5. Conflicting perspectives: epistemology and ontology in Nietzsche’s will to power

Nietzsche is the first Western philosopher to define the human as a metaphorical being. I could rephrase the point by saying that, for Nietzsche, we are in metaphor or we are metaphor: our being is not derived from a Platonic, eternal essence or from a Cartesian thinking substance but (in as much as there is a way of being we can call ours) is emergent from tensional interactions between competing drives or perspectives. This claim may be a familiar one as far as truth and human perception are concerned, since Nietzsche argues the point explicitly in ‘On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense’ (2000), but may be less familiar with regard to defining human being. Taking truth first, we customarily hold it to be a relation of correspondence between knowledge and reality but, Nietzsche declares, it is in fact ‘a movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms’ due to the fundamentally metaphorical nature of concept-formation, a series of creative leaps from nerve stimulus to retinal image (first metaphor) to sound as signifier (second metaphor) (2000: 55). Our categories, and the judgments we form with them, can never correspond to things in themselves because they are formed through a series of transformations which ensures that ‘there is no causality, no correctness, and no expression’ connecting the first stage (the stimulus) with the last (the concept) (2000: 58).

Beyond perception, the metaphoricity of the human can be found within Nietzsche’s will-to-power ontology. In contrast to the orthodox ontological scheme of subjects confronting a world, Nietzsche presents being in general (of nature and the human subject – no distinction is made at this point) as a set of competing perspectives or wills
to power, out of which emerges human experience of an external world: ‘When one speaks of humanity, the idea is fundamental that this is something that separates and distinguishes man from nature. In reality, however, there is no such separation: “natural” qualities and those called properly “human” are indivisibly grown together’ (from ‘Homer’s Contest’ in Nietzsche 1968b: 369). The metaphorical dimension of this lies in the necessarily transpositional nature of the contest between perspectives. No one will to power exerts itself in isolation; rather, power in Nietzsche’s ontology is always asserted against a rival or an opposite, where the ‘assertion against’ is realized not as annihilation of the other viewpoint but as the capacity to see from it: ‘[The philosopher] tries to let all the notes [Töne] of the world resound [nachklingen] in himself, and to set forth out of himself this total sound [Gesammtklang], in concepts’ (Nietzsche 1979: 22).

Stretching metaphor beyond being a literary or poetic device to being a mode of perception is a well-supported move in recent philosophy and psychology, for example, the neural transformations involved in perceiving colour form part of Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of metaphor as an embodied neurological structure (1999: 24). However, broadening metaphor so that it becomes the essential nature of the human being might seem a less familiar or a not-so-well-supported claim. It is in fact made by Kofman as part of her deconstructionist study of Nietzsche (1993), although it could be objected that ascribing the claim to her runs counter to her explicit intentions. Nietzsche moves from talk of metaphor to talk of the will to power, Kofman argues, precisely to avoid metaphor becoming an all-consuming, metaphysical principle. But my mention of essential nature is not intended to suggest that there is a fundamental stratum of being (metaphor) which can be known independently of the cognitive and linguistic capacities (metaphor) which make such knowledge possible. Instead, my enquiry in this chapter is precisely into the epistemological and ontological complexities that arise when one is thinking with and through a medium which is also recognized to be a part of the world.

This state of affairs, as well as being a feature of Nietzsche’s will to power, is also a problem for it in as much as it generates a paradox. All things are wills to power or
perspectives, he affirms, including the perspective which grants me the knowledge that this is what the world is like. The paradox here is that Nietzsche’s assertion of perspectivism appears to cancel or deflate itself as just another perspective. However, drawing on a recent account of the will to power from Richardson (1996), I argue that Nietzsche avoids the paradox due to his ontology having a ‘metaphorical’ structure. Consistent with but not recognized by Kofman, Nietzsche’s ontology represents what is the case through the interplay between conflicting perspectives, in contrast to orthodox models which define identity either by assigning a property to an object or by assigning an object to a category. In setting out this debate, metaphor drops away as a noun or a subject in its own right, but this is not a departure from the theme of this book. Rather, the notion of something belonging to or being intrinsic to a category, which metaphor questions, becomes prominent, since Nietzsche’s ontology requires us to conceptualize identity as a relation between one term and another, where what does not belong – as that which can transform, enliven, challenge the subject of our attention – is positioned by Nietzsche as a motivating force. With regard to the question of what arises when one is thinking with and through a medium which is also recognized to be a part of the world, we find that the motif of belonging or not belonging assumes new importance as the mechanism which articulates the encounter between mind and world.

