is an intelligible world is the mystery that presents itself at every moment. This mystery is always there, only we do not notice it in the flow of the ordinary. When the ordinary becomes strange and wondrous, philosophy can begin. The known presents a puzzle, a challenge; perhaps a crisis; it immediately opens us to the question of why things are as they are or appear to be or why they ought to be one way rather than another. Philosophy as radical questioning is the ultimate risk of our meaning and a confrontation with our deep vulnerability and fallibility. To truly be a philosopher is to be prepared to move beyond any view you hold toward further insight and be as aware as possible of your presuppositions and prejudices, the limits of your meaningfulness.

2. In Western philosophy there are two interrelated traditions that stem from Pre-Socratic philosophy and from Socrates: One is philosophy as a kind of "theoretical enterprise" where we seek understanding for its own sake. This is similar to the sciences. It asks "What is there?" and "How do we know it?" The other tradition is philosophy as a "spiritual practice" where the insights that result from the highly rigorous questioning in philosophy are brought to bear on our daily activities and our overall attitude toward things. "Spiritual" here refers to our deep vulnerability, that things matter, the capacity to be meaningfully affected. Spiritual refers to the basic feature of human consciousness: affective

and interpretive openness, striving and yearning in a condition of finitude, uncertainty, and insecurity. This deep vulnerability is prior to any account we can give of it, scientific or religious. This deep vulnerability is undeniably present and shows itself in the primordial experiences of wonder, awe, horror, and anguish that are deeper than surface emotions such as joy, anger, fear, sadness, etc.. This deep vulnerability, that things matter and the need and ability to make sense are our spiritual core. Having a meaningful world, a sense of things from which we value and judge is universal to human beings. There is a recalcitrance to what we collectively call “the world,” a recognizable, variously described and explained orderliness that makes life, thought, and meaning possible, but it is always a world for us and for me here and now. “World” never comes uninterpreted. It arises in a cultural, linguistic, historically situated fluctuating meaningfulness with enough stability to make life possible. We communicate and act because things matter. That “mattering” is our spiritual core that can open us to something beyond ourselves. We always are situated within the limits of our meaningful perspectives. Our spiritual nature is to grow, overcome previous boundaries using the very limits of meaning we are growing beyond.... Philosophy reflects this basic impetus to grow. It arises in wonder, astonishment at the ordinary that makes that ordinary new.

For Socrates, philosophy aimed primarily at virtue, care of the self, the rational capacity to choose more wisely because things matter. Philosophy is a process of radical inquiry that is not merely intellectual but inquiry driven by matters of the heart, a desire to understand and improve one’s self that can transform who one is. It is a kind of undoing in which we risk ourselves, our meaningfulness in the service of self-understanding and personal transformation.

The practical or spiritual approach to philosophy as a means to living a better life tended to dominate in Greek and Roman philosophy from Socrates to the Stoics and tends to dominate in Eastern or Asian philosophy. Theoretical philosophy as an end in itself has its roots in the Pre-Socratics and came to dominate in the modern period in the West from the time of Bacon and Descartes through contemporary Anglo-American analytic philosophy. But the other “spiritual” approach has been powerfully continued in the past two centuries in thinkers such as Emerson, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Hadot, American Pragmatism as well as hermeneutic phenomenology with its emphasis on lived-experience. There are many other examples, such as the 20th century movement to make philosophy practical and apply it to life, especially in the philosophical counseling movement from the 1980’s. Both Western and Asian philosophy have the same fundamental motivation or impetus to inquire in the pursuit of wisdom or seeing. Contemporary Western philosophy has permeated the world as has Asian philosophy. Various forms of each have had influence on the other and there are many important similarities, for example, Nietzsche’s and Zhuangzi’s critique of society and philosophy, and their insights about language and meaning.

3. In contemporary Western philosophy **two general styles or approaches to philosophy** have emerged and dominated over the past two centuries in post Kantian philosophy. One is in the lineage of Hegel, Nietzsche, Dilthey, Brentano, Husserl, to Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Derrida, etc., called hermeneutic phenomenology (sometimes referred to with the misnomer: Continental philosophy). The other, called analytic philosophy, emerged from Frege, Russell, Carnap, Wittgenstein, to Austin, Ryle, Quine, Davidson, etc.. There have been a fair number of philosophers in each group who are widely read in the other approach. Wittgenstein, Rorty, and Davidson, for example, who are in the analytic group, are read by hermeneutic phenomenologists and Foucault and Ricoeur, for example, who are in the hermeneutic phenomenological group are read by analytic philosophers.

Analytic philosophy is primarily concerned with conceptual logical analysis and language use and takes literal discourse as fundamental. Emphasis is placed on the values of clarity, accuracy, precision,

and rigor in argumentation that advances our ability to better know and express truth. In contrast, through careful description phenomenology attempts to achieve clarity of a different sort, clarity by attention to what is given in experience and gained by careful attention to intuition, what can be seen in immediate experience, rather than through argumentation and deduction which are seen as derivative or secondary forms of understanding.

American Pragmatism (Emerson, James, Pierce, Dewey) is a third approach to philosophy that arose in the 19th and 20th centuries that has influenced both analytic and hermeneutic phenomenology. Pragmatism takes the meaning and truth of any idea as a function of its practical consequence. Language is a tool for problem solving, prediction, and action rather than correspondence to reality. Like hermeneutical phenomenology, Pragmatism sees poetic language as the source of meaning.

A major difference in analytic philosophy and hermeneutic phenomenology is the starting point and the view of language, between ***what can be intuited and what must be deduced***, between literal and poetical or metaphorical discourse. They both focus on meaning and language, in other words, both have made the “linguistic turn.” But they often are in conflict over a basic difference in how they see the goal and role of philosophy based on a fundamental difference about the nature of language. The question is whether and to what extent language can be exact and refer to reality in some literal way. For analytic philosophers, literal discourse that is essential to the sciences and other areas of human discourse is seen as fundamental to an articulation of truth. Poetic and metaphorical use of language is parasitic on literal discourse and is seen as primarily emotive and having little or nothing to do with truth even if highly important for human expression of feeling.- In contrast, hermeneutic phenomenology sees language as essentially and inescapably symbolic and metaphorical. Literal discourse is parasitic on symbolic discourse. For hermeneutic phenomenology, poetic metaphorical language is not one of many uses of language, but reflects the primary way in which meaningfulness can arise. Such primordial language gives rise to all forms of articulation. Language points beyond itself, beyond what is immediately present which makes communication possible to begin with.

“Hermeneutic” refers to the recognition that all meaningful experience is fundamentally interpretive. There is no truth or reality apart from this fundamental interpretive condition. Truth is rooted in meaningful experience and is an expression of a felt sense of presence. For hermeneutic phenomenology consciousness is “ordinary,” the original “place” or context in which all thought originates and arises. Any particular theory or conceptual analysis only has its appearance in that context. Hermeneutic phenomenology attempts to temporarily set aside our interpretive habits or reflexes that arise in consciousness and strictly observe and describe the most basic features of consciousness without those habits and kinds of secondary meaning obscuring what is basic and primordial to meaningful consciousness. Hermeneutic philosophy is concerned with understanding the very nature of understanding itself without reducing it to one type of understanding, to theoretical and argumentative thinking. Rather than explain anything, clarify concepts, or produce arguments, it is an attempt to get clear descriptively on the most primordial emergence of meaning and understanding that is the condition of possibility for what can then develop conceptually and in argumentation. From a hermeneutical standpoint, meaning-giving itself is prior to any meaning we give to things. Lived experience is prior to any understanding we give it and theoretical explanation is merely one form of understanding. Understanding does not reduce to explanation. Argumentation and explanation are derivative species of understanding. We can understand ourselves and the world very deeply via poetical discourse prior to literal calculative and theoretical thinking which requires a domain of discourse to be established out of the lived-world which is the condition of their possibility. Examples of those derivative or secondary domains are the sciences, analytic philosophy, jurisprudence, practical and everyday discourse in the lived-world, etc..