THE WILL TO POWER AS AN ONTOLOGY

Kofman finds Nietzsche substituting the will to power for metaphor as a result of his deconstruction of the ‘proper’ in Western philosophy. On Kofman’s reading, Nietzsche becomes a proto-deconstructionist, taking metaphors which, at first glance, appear to serve philosophy as concepts of propriety and structure, for example, beehive, tower, pyramid, and turning them around to reveal values that are antithetical to the original ambition, for example, equating the structure of scientific knowledge with the instinct-driven productivity of bees (1993: 59-80). As Nietzsche argues in ‘On Truth and Lie’, there is no ‘proper’ language in the sense of concepts corresponding directly to objects in the world; instead, there are only metaphorical leaps between realms, for example, from stimulus to retinal image to aural signifier. This challenge to the ‘proper’, Kofman
suggests, has the effect of positioning metaphor as the ‘improper’, the combination of one concept with another which is wholly inappropriate to it. But this, it would seem, limits the power of metaphor: ‘as Nietzsche has taught us’, she avers, ‘two opposites belong to the same system, and if one cannot deconstruct the one without generalizing the other, the deconstruction remains trapped within the territory it seeks to go beyond’ (1993: 16). In other words, metaphor’s power is limited because it becomes *philosophy’s concept of metaphor*. If one were to continue with the concept of metaphor defined as the ‘improper’, then one would not only trap it within the proper–improper opposition, but would also assign the concept ‘metaphysical implications’ (1993: 17).

‘To continue using this notion [of metaphor as ‘improper’] as a key concept’, she writes, ‘might have been dangerous because of its metaphysical implications, and it is understandable that Nietzsche should have abandoned it after making strategic use of it’ (1993: 17). Metaphor is made metaphysical because it is generalized and made proper as the proper–improper distinction; that is to say, in response to the question ‘What is proper to metaphor?’, the philosopher can answer: ‘The proper–improper distinction’.

In substituting will to power for metaphor, Kofman argues, Nietzsche sacrifices the signifier ‘metaphor’ in order to prevent metaphor’s capacity for transposition and re-evaluation from being reduced by philosophy to a single opposition.

To appreciate fully the insight of Kofman’s reading, one needs to recognize that this substitution ‘away from’ metaphor is itself a metaphorical transposition, and one that exhibits the competing wills to power in and around metaphor. The substitution takes place, she writes, because ‘metaphorical activity coincides with that of the will to power’ (1993: 82):

The hypothesis of the will to power, an evaluative artistic force which posits forms but seeks also to master by means of them, accounts for the generalization of metaphor, or of text, as well as for the illusion which passes them off as ‘proper’: every desire tends to impose its evaluations as absolute, tends to master, is ‘philosophical’.

(1993: 82)
The generalization of metaphor is ‘accounted for’ by the limited form of the trope – the proper–improper opposition – posited by philosophy’s will to power. Renaming metaphor, as ‘perspective’ or as ‘will to power’, is an act of defiance carried out by metaphor’s will to power against its own reduction by philosophy; it moves the concept on through language, sustaining its capacity for transposition not as a unique signifier but as a process of interpretation which regards meaning as a contest between opposing wills. On this understanding, metaphor becomes a text:

If Nietzsche substitutes ‘perspective’ for ‘metaphor’, then it is because the meaning which is posited and transposed in things is no longer referred to an essence of the world, a proper. The ‘world’, the ‘essence’ are themselves texts written by a specific type of will. The idea of an originary music of the world – a sort of original text making human texts into mere metaphors – disappears: every text becomes the correlate of an interpretation which constitutes a specific, provisional meaning symptomatic of a certain type of life’s mastery over the world and over other types of life.

(1993: 82)

Metaphor is moved away from the notion of the proper (and its opposite), and away from being a single concept, to a notion of textuality which, rather than being conceived in purely or narrowly linguistic terms, equates to the form- and meaning-generating action of a will to power. Kofman’s characterization of this interpretive process as ‘mastery over the world and over other types of life’ is questionable, however. While the concepts of ‘overcoming’ and *das Übermensch* are central to Nietzsche’s later thought, the notion of ‘mastery over’ is problematic in an ontology which configures the world as competing wills. What happens to the wills that are mastered? Is there any form of resistance or intermingling between victor and vanquished, or is the weaker will silenced forever? I return to this discussion when I focus on the cogency of competing wills as epistemology below.

One question left unanswered by Kofman is why she should think Nietzsche’s continued use of the term ‘metaphor’ gives it metaphysical status. To continue using
metaphor as a ‘key concept’ – the concept of the proper–improper opposition – Kofman declares, ‘might have been dangerous because of its metaphysical implications, and it is understandable that Nietzsche should have abandoned it after making strategic use of it’ (1993: 17). Perhaps she has in mind the process whereby freshly-minted metaphors gradually have their particular impact worn away through usage, making them general concepts, but in this instance we are already discussing metaphor as concept and not as a new, token metaphor. The value of Kofman’s emphasis on Nietzsche’s substitution of terms – from metaphor to perspective to will to power – is that she can present the substitution itself as an effect of metaphor as will to power, thereby showing how Nietzsche’s writing is implicated within the ontology he writes about or writes with. However, she fails to consider that substitution, as a device for resisting the pull of metaphysics, only delays the process, and merely has the effect of putting a new term in line for becoming a metaphysical principle.

That this does in fact happen is evidenced by Kofman’s own exchange with Jean Granier over the status of interpretation in Nietzsche, with Kofman arguing for ‘interpretation all the way down’ in contrast to Granier’s commitment to a metaphysical text in itself, of which an objective, authoritative reading is possible. To some extent, with Kofman, one can recognize how the persistence of a signifier might result in its signified concept accruing greater association and importance. However, I think Kofman’s argument fails to take into consideration that the signifier ‘metaphor’ (which she regards as philosophy’s concept of metaphor) denotes a concept which, through its opposition to conventional notions of what belongs to a category, resists the process of accrual, and therefore actively undermines any tendency for it to become a governing principle. Furthermore, such a possibility is even entertained by the power-based interpretive scheme which Kofman finds in Nietzsche: philosophy, in forming a concept of metaphor, would not automatically dominate the concept but would have to compete with other perspectives on the figure, for example, from literature or from metaphor itself. Such an approach precludes the need for a substitution of signifiers because the possible elevation of metaphor to a metaphysical principle (which substitution was intended to avoid) is here counteracted by the different directions in
which metaphor is conceptualized, for example, in terms of perspective, transposition, carriage, interaction, and not just propriety.

If the will to power were to be regarded as an ontology, it would be described as follows: a theory of the universe as made up of competing perspectives and drives, each working against other, opposing forces in an attempt to achieve its end, with consciousness and human being presented as phenomena arising out of the conflict between drives. For some commentators, presenting the will to power as an ontology is a mistake: it contradicts the assertion running throughout Nietzsche’s philosophy that we should view the world not from one perspective – which is arguably what the imputation of an ontology amounts to – but from a variety of perspectives. For example, in Nehamas’s view, the will to power cannot be construed as ‘a general metaphysical or cosmological theory’ because of Nietzsche’s hostility to the concept of the thing in itself; any general metaphysical or cosmological theory, Nehamas argues, is simply going to introduce a new set of things in themselves (1985: 80). It is because a thing ‘cannot be distinguished… from its various interrelations’ that the will to power stands as ‘a reason why no general theory of the character of the world and the things that constitute it can ever be given’ (1985: 80).

On Kofman’s view, the will to power is ‘the text of nature’ but this does not mean that ‘Nietzsche claims to have arrived at the essence of being… for Nietzsche relates this “text of nature” to the art of interpretation which enabled it to be read, an art of interpretation motivated by a specific intention’ (1993: 142). The ‘specific intention’ here is not a reference to a particular intention which Kofman has singled out as paramount for Nietzsche, but is rather the reinforcing of the point that the text of nature, as will to power, is always already subject to interpretation from a perspective. Kofman articulates her text as ‘interpretation all the way down’ position in contrast to Granier’s ‘ontological’ reading. Granier has the ‘text of nature’ imply the existence of a text in itself, ‘the final referent for any reading and any commentary’ (in Kofman’s words), and, by analogy, an ontological order, to which interpretation must do justice (1993: 138). But on this view, Kofman argues, one is tempted to think of the text as ‘an object in itself, independent of the originary interpretation which constituted it, and
one arrives at an ontological position by cutting the text off from its interpretations’ (1993: 138). Thus, as Kofman sees it, reading the will to power ontologically amounts to asserting that an aperspectival determinacy is available to interpretation.

Whether one finds an ontology in Nietzsche or considers ontology to be antithetical to his philosophy largely depends upon how one understands the term and, more importantly, its relation to what can be known. Both Nehamas and Kofman are right to disassociate ontology from Nietzsche on their understanding of the term as referring to a fundamental realm of entities which, in principle, can ultimately be known; in Nehamas’s case, it is a realm of things in themselves standing behind appearances, and for Kofman, it is the notion of a final, interpretation-independent text. In this respect, they are acknowledging the crucial difference between the concepts of will in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche: with the former, the will is a principle underlying appearances which can be known (Schopenhauer 1967: 184) whereas, with the latter, it underlies appearances but not as an eventual object of knowledge. However, as Richardson points out, in criticizing Western metaphysics, Nietzsche nevertheless produces alternative ways of thinking about knowledge and the world and, therefore, can be seen to be contributing to debates within the traditions of metaphysics and ontology (1996: 3-5). In this context, talk of ontology is not necessarily tied to questions of the knowability of ultimate forms or noumena. When a philosopher is proposing a model of being, including the being of knowing subjects, ‘ontology’ can still be used to refer to that model of being, its elements and their interactions. The key difference is that these are not elements which Nietzsche claims we can ever know in the sense that they are grasped as objects in themselves independent of any perspectival contribution, because we, as knowing subjects, are constituted by them and always know from the perspectives which they give to us. I think Kofman works towards this view in the final footnote of Nietzsche and Metaphor (1993: 189-90, note 15). She quotes Nietzsche: ‘I take appearance to be the reality which resists being transformed into an imaginary “true world”. A specific name for this reality would be “the will to power” – in other words a designation from within, not based on its elusive, fluid, protean nature’ (1993: 189; Nietzsche 1901-13: XIII, 121). On this basis, Kofman argues, the will to power is a name which designates the foundation of things yet without providing us with reality’,
where the absence of provision, I suggest, means the name ‘will to power’ is not intended to have a knowable, ontological ground, the substratum of nature, as its referent.