Analytic philosophy privileges literal, logical, argumentative and calculative thinking over poetical and metaphorical. Hermeneutic phenomenology sees the demands for clarity and argumentation as an attempt to privilege and emulate the exactitude of calculative rather than ordinary thinking. Hermeneutic phenomenology, in contrast, privileges insight and description over argumentation to elicit a kind of gestalt shift or transformative insight. Wittgenstein who is usually identified with analytic philosophy, in his later work had a similar view of philosophy as providing perspectives and insight as a kind of therapy that can allow us to escape from the hold of a mistaken picture of things. Rather than argumentation, this requires a "change of attitude" (Husserl) or a "paradigm shift" (Kuhn).

Sciences and literal discourse generally aim at something determinate. Poetry aims at something indeterminate. Primordial experience is indeterminate and thus poetical discourse is appropriate to grasp and express it. In philosophy there is ambivalence in this regard with many philosophies wishing to emulate the exactitude and certainty of mathematics. Others, such as hermeneutic phenomenology, pursue rigorous thought aimed at the inexactitude of experience. Science, in abstracting measurable time and space, aims at sameness and repeatability to produce knowledge. Poetry aims at the uniqueness of experience to gain understanding in a broader sense.

Analytic philosophy and hermeneutic phenomenology really do two different things from two different starting points and are not only compatible but complementary. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a highly skilled recognition of what is ordinary to all thought. It attempts provide an understanding of understanding itself as it emerges from the conditions of possibility of meaningful lived experience. Analytic philosophy is very skillful conceptual analysis within an already established domain of literal discourse in which recognition of argumentation and calculation can take place. But this domain arises out of and is made possible only in the larger context of ordinary consciousness. Hermeneutic phenomenology examines what is more fundamental, analytical philosophy carries out valuable clarification and argumentation in literal discourse about matters that may arise in common sense, the sciences, or religions, but require philosophical skill and insight for better understanding.

John Rawls *A Theory of Justice* is a good example of language analysis used as a basis for developing an improved theoretical explanation of what justice must be, understood as fairness together with a theory of goods. Philosophical hermeneutics does NOT provide theoretical explanations. Rather it is concerned with understanding itself and the intuitive shifts in meaning-perspectives possible in consciousness. Theoretical explanation is a species of understanding. Understanding does not reduce to explanation as analytic philosophy and scientific thinking would have it.

Meaningfulness is essentially interpretive and cannot be reduced to calculative argumentative thought which is a sub-domain of meaning. Analytic philosophy operates within the boundaries of concepts, argumentation, and calculative reasoning, and can have extraordinary value beyond the sciences and ordinary discourse in achieving clarity and insight not typically revealed in everyday discourse, for example, clarifying the concept "person" in debates over abortion, or clarifying core enabling concepts in the sciences such as causality, spatiality, temporality. The enabling assumptions of the sciences, such as the presupposition that mathematization of space and time produce something called knowledge, are not themselves scientifically verifiable and require philosophical conceptual analysis, hermeneutic insight and phenomenological description of the processes of the sciences for better understanding of the sciences and their conditions of possibility.

The combination of phenomenology and hermeneutics represents an advancement over all previous philosophy. It shares in common with language analysis and American Pragmatism the

rejection of speculative metaphysics and traditional epistemology in favor of a focus on language, meaning, action, lived-experience, problem-solving.

4. **The value of philosophy:** It has been erroneously believed by many, including some very smart people such as Steven Hawking, that philosophy makes no progress, is simply useless, and has been replaced by science. Hawking like so many scientists is not merely scientific (carries out successful research in a domain of scientific enquiry) but he is scientistic. Scientism, is not science. Scientism is ironically a philosophical point of view because it is a cluster of assumptions and/or claims about knowledge, truth, and understanding, which is the domain of philosophy, not science. (And to paraphrase Aristotle: To condemn philosophy is itself a philosophical point of view that requires skillful philosophical reflection). The assumptions made by scientistic thinkers cannot be scientifically tested, rather, as the -ism in the word scientism implies, it is a kind of ideology, a set of assumptions and prejudices about truth and knowledge that are not properly examined. The skill for doing this is not scientific skill, but philosophical skill in analysis and hermeneutic phenomenology. That is outside the scope of science, just as most things important to human beings are (beauty, justice, goodness, the nature of value and importance, the nature of limits, etc.).

Scientism is a common error among scientists who may be brilliant in their scientific endeavors but are grossly lacking in the ability to think beyond the limits of science... which is precisely one of the great values of philosophy. Philosophy can rigorously reflect on the limits of meaningfulness in any form it may take, whether scientific, religious, common sense, and see when thought is oblivious to its limits and oversteps its enabling boundaries. Scientism is akin to religious dogmatism which is also a claim about truth that goes beyond the scope of religion. Seeing limits is one of the main functions of philosophy.

As to the claim that philosophy *makes no progress*, that is manifestly false. Each generation of Eastern and Western philosophers for more than 2500 years has built on, refined, modified or replaced previous philosophical thinking. Not all philosophy is done well, and thus needs revision or overturning. And philosophy often involves not merely overturning previous thought, but a complete shift in perspective that sets new boundaries for thought. There may be adherence to certain ideas through changes in philosophical thinking that provides for orderly transition to new ideas, but sooner or later they come under scrutiny and get modified, seen in a new context, or abandoned. And there are new insights about the nature of thought, reason, and process of inquiry themselves that emerge. In every case, we see a set of philosophical issues taken up from previous generations either refined or incorporated into major shifts in cultural and intellectual development. Philosophy can both initiate and be responsive to such shifts. There have been dramatic points of no return along the way such as the development of modern philosophy in 17th century Europe and Great Britain that directly influenced the founding of the United States. Jefferson and other founders were well-read in Greek philosophy as well as modern political thinkers such as Locke. We are always rooted in the past, but new insight can dramatically alter our perspectives and understanding.

The study of the history of philosophy allows for a perspective on this evolution of thought and its relation to culture. For example, we can look back to the emergence of philosophy as proto scientific metaphysical speculation that began to replace mythological explanations of the world in ancient Greece. From about 600 to 400 BCE these speculations resulted in successive improvements and refinements in philosophical thinking. In the 5th century, Socrates departed from such metaphysical proto-scientific speculation about reality focusing instead on the human challenge of human virtue, rather like Kongzi in China a century earlier. Athens had become the cultural center of the world and Greek philosophy reached its golden age in the lineage from Socrates to Plato to Aristotle. All the

previous development in Greek thinking culminated in the fourth century in Plato's and Aristotle's attempts to give an overall account of reality, truth, and value. Plato invented the first systematic overall philosophical explanation that incorporated the influences of many previous philosophers, primarily Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Pythagoras and especially Socrates. Plato founded the Academy, a university for advanced studies in philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, music, physics, politics, literature, history and poetry. reasoning, rhetoric, politics, ethics, science and psychology. Aristotle studied there for twenty years and though his philosophy differs in significant ways from Plato, his philosophy is primarily Platonic. He wrote on reasoning, rhetoric, politics, ethics, science and psychology. Aristotle's crowning achievements are the invention of biology, the first systematic formal logic, as well as political science, a scientific study of drama and poetry, psychology and ethics. A glaring example of the hubris in scientific thinking is the astronomer Carl Sagan's remark that Aristotle set civilization back 1000 years!!