THE PARADOXES OF PERSPECTIVISM

There is one problem with this, however. While it is possible to talk about an ontology that is not offered as an ultimate ground of appearances, the distinction between ontology and knowability is not as straightforward as I have suggested. There remains the question of the status of the claims made by Nietzsche and his commentators regarding the will to power. As Kaufmann has noted, Nietzsche creates for himself with the will to power a predicament akin to that faced by Epimenides the Cretan (1950: 176). If the statement ‘All Cretans are liars’ uttered by Epimenides is true, then his utterance contradicts the statement, rendering it false. With regard to Nietzsche, Kaufmann writes, he ‘asserts that any attempt to understand the universe is prompted by man’s will to power. If so, it would seem that his own conception of the will to power must be admitted by him to be a creation of his will to power’ (1950: 176). If all statements about the world are made from the perspective of a will to power, then this state of affairs (being made from a wilful perspective) must logically apply to the statement which asserts that all statements about the world are made from the perspective of a will to power. Which is to say that the statement (regarding all statements about the world) cannot get beyond its own perspectival nature to reach how things are between perspectives and the universe. Just as the truth of Epimenides’s utterance contradicts the content of what is asserted, so the (seemingly extraperspectival) truth or objectivity of Nietzsche’s epistemological assertion appears to contradict itself through having to acknowledge its own wilful origin.

A different but related version of the paradox is given by Danto. Instead of perspectives seeming to offer extraperspectival knowledge, Danto concentrates upon nihilism cancelling itself out. Nihilism is the ontological correlate of perspectivism in that its denial of metaphysical or mind-independent order equates to the claim that the
world can only be known as it appears to someone from a point of view. But this gives rise to the following problem:

Nietzsche’s is a philosophy of nihilism, insisting that there is no order and a fortiori no moral order in the world. Yet he sometimes wants to be saying what the world is like. The world is made up of points of origin for perspectives, … occupied by active powers, wills, each seeking to organize the world from its perspective, each locked in combat with the rest… In the end then, [Nietzsche] too has his metaphysics and his theory as to what its structure and composition ultimately must be. If nihilism depends in any logical way upon this view, then nihilism is false or, if it is true, it entails the falsity of its own presuppositions and cannot be seriously asserted.

(1965: 80)

Thus, a statement about the way the world is has as its content the claim ‘there is no way the world is’, which is to say that the statement is the assertion of its own falsity. Danto’s ontological formulation of the paradox – a denial of the determinacy of reality which is nonetheless determinate – is the obverse of Kaufmann’s epistemological formulation – an epistemology undermining itself through relying on an antithetical concept – precisely because Nietzsche’s ontology impacts upon his theory of knowledge and, by implication, the knowledge claims he makes about his ontology. Underlying both forms of the paradox is the fact that Nietzsche’s ontology of wills describes both the way human beings know and the way the world is – competing wills underlying subject and world – but the sense of ‘this is how things are’ – both epistemologically as a way of grounding perspectivism (Kaufmann’s question), and ontologically in a judgment about the nature of reality (Danto’s question) – is a notion which both commentators think Nietzsche cannot draw upon without contradicting himself.

As well as being a problem for Nietzschean scholarship in its own right, the paradox also takes us back to Nehamas’s and Kofman’s dismissals of ontology in Nietzsche. For, in denying that Nietzsche’s philosophy refers to a world in itself, Nehamas and
Kofman seek to jettison the sense of ‘this is how things are in the world’ which is responsible for the paradox. Finding a resolution to it will be useful not only in its own terms but also because it will demonstrate how Nietzsche’s statements regarding the nature of the world can be rendered consistent with his perspectivism and, therefore, will help me to extract a metaphorical, perspectival ontology from him.

Several responses have been given to Nietzsche’s paradox (Anderson 1998, Clark 1990, Freeman 1988, Mittelman 1984, Newman 1983, Richardson 1996). Mittelman argues that the statement ‘there is no order in the world’ is consistent with a claim to the effect that ‘this is what the world is like’ if it is accepted that the former amounts to a denial of ‘the existence of a true world, i.e. a world of being’, a world of stable, continuous particulars (1984: 5). Thus, ‘there is no order in the world’ is not intended epistemologically ‘to reject as false every statement we can make about the world’ but ontologically to assert that the world is in flux – the continual process of becoming generated by transitions between wills to power – and, as a result, ‘there are no enduring particular things for us to make true statements about’ (1984: 6). Because Nietzsche’s denial of truth is aimed at our conception of the world and not the status of our knowledge claims about the world, Mittelman reasons, this leaves room for Nietzsche to make statements which are true and which do not have to be thought of as being made from a perspective. Ontologically, the universe is made up of competing perspectives but the epistemological space still remains for us to describe this without our judgment being accused of being one perspective among many.

Mittelman’s approach is a version of what Richardson terms the ‘two-level response’: Nietzsche’s perspectivist epistemology is created by his ontology but does not refer back to it to call its own status into question (1996: 10-11). Initially, it would appear that the distinction between epistemology and ontology succeeds in meeting Danto’s formulation of Nietzsche’s paradox. The first part of Danto’s objection is that ‘if nihilism [as the denial of order] depends in any logical way upon [the view of the will to power], then nihilism is false’ (1965: 80). But on Mittelman’s terms, Nietzsche can deny order ontologically, that is, the existence of things in themselves, while still presenting a thesis about how we know the world through wills to power. Similarly, in response to
Conflicting perspectives

the second half of Danto’s objection (that nihilism is false), nihilism does not entail the falsity of its own presuppositions because the denial of the existence of things in themselves does not entail the denial of principles of order per se which can be used to form epistemological judgments, or even alternative ontological judgments for that matter. As Richardson observes, Danto himself appears to favour this response when he writes that ‘apart from the bare [epistemological] assertion of power striving, there appears to be little one can say about the world [ontologically] which is not interpretation’ (1996: 11, n. 21; 1965: 222, my emphasis).

However, while this response to Danto could be upheld in general terms, that is, with notions of epistemology and ontology as they are generally understood, in cannot be sustained in the context of Nietzsche’s philosophy. The perspectival will to power is a combined epistemological-ontological thesis. It is wholly out of keeping with Nietzsche’s philosophy to think that epistemology can be separated out from ontology, since our capacity to know is a product of will to power. When Mittelman affirms that the claim ‘there is no truth’ does not ‘rule out as false or perspectival the claim that the world is in a state of becoming’ (thereby letting it seem that the ‘state of becoming’ claim is perspective-free), he is relying upon conventions of entailment (determining what can be ruled out as ontology and what can be ruled in as epistemology) whose principles of inclusion and exclusion are among the foremost targets of Nietzsche’s critique of Western philosophy (1984: 9-10; my emphasis). I am thinking here of his repudiation of concept-formation as the stripping away of the inessential, a process, he asserts, which is customarily oblivious to the interest governing what is judged to be essential. Nietzsche’s truth paradox is caused by the intertwining of epistemology and ontology – a claim to knowledge is made about an ontology which comments directly on the status of our claims to knowledge – but Mittelman’s account does not heed this sufficiently. Ironically, this problem in Mittelman is identical to the problem he himself finds in Magnus’s treatment of the paradox. ‘Nietzsche’s claim that there are only interpretations is not itself an interpretation of the world’, Magnus argues (in Mittelman’s words), ‘but is rather a meta-theoretical claim’ (1984: 17, original emphasis). What is overlooked here, Mittelman replies, is that Nietzsche’s perspectivism, far from being a meta-theory, is in fact a ‘first-order’ theory making claims about the world,
including those ‘things’ or perspectives involved in making claims about the world. But it turns out that Magnus and Mittelman are equally misguided, for the distance from things (or perspectives) which the former seeks in meta-theorizing and the latter seeks in epistemology is not forthcoming.

EXTRAPERSPECTIVAL PERSPECTIVES: CLARK, ANDERSON AND RICHARDSON

The more successful responses to the paradox, to my mind, face head-on the complexities of ‘a claim to knowledge regarding an ontology which includes our capacity for knowledge’ and set out to show how Nietzsche can be consistent on his own terms. Because our question, otherwise put, is ‘what does it mean to offer a perspective on perspectivism?’, these responses focus on the ‘mechanics’, so to speak, of Nietzsche’s perspectivism and, ultimately, on how it is possible to understand a perspective on perspectivism in such a way that it is not taken as being wholly self-referential or self-undermining. Common to these approaches is the idea that a viewpoint never simply looks at the world from its own perspective but also engages with other perspectives and, as a result, is in a position to assess the relative merits of all the perspectives involved. This point is crucial because the epistemological space in which the assessment of merit occurs will be the same space in which a perspective can be recognized as consistently asserting an extraperspectival claim. I shall consider three accounts: from Anderson (1998), Clark (1990), and Richardson (1996). The three authors agree on the following: transcendence over and above any one viewpoint is achieved not through a mere summative adding of a number of viewpoints (which merely compiles perspectives indiscriminately, without selection), but through a process of evaluation which defines stages towards truer or better perspectives, and which opens the epistemological distance necessary for Nietzsche to assert consistently, as a perspectivalist, that the world is made up of perspectives. However, disagreement occurs over what the process of evaluation within the space of the overlap consists in.
For Clark and Anderson, evaluation is a cumulative process, with perspectives overlapping to generate comparisons that work towards greater insight. On Clark’s view, perspectives can talk to one another and can recognize when one is better than another because ‘cognitive interests or standards of rational acceptability’ work across or between perspectives: ‘we think of one perspective as superior to another if it gives the occupants of both perspectives more of what they want from a theory – would better satisfy their standards of rational acceptability – than does the other perspective’ (1990: 141). To say that truth is decided by rational acceptability means that truth is ‘what would be rationally acceptable under “epistemological ideal conditions” for beings like ourselves (ones with our current capacities for observation, conceptualization, calculation and reasoning)’ (1990: 43). Comparison between perspectives on the grounds of rational acceptability implies that there are standards of acceptability which exist across perspectives or endure throughout perspectives over time but, as Clark rightly observes, this does not commit her to the notion of standards of rational acceptability (and their concomitant perspective) which can legislate across all perspectives. All that is entailed, she argues, is that, for any two conflicting perspectives, there may be standards of rational acceptability that are ‘local’ (my word) to the perspectives in conflict in that they are ‘neutral in regard to what is at issue between the two’ (1990: 141). It may also be the case that different perspectives have different standards of rational acceptability, for example, Nietzsche’s genealogical and the Christian-moral perspectives on history, but even this does not preclude the possibility that a ‘neutral corner’ made up of criteria that do not beg any relevant questions can be found. Thus, for Clark, evaluation across perspectives is made possible by locally applicable, perspective-transcendent standards of rational acceptability, and the process is cumulative in the sense that the shared concept of rational acceptability enables the superiority of perspectives through the satisfaction of standards to be assessed.