There were many subsequent developments in Greek philosophy such as Stoicism that continued to develop and had a wide and lasting influence on Roman and Christian thought. Plato was the primary influence on Plotinus who developed Neoplatonism and Plato was also central to Augustine's development of Christian theology. With Aquinas, Aristotle, who was introduced by Arab philosophers to Europe, became the center of Thomism, the theological core of Catholicism. The so-called Renaissance, named by Burkhardt in the 19th century, was a time in which new ideas under the influence of recovered Greek culture emerged and was a period of development toward what became known as the modern period in philosophy in 17th century Europe and Great Britain. ...

Modern philosophy arose over time but the decisive figure was Descartes who, influenced by the rise of modern science, emphasized proper method and epistemology aimed at independence of thought that is consistent with both Newtonian science and Christianity. This was a decisive shift from previous theological-metaphysical philosophy that was often hostile to the sciences. Two main schools of thought emerged: Empiricists who believed all knowledge arises in sense experience and rationalists who believed that at least some knowledge can be arrived at independently of immediate sense experience. But things changed decisively with David Hume in the 18th century. Though Hume was an empiricist, his empiricism was so thoroughgoing and well-thought out that it undermined the assumptions and thinking of both schools. This led the first great academic philosopher, Immanuel Kant, to respond to this crisis in philosophy and re-think the very limits of reason and knowledge in order to place it on a much more modest but more sure footing. With Hume and Kant we have a decisive advance in philosophy, a point of no return that set new conditions for the development of philosophy. Kant's absolutism was nonetheless still tied to Newtonian mechanism. Hegel represents a radical change from such a static view to a dynamic idea of knowledge and reality. History moves toward a Final Truth. That is a reintroduction of Greek teleology (history/reality has a purpose and moves toward a goal) and a rejection of modern mechanism. The methods of Hume, Kant and Hegel were phenomenological, close examination of what appears in consciousness.

With Nietzsche we see a complete rejection of any metaphysics, static or dynamic. One of Nietzsche's central and most influential insights was that everything is interpretation. There are no "facts-in-themselves." On the other hand, he warns that all interpretations are not equally good and there are clearly means to determine this and both relativism and absolutism fail as viable ways to make sense of truth. His thinking has something in common with American Pragmatism and Emerson was one of his main influences.

This overturning of both absolutism and relativism is one of hundreds of advancements made in the history of philosophy over the centuries. **Absolutism** is the idea that there must be some final, certain, unchanging truth, or standard for judging truth. Two variations: There are those who think they

in fact possess such objective truth or final standards for judging truth or there is the slightly more modest view that even if we don't possess these, truth must be fixed, final, and unchanging in order to be truth. Both these views tend to ontologize truth, that is, make it parasitic on some notion of reality that in some way can be known in itself independently of the limitations with which we attempt to make sense of the world. Similarly, **foundationalism** is the erroneous view that in order for something to be true, it must rest upon a foundation, whether religious, political or scientific, that is itself self-evident, unquestionable, and self-supporting like the foundation of a building. The metaphor of a foundation is a misleading metaphor. Truth is not something that is final, fixed or foundational. It is an on-going achievement and is the result of an open-ended, self-correcting process of good reasoning. The standards we appeal to in this process are themselves subject to questioning, but always within the context of arriving at some more intelligible view. To treat something as a final truth is to pretend there is no further possibility of better interpretation and reasoning. **Relativism** is a skeptical response to absolutism but goes beyond this to claim that that **all** truth is relative to individuals, groups, systems, cultures, nations, or languages, and that contradictory views can be equally true depending on these factors. Moral objectivism and moral relativism are narrower terms within this broad division of absolutism and relativism about truth that concerns the basis for making moral judgments. Regardless of what form absolutism or relativism take, they are simply mistaken views based on deep confusions about truth and reality and on ignorance of the best insight we have about the nature of limits, meaning, and language. (See D. Pickard, Logic, Truth, and Reasoning, 2nd ed Chapter 2: Truth www.deanpickard.com)

"Truth" is always perspectival and historically situated, the product of human finitude and fallibility. So any absolutism is a sign of hubris, overstepping our finitude and fallibility. But the embracing of relativism, the idea that anything goes, that all points of view are equally good or justified, is absurd and not supportable by philosophical reason or common sense. A large number of people today, perhaps a majority, are relativists who have not realized the absurdity of that belief, that it is on the one hand, a kind of skepticism about absolutism, yet is itself an absolutist claim: The term "all" in "all truth is relative" makes this a self-contradictory absolutist view of truth. Further, absolutism and relativism are not genuine contradictories. Absolutism being false does not make relativism true. They are contraries: they cannot both be true, BUT they both can be and in fact are false. An alternative is the idea of well-reasonedness and insight, that truth is the best thinking we can do about anything at a given time and our potential insight can evolve. Some points of view are far better than others and we call those "true" but it would be better to call them most reliable or insightful, which is a more modest claim that leaves open better thinking or new perspectives. Insight can always be followed by more insight. If relativism were correct, then any point of view would be as good as any other, an absurdity.

This is an example of successful philosophical thinking about something widely and falsely believed and no other human way of thinking can address and provide corrective insight, not science, not religion, not common sense. The consequences of belief in absolutism or relativism can be horrendous. With absolutism, it lends itself to the intolerance and persecution of logically contradictory views. With relativism it lends itself to irresponsible license in what beliefs we should commit ourselves to and ironically often leads to the very intolerance it was supposed to eliminate in countering absolutism.

Philosophy has too often been driven by fear of not having fixed boundaries of meaning, truth, reality, and justice. Fear of facing the impossibility of certitude in the condition of finitude and the ambiguity of experience has too often led to "dogmatic philosophy" a contradiction in terms. Anything dogmatic cannot be philosophy in the sense it has been described here. Good philosophy has freed us from this craving for certainty and the desire for salvation. A few notable examples are the works of

thinkers such as Zhuangzi, Hume, and Nietzsche. They respond to the manifest finitude and uncertainty of life with joy, wit, humor and deeply transformative insight. Nietzsche tells us that "Truth is that fiction without which we cannot live." But when "truth" fails it engenders nihilism, (loss of all meaning). What if we never went down that terribly misguided path about truth that is so contradictory to experience? (or better, went through its death: completed nihilism with the wisdom this could engender!). What freedom (not license) would that be?

Human beings cannot live without some fixity of meaning, in other words, truth. But any "truth", though it usually is an attempt to unify and achieve consensus, is also potentially divisive. We are not, however, left with an unbridgeable gap between people and cultures. There is a shared fraternity. However divided we may be by our "truths," however imperfect the generality of concepts is in conveying the uniqueness of our lived felt experience to each other, whatever incommensurability of meaning there surely is between cultures and individuals, we are all esteemers, valuers who judge and to whom things matter. If there is anything universal to humans it is their struggle with limits, and with vulnerability and suffering, but also the potential for a sense of wonder. It is the fraternity of this shared condition that unites us, not any necessity of reason, any universal religious faith or political ideology which can only inevitably make its truth a divisive tyranny

A major impetus of modern philosophy from the time of Bacon and Descartes was autonomy of thought, thinking that is free to discover, free from prejudice... But as Gadamer rightly points out it is impossible to not have prejudices. In fact, they are the enabling limits of thought within which thinking can progress. Descartes's prejudice against prejudice was an enabling assumption. Prejudices are inherent in all the meaningful experience we have. Prejudices allow us to think and judge at all. The goal is not to get rid of prejudices but to see them and transform them, have more enlightened "prejudgments" and perspectives that operate in our actions and when we are not reflecting. The best that autonomous thinking can achieve is seeing in what ways it is always already bounded by that which makes it a possible human task.