Anderson offers a comparable and slightly more detailed account. Objectivity is achieved, he argues, ‘by playing perspectives off against one another, using each to produce arguments and insights which expose the limitations and presuppositions of the others’ (1998: 20). This is organized in terms of an epistemological tension, originally advanced by Leibniz, between unity and variety in viewpoints, evidence of
which Anderson finds in the following passage from *On the Genealogy of Morals*: ‘the *more* affects we allow to speak about *one thing* [my emphasis, made to bring out Anderson’s point], the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our “concept” of the thing, our “objectivity”, be’ (1998: 18; Nietzsche 1967: III, 12). In practice, Anderson writes, an individual, ‘unified’ viewpoint, say, knowledge about the psychology of depression (to borrow his example), can advance through the ‘back and forth’ co-operation between the incompatible perspectives of talk therapy and drug therapy, with progress in one course of therapy being made at stages where progress is not made in the other, and vice versa.

Unity is important for Anderson’s interpretation because it provides the identity of focus between viewpoints necessary for their orientation and interrelation. However, just as Clark rejects the implication of an all-embracing perspective, so Anderson dismisses the idea that the accumulation of insight through unity commits Nietzsche to a Hegelian, teleological account of truth. Whereas a Hegelian ‘might insist that these various perspectives are all ultimately compatible, that in the end they will all be reconciled in a single broadest perspective’, as far as Nietzsche is concerned, it is always possible that ‘other perspectives might throw what we have already accomplished into a new and more problematic light’ (1998: 20-21); ‘we cannot reject the possibility’, Nietzsche writes (quoted by Anderson), ‘that [the world] may include infinite interpretations’ (1998: 21; Nietzsche 1974: 374). Unfortunately, Anderson’s point on its own is not sufficient to dismiss the similarity with Hegel, since the event of our perspective being thrown off course and cast in a new light could be nothing more than our tributary of enquiry joining a wider stream towards absolute truth. However, Nietzsche’s reference to an infinity of interpretations might forestall this criticism, if one is prepared to accept that a teleological path cannot have an infinite number of steps. But this is not my main concern. All I want to establish is that Anderson provides another model for the possibility of evaluation between perspectives: each perspective is played off against another as part of a tension between unity and variety, with the unity of focus providing the identity necessary to accumulate the advances achieved through the ‘back and forth’ between incompatible perspectives.
Richardson’s analysis differs from Clark’s and Anderson’s in the way it presents one perspective’s accommodation of incompatible views. Instead of the cumulative approach adopted by Clark and Anderson, Richardson explicates the evaluation of perspectives in terms of Nietzsche’s metaphor of ‘health’. ‘Health’ is understood epistemologically by Nietzsche not as a pure state, one which has eradicated all oppositional or detrimental viewpoints, but as a ‘higher’ state, in that it embraces tension between viewpoints: ‘today there is perhaps no more decisive mark of a “higher nature”, a more spiritual nature, than being divided in this sense and still really a battle ground for these opposites’ (quoted by Richardson 1996: 277, note 143; Nietzsche 1967: I, 16). The healthy perspective will ‘know better’ not just by referring to or including other viewpoints but, more significantly, by embracing the contradiction between them. Whereas contradiction between judgments is conventionally taken as a sign that one is true and the other is false, Nietzsche in contrast, Richardson avers, ‘wants to preserve the opposing positions and to build his own viewpoint with, or out of, their contradictions’ (1996: 279). It is the perspectivism in Nietzsche’s epistemology which makes this coherent, (again) not as a mere addition of opposing views (which would result in their mutual cancellation), but as a framework that provides the space for two or more opposing views to be held. ‘This embrace of contradiction’, Richardson declares,

doesn’t take a form that paralyzes thought: A and not-A can both be true when we allocate the claims to different wilful views… [M]y A and your not-A collide less intolerably to the extent that we see how these opposites are mine and yours.

(1996: 279)

However, the embrace of contradiction is not intended to flatten this perspectivism into a form of ‘anything goes’ relativism. Richardson adds:

Either my A or your not-A can have more of truth: the point is to see better which part of truth each has, by advancing their conflict by [embracing contradiction]… [In this way] viewpoints settle into a rank order that
reflects how well they know. The knower accomplishes in himself the real epistemic levels of these viewpoints: their power in him reflects how well they see.

(1996: 279)

The references to one view having ‘more truth’ in contrast to another, our seeing parts of truth ‘better’, and the accomplishment of ‘the real epistemic levels’ of viewpoints need explanation. They imply the existence of a measure of truth that is external to the framework of competing wills, and suggest, contrary to my introduction to Richardson, that he subscribes to a cumulative concept of truth alongside Clark and Anderson. But Richardson doesn’t take this route. In the final analysis, he argues, the ranking of perspectives is not a matter of placing $x$ above $y$ because the former is true and the latter is false, as judged by correspondence with an extrapolperspectival court of appeal. Rather, the understanding generated by the opposing views ‘finds truth not in either alone but precisely in the continuing, unequal dialogue between them, in which each progressively qualifies the other’, and it ranks itself ‘above both of them, because they see just parts of its whole’ (1996: 279-80). According to Richardson then, we can have a view with ‘more truth’ or which ‘knows better’ where truth is a function of the interplay between views that allows inequality between them to arise, the measure that makes the difference being the degree to which one view qualifies another within the interplay of views.

What does Richardson mean by one viewpoint qualifying another? His brief response to Clark’s assessment of the same problem offers a clue. Clark suggests that Nietzsche’s perspectivism allows one viewpoint to be ‘cognitively superior’ to another on the grounds that it ‘satisfies more fully… the cognitive interests of the perspective constituted by all of the relevant beliefs that the two perspectives agree on’ (Clark 1990: 141). But superiority or health, Richardson replies, is not a function of the number of ‘relevant beliefs’ that are agreed upon. Leaving aside the question (for Clark) of how the relevance of a belief may be determined in any given context (which Richardson could answer in terms of strength of opposing wills), it is not agreement that qualification of one viewpoint by another consists in, Richardson affirms, but the preservation of ambiguity between wills (Richardson 1996: 279). Ambiguity here signifies not a
cancelling or disabling form of confusion but a state of putting oneself in the place of another which allows the difference between viewpoints to be fully felt or understood. ('Felt' can be equated with 'understood' here because, from the point of view of Nietzsche's power epistemology, understanding – together with any moment of experience – is theorized as one will or viewpoint acting upon another.) Thus, when Clark asks (on the assumption that superior cognition comes through agreement between viewpoints) why a cognitively superior perspective should 'need supplementation by the interpretation of things from an inferior perspective' (1990: 148), Richardson replies:

Nietzsche’s knower comprehends each attitude [in his society] by inhabiting or experiencing it himself, ‘from inside’, and by directing competing attitudes on it, thereby viewing it ‘from outside’, from (the point of view of) its most relevant or neighbouring opponents. By holding in synthetic [dialectical] view both stances (of it as ‘subject’, of it as ‘object’), he knows it better than it knows itself and better than it can be known by any external view, including (to the extent even possible) the purely objective ‘view from nowhere’.

(1996: 280)

Thus the dialectic in Nietzsche’s perspectivism is intrinsic to what it means to be a perspective and, in Richardson’s view, is what enables Nietzsche’s account to transcend the limits of a perspective. A Nietzschean, wilful perspective, Richardson argues, amounts not merely to viewing reality from one particular angle but to having a view which is necessarily taken beyond itself or (one might even go so far as to say) is constituted by its tensile, simultaneous accommodation of other, opposing views. The notion of a tensile relation between opposing viewpoints may seem redolent of Anderson’s unity-in-variety model, but there is a key difference. The tension in Anderson operates in the service of ‘playing perspectives off against one another, using each to produce arguments and insights which expose the limitations and presuppositions of the others’, so that the limitations can be supplemented or fulfilled in the interests of a broader, more objective view (1998: 18, 20). In contrast, tension
Conflicting perspectives is maintained in Richardson’s model not as a step towards broadening a perspective but as a means of retaining the counterpressure which, as he sees it, is intrinsic to the forcefulness of a perspective in its willing against other views.