The attempt to reveal the conditions of possibility of experience and thought is called transcendental. Such thinking was a major advancement in philosophy in the 18th century. Though it can be seen in more nascent form in the works of Plato, Aristotle and others, it became far more developed in the thinking of Immanuel Kant. In response to the crisis Hume's work brought about, Kant sought to establish a new basis for understanding and defining knowledge by deducing the conditions of possibility of consciousness of objects. It starts with a phenomenology of objects of awareness then asks what must be true of the enabling conditions and limits that makes experience of objects possible at all? A transcendental deduction is reasoning back to what must be a priori true (true independent of experience) for objects to appear in consciousness. So objects are sensed, but their conditions of possibility can only be thought, deduced via transcendental reasoning. Knowledge is possible only by the enabling intuitions space and time that are not in consciousness but rather conditions of consciousness. Consciousness spatio-temporalizes objects providing the "raw material" that is then brought under categories of understanding such as causality, producing experience of objects and their relations. Kant's proposed 12 categories of understanding were: unity, plurality, and totality for the concept of quantity; reality, negation, and limitation, for the concept of quality; inherence and subsistence, cause and effect, and community for the concept of relation; and possibility-impossibility, existence-nonexistence, and necessity and contingency for the concept of modality . The categories operating on the raw material provided by spatio-temporalizing produces conscious awareness of objects in experience. His philosophy brought together empiricism (knowledge from senses) and rationalism (knowledge can be independent of experience) in a new model of mind: the mind is not a passive reception of what is imprinted by the external world (naïve realism), but is an active synthesizer

of experience. What “causes” the mind to have such phenomenal experience is not knowable (noumena). Thus there is still a dualism of phenomena vs noumena that must be addressed by later philosophers. Dualism had been a problem for Plato in how the world of sense and the world of thought could interact and for Descartes in how mental and material substance could interact. Knowledge is now seen in a radically new way in a new model of the mind that does overcome naïve realism and the problems of rationalists and empiricists. It nonetheless leads to a new set of problems that kept philosophers busy for the next century. Hegel famously eliminates the noumenal and argues that everything is mind and thus is knowable. The rejection of Hegel’s new kind of metaphysics was the impetus for much of subsequent philosophy, pragmatism, analytic philosophy, and hermeneutic phenomenology. Nietzsche famously had already rejected all previous metaphysics, epistemology, and most Western philosophical assumptions. As Nietzsche was able to see a century after Kant, Kant’s transcendental conditions are actually a revelation of the basic condition of all thought: **Reflexivity**, that is, thinking reveals its own enabling presuppositions and conditions of possibility if taken far enough. So Kant did not discover the transcendental conditions of knowledge in the conditions of possibility of consciousness of objects. Rather, he revealed the reflexivity of the thinking he was doing in the form of transcendental conditions which is an indication of the reflexivity of all finite thinking.

Transcendental Arguments and Reflexivity or Self-Reference¹: We can see this transcendental reflexivity at work in Frege’s attempt to provide a foundation for the possibility of language and communication. But like Kant’s attempt to provide a foundation for the possibility of knowledge, it fails to provide us with something absolute and foundational in a fixed sense. However, both these philosophers succeed in showing something about necessity that can be preserved independently of their absolutisms. Frege may be seen in the tradition of Kant (and Plato with regard to ideal entities) as providing for language and the possibility of meaning and communication what Kant attempted to provide for the possibility of knowledge of objects. Just as Kant had shown that judgment and the conditions of thought and experience of objects are the same for all human consciousness, thought and truth are the same for all men, for all languages, for all time, and makes communication of knowledge of objects in language possible. However, Russell’s famous contradiction undermined Frege’s logicism and his notion of logical objects. But within the context of Frege’s philosophy and seeing it as a response to the problems of classical theories of language and meaning, his use of the notion of propositions or thoughts as independent, objective and universal is very cogent and impressive. Freed from the context of providing a foundation for mathematics and his critique of classical theories of meaning, and seen only in the context of the historical pursuit of certainty, his view of truth and thought seems to lose its appeal, unless perhaps there is a hidden appeal to another level of transcendental argument here. If truth and meaning as Frege envisioned them were possible then certain conditions must be presupposed, most centrally some way of ascertaining and communicating them. His philosophy does provide this in the notion of thought. But the relation between thoughts and truth, and the way in which the mind has a relation to thoughts by “apprehending” is not clear. The problem for Frege is that he needs his view of truth not merely to be not false, but rather necessarily true. The problem is begged in formulating it since the notion of truth and falsity in a context and what Frege calls the true and the false are very different conceptions which cannot be decided once and for all within the context of Frege’s philosophy. His view of truth rules out the alternative. Frege needs the very conception of truth he is assuming in order to make his view of truth and meaning work, and thereby support his underlying thesis that human knowledge has objective non-empirical foundations. This is not to say a philosopher of such great stature committed the fallacy of begging the question in his reasoning about truth, but

¹ This section is drawn from “Frege’s Concept of the Thought” by Dean Pickard, www.deanpickard.com

that the conception is so primitive, as Frege says, unique and simple, that reasoning about it requires it. Kant was a master of coping with this kind of problem. But that does not in itself make Kant's list of categories and his view of knowledge the right ones nor, in Frege's case, does the brilliance of his reassessment of the proposition and his attempt to preserve objectivity make his notion of truth successful. Perhaps the best one could say is that any system of knowledge and meaning will presuppose some set of categories, will presuppose some conception of truth and consistency that would make the system of knowledge or meaning possible in its own terms in order to achieve its aim. It seems the notion of self reference is the key to the process of justification in any transcendental arguments and is unavoidable. Kant and Frege were looking for these limits in terms of those very limits, a very difficult task. One might argue against Kant and Frege, that no limit is absolute, but in their defense, that limits are absolutely necessary. Their philosophies have helped us see the latter much more clearly, if not also the former by the problems their philosophies encountered. Kant and Frege showed us that limits in the form of logical and transcendental requirements for thought, knowledge, and communication may well be absolutely necessary, but we now realize that no such limit is absolute.

More recently, Jurgen Habermas has attempted to use transcendental arguments for the conditions of possibility for communication to provide a foundation for ethics. Due to not recognizing what Nietzsche had revealed about reflexivity and that Derrida elaborates, Habermas commits the same error as Kant and Frege in thinking they had discovered foundational and universal or absolute truth, rather than revealing something about the nature of thought and reasoning, namely, it is reflexive, it reveals its own presuppositions as some point when transcendental arguments are used. Davidson recognized the value of transcendental arguments with regard to what can be said about truth but did not fall victim to the pursuit of foundations. With regard to foundations, transcendental arguments have no value, fail to provide such foundations. The real value of transcendental arguments is not what they have *proven* but what they have *shown* us. They have not proven that there are absolute limits of thought or communication as Kant, Frege, and Habermas have tried to show. But they have shown something about the nature of thought and language when it tries to reflect on itself. The orderliness of any system of language and thought can be distilled and expressed by logical rules that are necessary to that system, and can be turned back upon that system to show this very necessity. Any system of knowledge and meaning, insofar as it achieves its aim of providing fixity and coherence, can be shown to presuppose some set of categories and rules, some conception of truth and consistency that would make that system of knowledge or meaning possible in its own terms. Self-reference is the key to the process of justification in any transcendental arguments about necessary conditions and is unavoidable. Kant and Frege were looking for fixed absolute limits, the necessary conditions of language and knowledge. But the limits of language and knowledge they sought to expose depended upon those very limits themselves.

What the deeply insightful failures of Kant and Frege have shown is that no limit is absolute, but they have also shown us that limits are absolutely necessary. Limits or rules, though not absolute, are "necessary" for order and coherence and can be "read off" or distilled from that order as "preconditions." They *can* be conceived in the form of logical and transcendental requirements for thought, knowledge, and communication. But in a post Nietzschean world we now realize that no such limit provides a "grounding" for anything. It merely reflects the reciprocal relationship between ordering and what is ordered, between interpretation and meaning. Habermas did not realize that reflexivity does not provide any objective grounding conditions. Its unavoidability has been mistaken for a kind of necessity that he thinks could serve as a basis for ethical and social solidarity. He fails to see that Nietzsche has used this unavoidability to advantage in the service of emancipation rather than to undermine it.

The problem of self-reference or of reflexivity in Nietzsche is well known, for example, if Nietzsche's perspectivism is true then it is a counterexample to itself.² Nietzsche's ideas seem to force thinking into such conundrums: Will to power, as an explanatory principle, is so wide as to be vacuous, it tells us nothing, or it is altogether incoherent. If eternal recurrence were true, one could never know it, since each cycle is identical. What would distinguish them? It is an unprovable hypothesis if taken literally. *Amor fati* is also "problematic." How could one choose to love one's fate if one is already fated to do so or not? And as we have seen, the very idea of an "active forgetting" is a self-contradiction on its face.

But of course Nietzsche did not intend any of these as truths or explanations to supersede previous ones. They are aimed at undermining (and freeing us from our addiction to) conceptions of absolute truth and the pursuit of certainty. They facilitate a shift in perspective and feeling about life, a "gestalt shift" whereby we are emancipated from the prison of our convictions. They are purposely self-undermining and aim to "show" something about language, consciousness and our motives for the artful fictions we live by. The question becomes which interpretations do not bury the facts and are most life enhancing.

Reflexivity is a feature of all language and thought, if deconstructed far enough. Nietzsche's riddles are not to be solved but are to elicit transformation. His readers must read slowly, carefully, thoughtfully because they are finding themselves. Nietzsche is a catalyst for this. Nietzsche seems to be consciously putting reflexivity to a particular use of destabilization. He is not merely committing serious errors in thought that lead to incoherence which undermine any attempt at fixing limits and foundations. That one inevitably arrives at such incoherence in any attempt to reason to some absolute truth is a major, if not utterly transforming, insight. Nietzsche's work seems self-destructive only when it is read from a standpoint which aims at, demands, or presumes foundationalism, absolutism, or universalism. This would seem to distinguish it from problems of self-reference found, for example, in certain famous paradoxes such as the liar's paradox, Russell's contradiction that undermined Frege's logicism, or the Logical Positivists' principle of verification which cannot be verified by itself. Such problems of self-reference are devastating when they undermine some kind of foundationalist project, i.e, the attempt to find a basis by which truth, knowledge and reality claims can be legitimated.

Nietzsche's perspectivism and antifoundationalism illuminates this self-referential or reflexive nature of reason and language is now supported by major advances in twentieth century logic and mathematics, and exposes the false dichotomy of absolutism and relativism. To speak generally of necessity and contingency, of absolute and relative, is to already have bought into dichotomous thinking that has gone beyond the bounds of its contextual utility. What is the context of such claims and divisions? We cannot achieve an absolute orientation to everything else. We create the orientation. Accepting any rules of reason as absolute and universal is an orientation that attempts to step outside itself and proclaim itself "objective." But we can never outrun our orientation, our perspective, and can never achieve the objectivity of a view from everywhere, (which is nowhere). The attempt to prove this results in a regress of proofs of consistency and completeness exposed in contemporary philosophy of logic and in postmodernists' exposure of the reflexive nature of any attempt at justification by appeal to a universal or generalized perspective. Any attempt at "closure" on this issue would itself be self-refuting in requiring an unsupported assumption at some point.

Nietzsche said, "What was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all 'truth' but something else--let us say, health, future, growth, power, life." (GS, Preface, 2) Nietzsche is concerned

² This section through Section 5 below is taken from Dean Pickard, "Nietzsche, Emancipation, & Truth" in New Nietzsche Studies, (SUNY), Winter, 1997, pp. 85-109.

with truth in the service of life, truth understood as transitory boundaries or limits without which life is impossible. As esteemers, we always impose limits, constraints. Hence, limits are absolutely necessary, never absent, though never fixed and absolute. Temporary fixity is ensured and therefore truth in this sense. Conflict is resolved not by "truth," but by the demands of life, in response to which "truth" has its meaning. It is through Nietzsche's interplay of philological rigor and interpretive play that we can avoid the result in which "the text disappears under the interpretation." (BGE 38) Everything can be a trope. But not at the same time. Within the life and use of a language the literal/figurative distinction is preserved, only to be rearranged, melted down to meet some need and recast by some brilliant deconstruction/reconstruction. It is possible to push any interpretation to the point of "a trembling" that reveals its own unsustainable presuppositions. But identity and meaning are not obliterated. They are always present. One *can* get things wrong! There would be no intelligibility without some fixity, though every interpretation is always open to revision. To reify or absolutize a perspective, a particular set of propositions, is a worn out habit. This "all or nothing" dichotomy constitutes the two poles that modernists seeking certainty and deconstructionists proclaiming a kind of linguistic nihilism are trapped in. It does not follow that because the dogmatism of absolute foundational certainty fails that relativism is validated or that there is no meaning.

Extreme positions are not succeeded by moderate ones but by extreme positions of the opposite kind....Nihilism appears at that point...because one has come to mistrust any 'meaning' in suffering, indeed in existence. One interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered *the* interpretation it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain. (WP 55)

Nietzsche rejects dichotomies throughout his work, for example:

The true world--we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one. (TI, "History of an Error" p. 486.)

Nietzsche says of the tendency to divide things into opposites:

General inexact observation sees contradictions everywhere in nature (such as, for example, 'hot and cold'), where there are no contradictions but only gradations. This bad habit has induced us to wish to understand and analyze even internal nature, the intellectual-moral world, according to such contradictions. Untold pain, arrogance, rigidity, alienation, deathly coldness have thus suffused human feeling for the reason that one believed in seeing contradictions instead of transitions.

Nietzsche considers contradiction to be a construction of the understanding:

There are no contradictions: we acquire the concept of contradiction only from logic, whence it was erroneously transferred to things. Things do not mutually exclude one another, in thought also the principle of gliding and not of antithesis should dominate.

Nietzsche said, "My style, which is affirmative...deals with contradiction and criticism only as a means." (Twilight of the Idols, p. 511) It is a means for what cannot be easily captured in language, and

certainly not in any set of logical inferences. Nietzsche's various uses of style aim to undermine dogmatic absolutism, to transform the attitude of *ressentiment* toward the challenge and struggle of life. He is attempting to overcome the desperate desire for salvation from suffering, insecurity and uncertainty, which is finally a desire for salvation from oneself and from life we attempt to gain through immutable "truth."

Nietzsche is no "linguistic nihilist," that is, he does not undermine the possibility of meaning nor proclaim its utter loss. He proclaims the loss of a very old and powerful meaning, the idea of an absolute objective ground for truth (e.g., Platonism, Christianity and more recently scientific positivism). He diagnoses the resulting illness of nihilism and aims to overcome it. He is a "deconstructionist" only in the sense that he uses self-undermining concepts as a means to clear away thinking that is habituated to traditional conceptions of absolute truth which stand in the way of an emancipation from the "human all too human." Nietzsche's vision of transformation and *übermenschlichkeit* has something in common with modernist and Enlightenment ideals, but without the modernist attempt to ground knowledge and morality in absolute reason, knowledge and truth. Contrary to Habermas's criticism Nietzsche as having abandoned emancipation, Nietzsche's message is clearly emancipatory. But it no longer seeks emancipation in or by means of something universal or absolute that is grounded in reason. Freedom is always freedom within limits, but these limits are not fixed and absolute.

The Question of Ethics: Reflexivity and Habermas's Transcendental Argument for Social Solidarity

Habermas has not caught up with this post Nietzschean condition. He is still pursuing the goal of emancipation through rational grounding to solve the social, political, and ethical problems of late capitalism in the context of a postmodern world. But this new context changes everything. Any transcendental universalist approach to grounding truth is just another metanarrative. Given the conditions of postmodernism, until Habermas rids himself of the Kantian features of his view he will less likely be successful in combating the usurpation of one area of cultural activity (the life-world communicative reason) by another (economic instrumental reason).

The notion of an ideal or unconditioned moment of communication is very Kantian and the distinction between life-world and system seems to be very similar to the Kantian dichotomy of reason and nature, the dichotomy of inside and outside, the realm of freedom and value versus necessity and fact. Parallel to Kant's scheme of reason, rationality divides into the spheres of cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic-practical. But we can think of the division of rationality in another way using a quite different model to interpret our experience. The intrusion of instrumental reason into the life world is not the intrusion of one realm into another as Habermas sees it, but the splitting off of one social order that has become dominant, insulated and unresponsive to the others. There is not a lifeworld, but lifeworlds, not a communication community, but communities, and the individual is a crossroads of many communities. Freedom then is the availability of different perspectives. "A decrease in plurality of perspectives would tend to rigidify community, shrink individuality toward uniformity and unity and diminish or undercut query, social and even reflexive communication, and the possibility of rationality," i.e., freedom of choice.

One might admire Habermas' sustained attempt to carry forward the enterprise of always binding theory and practice together in the pursuit of human emancipation. But Habermas has certain assumptions about the fundamental status of politics and theorizing that lead him to conclusions that are critical of those who do not share these assumptions and he begs the question of the legitimacy of such assumptions in his criticism of postmodernists for committing a "*performative contradiction*."

Likewise, his assumptions about the fundamental nature of politics lead him to question begging criticisms of postmodernists for being "apolitical."

Habermas's failure to grasp adequately the significance of Nietzsche, as indicated in his chapter on Nietzsche in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, has prevented him from seeing that his own philosophy, in its struggle to ground a normative ethics in a theory of communicative action, still trades unnecessarily on universalistic dichotomous categories characteristic of pre Nietzschean philosophy. Worse, Habermas unwittingly and ironically commits a kind of "*performative contradiction*" in his own thinking by appealing to procedural rules that are reflexively selfundermining. The issue of legitimacy and justification cannot be settled in advance and then be used to attack those who do not conform. Many "postmodern" thinkers question these very notions of legitimacy and justification even though they must use the language and conceptual framework that "presuppose" them in order to carry out their critique of reason and language. To attack postmodernists for "violating" these conditions in the form of "performative contradictions" begs the question of whether Habermas's assumptions about reason and communication can provide the grounding conditions he thinks are necessary. Any notion that requires itself as a precondition is suspicious to postmodernists, not to mention post Goedelian logicians. This necessity that is supposed to provide a ground for emancipation is only possible if one makes an initial leap of faith with regard to reason. In Nietzschean terms, it makes *a* perspective into *the* perspective necessary to all perspectives. To make such a move is to presuppose what is at issue. The fact that such notions appear unavoidable is at the center of the confusion over the self-referential nature of reason and language and the misuse of transcendental arguments to ground and universalize truth.

To universalize any rule or truth is to ignore the context of particularity that gives rise to the desire to universalize in the first place. There is in fact always already a context of meaning in which we are operating. That context is inescapable if we are to be discussing anything at all. It is this obvious fact that is overlooked in the rush toward the fixity of universals arrived at by "pure reason" and transcendental arguments such as Habermas's.

The notions of emancipation, individuality, community, harm, and consensus all fail to have sufficient fixity that would allow any universal rational truth being asserted about them independently of the linguistic context in which they do their work. Habermas's discourse ethics is a requirement for all discourse under any conditions whatsoever. It imposes standards of rationality by which any discourse would be deemed acceptable and to which it must conform. But if these "rules" of discourse are truly universal, they must apply to any discourse about themselves and must themselves be arrived at by rational discourse. This, in turn, must be governed by these same rules which must already be operating in order to even have any rational discourse at all about the rules, ad infinitum. If we attempt to impose this universal requirement then the issue of self-referentiality, which is a feature of all our language and reason, is made into a problem. Self-referentiality is only a problem for one who tries to outrun it and arrive at some independent standpoint which excludes itself in taking things into account, in providing THE way of seeing or judging things.

Habermas, nonetheless, persists in his pursuit of a universal, albeit "pragmatic," absolutism. From this standpoint, he wrongly lumps Nietzsche together with thinkers Habermas labels as relativists and whose thinking Habermas sees as pernicious forms of postmodernism. However, Nietzsche's works, especially his recognition and use of reflexivity, undermine bipolar dualities, such as the absolute/relative distinction, and he cannot be labeled modern or postmodern for similar reasons.

If one gives up false hopes of universalism then one can give up the idea of relativism as well. There is no point trying to find shadings between the poles of relative and absolute. Relativism only makes sense in relation to absolutism. The distinction is a relic of a rationalist conception of truth that

only serves to obscure rather than clarify anything. From a Nietzschean perspective, there is neither a unified epistemological subject nor object to provide an absolute point of reference, so the absolute/relative distinction is dissolved along with anything supposedly absolute. The words relative and absolute do not have to disappear from our vocabulary. They obviously have some utility in some contexts. But they should cease to be a guide to our understanding of knowledge and truth. The pursuit of certainty and absolute foundations for truth is not only misguided and unnecessary, but also dangerous. Unrealistic and misguided expectations with regard to certainty and absolute and universal grounding of our moral judgments invites the unhealthy conditions of dogmatism and fanaticism, on the one hand, or nihilism, on the other.

We cannot live a coherent meaningful existence without "truth" or fixity in some sense. It is never the case that anything goes. A coherent, meaningful life requires imposing some order upon the flux of existence. What Nietzsche and many so-called postmodernists have seen is the self-deception of universal requirements of reason, but equally, the necessity of fixity and structure. They believe we can have the latter without the former. Habermas, who is still short of this insight, attempts to do what, in light of postmodernism, is not feasible or desirable. Habermas can be the Deweyan democratic pragmatist he wants to be without resorting to the foundation of an ideal moment of communicative consensus.

5. Nietzschean Ethics: The Irony of Sovereign Individuality

The core problem of modernity may be seen as the problem of how to achieve both individual autonomy and authenticity together with social solidarity, personal freedom and an ethical life, enlightened self-awareness and self-satisfaction together with social order. We have striven for authentic and sovereign individuality that would also support collective solidarity by forcing upon the individual some external "thou shalt" of faith or reason. "Enlightenment" is supposed to be coming to see the necessity and/or wisdom of this external "must", thereby rationally identifying one's self-interest with the collective good. But there is something fundamentally wrong with the idea of sovereign individuality grounded in an external demand. For Nietzsche, the very notion of the sovereign individual precludes morality: "for 'autonomous' and 'moral are mutually exclusive" (GM II, 2). A genuine ethics must be autonomous and cannot arise merely from an external demand. It requires real courage, not the courage of convictions, but the courage to question one's convictions, which leads to self-overcoming in which the moralization of consciousness is revalued and appropriated to free up creative individual sovereignty. Ironically, the supposition and demand that any collective solidarity that *could* do justice to the individual *must* be based on something utterly *outside* the individual, that is, a transcendent God and/or transcendental truths of reason, ironically reflect a **mistrust** of the individual.

Nietzsche's conception of ethics requires that we *trust* the individual (once we have given her the means to achieve autonomy), in order to promote the authentic individuality upon which *genuine* ethics depends. *Morality*, in contrast, is based on *lack of trust!* It does not trust actual individuality. It wants to move *toward* trust by logically or otherwise forcing respect of an *ideal* or otherworldly individuality. Nietzsche's ethics begins with the *concrete achievement of the individual as the very basis of any ethics* (and if Nietzsche's genealogy is on the mark, has been the real source of moralities). Rather than obligation, this genuine ethics is based on respect for actually achieved sovereign individuality and recognizes this potential for self-overcoming in others. It is based on respect for life and its diversity, rather than on moral law and conformity. Values grow up out of forms of life and are grounded in these, not in some "thou shalt" of faith or reason that wishes to become orthodox and universally applied. Such absolutism invites tyranny and repression.

To be human is to be a being to whom things matter. Things matter, but they matter differently, and conflict is inevitable. Nietzsche's ethics cannot require a world without risk and harm, a world without the risk of harm from other people pursuing their own interests. This is not a denial of the need for civil law. The idea that virtue has ever been a matter of legislation anyway, or vice versa, is highly suspect. Why pretend that without the right laws morality would collapse and that having such laws guarantees anything in the way of virtue? This hope breeds deep reactionary disappointment. Both the political left and right today mistakenly want to legislate moral right. Genuine ethics cannot come from law. Successful contemporary politics would be to maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect without letting conflict undermine social solidarity. Reason still prevails, but not from transcendental necessity or supposed transcendent decree.

Though he does not appear very optimistic about it, Nietzsche tells us that we are uniquely positioned in history to move away from morality toward a more genuine ethics and high culture. Freedom from religious, moral, and scientific dogma after the death of God/Truth greatly enhances the possibility of genuine individuality, but only after the necessary pathology of the various forms of nihilism are completed. They must be completed in order to not go on recapitulating the illusions of a grounded "thou shalt" external to concrete individuality. Nietzsche's perspectivism and ethics of authentic individual sovereignty is a vastly different pursuit of perfectibility than the absolutes of faith or reason. Nietzsche has much in common with Emerson's "self-reliance" and the American Pragmatist movement. One stops blaming the world and looks to oneself for solutions to problems and as the source of ethical strength and obligation.

Can such genuine individuality be taught? Can it be institutionalized (the problem of Plato's *Republic*)? This would seem doubtful in light of Nietzsche's view that "Culture and the state...are antagonists:...One lives off the other, one thrives at the expense of the other. All great ages of culture are ages of political decline: what is great culturally has always been unpolitical, even *anti-political*." (Twilight of the Idols, What the Germans Lack, 4) Culture means the cultivation of genuine individuality, so the state and the individual are antithetical, though they coexist. With this basic antagonism and tension one would think that the dialectic between individual and collective is always in jeopardy. But the collective should not be thought of as the state or social institutions. When these serve rather than rule the collective, then the collective can more readily produce culture. The nobility of the spirit can be encouraged by enhancing the conditions of its emergence if there is a collective will to do so.

We will not achieve health through politics. That is beyond its capability. Politics is merely a pragmatic instrument for culture that is also a danger to it as is the institutionalization of the "lifeworld" generally. Nietzsche's "Grand Politics" that arises from great individuals is a symptom of health of a culture, not a cause. And this health is beyond religion and outmoded moralities as well. It is only through education in a strong sense, education of the spirit that engenders something like Nietzsche's powerfully ethical sovereign individual, that health is made more likely. Institutional education, today's cybernetic education, is marked by mediocrity and

an indecent haste...as if something would be lost if the young man of twenty-three were not yet "finished," or if he did not yet know the answer to the "main question": *which* calling? A higher kind of human being, if one may say so...takes time, he does not even think of "finishing": at thirty, one is, in the sense of high culture, a beginner, a child. Our overcrowded secondary schools, our overworked, stupefied secondary-school teachers, are a scandal: for one to defend such conditions...there may perhaps be *causes--reasons* there are none. (Twilight of the Idols, What the Germans Lack' 5)

True education, for Nietzsche, requires excellence in learning to see—and to think:

One must learn to *see*, one must learn to *think*, one must learn to *speak* and *write*: the goal in all three is a noble culture. Learning to see--accustoming the eye to calmness, to patience, to letting things come up to it; postponing judgment, learning to go around and grasp each individual case from all sides. That is the first preliminary schooling for spirituality: not to react at once to a stimulus, but to gain control of all the inhibiting, excluding instincts....Learning to *think*: in our schools one no longer has any idea of this. Even in the universities, even among the real scholars of philosophy, logic as a theory, as a practice, as a *craft*, is beginning to die out...there is no longer the remotest recollection that thinking requires a technique, a teaching curriculum, a will to mastery--that thinking wants to be learned like dancing, *as a kind of dancing*. (Ibid, 7)

And there must always be a pathos of distance. "All higher education belongs only to the exception: one must be privileged to have a right to so high a privilege. " (Ibid, 5)

Education: what kind of person shall we breed, shall we will as being "worthier of life, more certain of a future. Even in the past this higher type has appeared often--but as a fortunate accident, as an exception, never, as something *willed*." (Antichrist 3, see 4)

The dialectic of individual and collective is an ongoing one and is not about something that can be finally achieved. But to the extent that a society tolerates, even encourages Nietzsche's ideal of self-discipline, self-overcoming, and self-reliance, it will be a healthier culture. Culture is the grand prize of the creative, destructive, and preservative movement and impulse of nature. Nietzsche forces us to ask the question far more penetratingly "What kind of culture will we be?" "What kind of nobility will we achieve, will we create?" And for each of us "What kind of person will I be, or more fittingly, am I?" To make oneself a task, a work of art, to love life and strive to be its highest expression, not merely in what one achieves but in one's life-affirming attitude, that is a noble goal. And to genuinely engage in this is to make the most ethical contribution to the collective.

Nietzsche's is a profound *ethical* philosophy. He does not prescribe abstract duties or grounded moral obligations, but sets a high ethical ideal in his perspective of human perfectibility. Self-overcoming is the key ethical idea. So in the real world of experience, we would do well to approximate Nietzsche's authentic ethics based on sovereign individuality, on the strength of character, the *ability* to keep promises, rather than producing and then coercing and condemning people who are incapable of responding to obligation except out of compulsion. Such coercion is supposed to be justified on the basis of something rationally and universally necessary. Thus, Habermas and all who seek a necessity outside the individual in transcendent or transcendental grounding, seek a kind of forced solidarity in an unnecessary attempt to abolish relativism. But this is ironically anathema to the idea of authentic individuality and therefore a genuine ethics. As Nietzsche predicted, in the name of individuality, we have moved instead in the direction of a great leveling, an inability for skill in judgment, toward an irresponsible license rather than responsible freedom. Nietzsche would tell us it is a failure in education and the effort necessary to hard won high culture, a failure in priorities, a failure in perspective, a failure in courage. No morality, no conviction, no dogma, no legislation will save us. Only the concrete achievement of authentic individuality and an ethics based on this can provide a basis for genuine social solidarity.

6. **Final Thoughts:** In my opinion, the most fundamental and profound progress philosophy has made in its twenty six hundred year history in the West has been to replace theoretical explanation as the most fundamental form of understanding with hermeneutic phenomenology as most fundamental in understanding the conditions of possibility for any understanding including science. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a descriptive (non-theoretical) study of experience that recognizes the basic feature of experience as interpretive. It's starting point is not a theoretical attempt to explain anything but rather an exceedingly rigorous and careful observation of the basic features of experience in which meaning arises. It does not pretend to do this without presuppositions but rather sees those limits as themselves indications of the most fundamental features of experience. It does not replace or try to compete with theoretical understanding, rather it provides a more fundamental basis for and context in which to grasp theoretical explanation as a specie of interpretation and understanding.

I believe that analytic philosophy is quite valuable in clarifying concepts and advancing discursive argumentation about those concepts, for example, justice, the concepts of space, time, and causality and many other core concepts. Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with concrete lived experience that comes to us in "intuition" rather than clarification of concepts and inferences generated in argumentation. It is an approach to awareness that moves more deeply into that awareness rather than away from it in abstractions about it, especially in the service of transformative insight, insight that allows us to see differently, be in ways we could not imagine until we have such an epiphany. It is a gestalt shift in understanding as opposed to a discursive argumentative movement step by step to some theoretical explanation. It is thought in the service of what is felt and seen. Hume got it right when he said we are passionate beings, "reason is and only ought to be the handmaiden of the passions." There have been many thinkers and spiritual facilitators who were fully aware of and cultivated this possibility of seeing with "new eyes" via transformative insight and that this approach to philosophy went far beyond merely knowing what can be literally and discursively laid bare. Parmenides stands out among ancient Greeks, many in the Christian tradition who were more concerned with spiritual awakening than doctrinal truth, such as Meister Eckhart, up to recent philosophers such as Nietzsche, Husserl, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Gadamer, etc., and many in Asian spiritual traditions, most prominently Gautama Buddha.

The inexactitude of poetic language is the originary and primordial entry into meaning. Feeling is never exact, only concepts, and even they fail us in the onslaught of the flux of emergence because they are always a product of situated finitude. Feeling is here/now, and this "here/now" has meaning, matters, only because we can give it meaning, always already has meaning. As Helen Keller so powerfully reveals, without language, there is no self, no perspective, point of view. Language and meaningfulness is more fundamental than anything we can say, any meaning we give to things. And of course, we are not discussing linguistics, but as Gadamer named it: Sprachlichkeit... in English: linguisticality, which is hopelessly opaque! But at least tells us we are not discussing the empirical science of linguistics. It is so profound we cannot even properly speak of it. The ancient Vedic culture saw speech as divine, a god as primordial as the god of breath/life. Augustine refers to our impulse to language as the "verbum interius." It is a mystery that we have the impetus to language at all and that we can attempt to but never fully articulate the "yearning" that we are. Thus poetic language is the alpha and omega of all that can be said, all else is silence as Plato and Wittgenstein tell us. But rather than nonsense, as Carnap and analytic philosophers have it, it is non-sense, not empty meaningfulness, but what is most important. We yearn but cannot say it. As Meister Eckhart and many other mystics of various religions tell us, what is most important is ineffable. Yet it guides us, transforms us. The literal is practical, scientific, allows ordinary life to function.... But not the spirit, which to a literalist, is

nonsense. We live with mysteries and miracles at every moment, the first and foremost is meaningfulness!!

So how do we grasp “sprachlichkeit”? How do we understand understanding itself? We are so near to it we cannot objectify it as we ordinarily do any objects of investigation (thus linguistics, which certainly has value in an objective study of the empirical features of language, utterly fails in this task). We are always situated in some perspective, some lived/felt sense of things. How do we grasp meaningfulness? We cannot grasp it as any meanings within meaningfulness. Language cannot be grasped by any of its overt features.

All meaning is reflexive, presupposes some enabling limits that will be revealed if we take our inquiry far enough. Contrary to Kant, Frege and Habermas those transcendental conditions are NOT foundational, do not provide grounding for our claims about knowledge, truth, or justice thus making them binding in some way. They reveal instead something about the nature of thought, reason, meaning: reflexivity. But what cannot be revealed is the utter mystery that there is meaning at all.

The goal of living a better human life is reflected in Socrates famous remark “the unexamined life is not worth living.” This is essentially the same message of the Buddha about living a wakeful life. Socrates’ method was a careful critical examination of our actions and beliefs to promote a more virtuous life. The Buddha used careful description of immediate awareness to reveal the basic features of experience to free us from habits of mind that lead to suffering and unethical action.—There is a collection of purported teachings of Jesus called “The Gospel of Thomas” that was not included in the canonical Gospels because it does not mention the central tenants of what became Christian dogma: crucifixion, resurrection, divinity of Jesus, the immanent end of the world and second coming, and salvation. The Gospel of Thomas is a book of wisdom about the human condition and the possible emancipation open to all people. Like the questioning of Socrates and the mindfulness practice of the Buddha, the book engenders “wakefulness.”

Regardless of our various beliefs and commitments, at the core of being human is yearning and vulnerability in a condition of uncertainty. We are finite, fallible, pain/pleasure beings susceptible to attachment and aversion and thus to loss and harm. Things matter to us from a situated standpoint of a meaningful world. Without this core condition of vulnerability, ethics would not be an issue, nor would our curiosity and wonder. All human striving to understand arises from this core. The fundamental task in the flux of self and world beyond mere survival, security, and comfort is understanding but always from some limited perspective. What can arise from an ability to see the consequence of finitude and uncertainty clearly is not any final truth but the process of insight that can give rise to an emancipated attitude about life. The reflexive and ironic position we are in is that we must use the very limits of our meaningfulness to finally become aware of these limits as enabling horizons of meaningfulness but also inescapable conditions of finitude. We are limited and fallible and experience intelligibility only from this standpoint.

Philosophy’s greatest value is as a kind of “undoing.” It challenges our assumptions and forces us to rethink what we believe more carefully, more insightfully, can provoke a transformation in perspective and attitude. We can have a perspective on what it is to be perspectival, finite, fallible beings who are fundamentally interpretive and live in our meanings. Insofar as philosophy disabuses us of misleading or false habitual perspectives, overcomes our thoughtless interpretive reflexes and provides fresh more viable insightful perspectives, it serves us in a way no other activity can. Philosophy serves to keep us intellectually and spiritual vital, creative, responsible in our perspectives and reminds us of our finitude and fallibility. This keeps us humble and serves as a check and balance against religious dogmatism, political ideology, and scientism. It does nothing to harm, rather supports the flourishing of genuine science, genuine religion and essential practical life. It does completely offend and undermine

thoughtless prejudice and so is often much feared and hated or seen as useless or irrelevant by those who suffer too much from the arrogance of finitude that we are all prone to, even and sometimes especially so-called philosophers. I say "so called " because insofar as a philosopher has become arrogant and dogmatic, to that extent, he or she is no longer a philosopher. Such a thinker is at best merely clever and caught in the web of thought used to assuage insecurity and sustain hubris about his or her "truths.". Philosophy is essentially the wisdom of insecurity that frees us from our desperate desire for permanence, truth and being right. That freedom in turn allows us to genuinely live a life of compassion exemplified in such great teachers as Kong Zi, Buddha, Socrates, Jesus whose lives we can emulate if we do not merely believe and follow what they taught, but discover it in our own experience. It is less what they said, than who they were, how they lived that is a model for us, their courage, insightfulness and integrity.