But what if one perspective has ‘won’ against another: is Richardson asserting that the ‘defeated’ view nevertheless remains in play as a force to remind the victor of its own forcefulness? Yes, I think he is. We need to be careful over how we take the notion of ‘winning’ here because, applied to the concept of truth, it is all too easy to reason that the victorious perspective is the true one, and those that have been defeated or left behind are partial and have less truth content. The question takes us back to Clark’s enquiring into why a superior perspective should need supplementation by an inferior one. The same response can be given here. The question only arises for Clark and (implicitly) Anderson because they retain the conventional ontological picture of knowledge as a series of judgments, albeit perspectival judgments, which, through their epistemic success, can be singled out and detached from the overall flux of the world as perspectives which correspond to the world. In contrast, Richardson is working with a new ontology based on Nietzsche’s will to power in which all perspectives already belong to the world. The vocabulary of ‘winning’ or ‘successful’ perspectives does not apply because truth, on this model, is a function of the contradiction or tension between perspectives which are held in play as mutually constitutive forces. The idea that truth consists of a certain set of perspectives grouped together as successful, away from false, limited or less successful ones, is dismissed since perspectival wills are part of the world; they exist as wills-with-a-view-on-the-world and so cannot be divided into components of ‘world’ and ‘judgment of world’, with those possessing unsuccessful judgment components rejected as false.

RESOLVING THE PARADOXES

The comparison between Clark, Anderson and Richardson was made in order to ascertain whether Nietzsche’s epistemology can avoid or overcome the paradox of being a perspectival assertion of perspectivism. All three commentators give grounds
for thinking that this is possible. This is on account of a perspective being something which is not simply confined to judgments made within its own scope but, rather, something which can engage with judgments made from another perspective, thereby suggesting that the perspectival can open onto the extraperspectival. On Kaufmann’s reading, Nietzsche’s claim that ‘any attempt to understand the universe is prompted by man’s will to power’ undermines itself through merely being a ‘creation of his will to power’, merely being a theory of perspectives given by a perspective (1950: 176). Based on the analogy to the Cretan liar paradox, Kaufmann takes Nietzsche’s assertion of his epistemology to be self-cancelling: just as the truth of ‘All Cretans are liars’, when applied to its utterance by Epimenides, renders it false, so any truth which the will to power thesis might possess is rendered false because it is judged by Kaufmann to be the product of Nietzsche’s own, subjective will to power as manifest in the assertion of the thesis.

What my study of Clark, Anderson and Richardson shows is that Nietzsche’s predicament is not the same as Epimenides’s. The strict bivalence of truth and falsity which operates in the liar paradox does not apply to the will to power thesis because Nietzsche is concerned with perspectives, whereas the liar paradox deals with statements. Kaufmann makes it appear that Nietzsche’s situation is bivalent because he (Kaufmann) creates an opposition between the perspectival origin of the thesis (it is a creation of Nietzsche’s will to power) on the one hand, and the seemingly extraperspectival truth or objectivity that (he thinks) Nietzsche needs in order to assert that knowledge is necessarily perspectival on the other; these terms correspond respectively to the utterance of ‘All Cretans are liars’ by Epimenides, and to the truth relation between the statement and the world. Kaufmann is right to suppose that Nietzsche relies on extra-wilful warrant, but he assumes that Nietzsche can only obtain it by stepping outside his epistemology of perspectives to confirm a statement-world mapping for his theory, thereby contradicting himself. However, what Kaufmann doesn’t acknowledge is that sufficient extra-wilful warrant (although not of the statement-world mapping kind) is consistently available to Nietzsche on account of the extra-wilfulness that is internal to his ontology of wills, as demonstrated by Clark, Anderson and Richardson. Will to power as perspective is not something which can be packaged as an idiosyncratic utterance and subsequently directed (as an individual
utterance) against the content of what was uttered, as is the case with Epimenides’s assertion. Wilful perspectives, including Nietzsche’s, are distinct from assertions (ordinarily conceived) in that they are already of the world, whereas assertions (ordinarily conceived) are taken to stand alongside or above the world in a bivalent relation. Thus, to be the creation of a will to power is not to amount merely to being a subjectivizing idiosyncrasy, but is already to be interacting with other wills and to have acquired an objectivity that is consistent with the epistemology of wills under consideration.

The version of the paradox which Danto finds in Nietzsche is not so easily resolved. Clark and Anderson successfully demonstrate the possibility of extraperspectivism in Nietzsche but do so with reference to the notion of cumulative truth: for Clark, locally neutral standards of rational acceptability enable the recognition of cognitively superior perspectives and, for Anderson, there is a guiding thread of unity which allows contributions to be amassed from incommensurable perspectives. But Danto’s paradox is that an assertion of ‘how the world is’ is being made, when the content of the assertion is that there is no order or there is no one way in which the world is. The positions of Clark and Anderson are not equipped to respond to Danto’s ‘absence of order’ because their accumulation and coordination of truth presuppose an order in the world sufficient for such accumulation and coordination to take place, and this is precisely what nihilism denies; a reading which assumes an order in the world cannot intervene in a paradox generated by the assertion and denial of order. However, Richardson’s analysis is able to respond to Danto’s paradox because it does not rely on the abidance of a particular world-view or perspective. For Danto, the paradox is caused by nihilism, as the denial of order, asserting a world order of wills to power. This would appear to be exactly what Richardson does with his own theory of Nietzsche’s power ontology (implying that his account is as unsuccessful as Clark’s and Anderson’s in meeting Danto) except for the fact that, on his view, no one perspective exists as a will that can be separated from the others and identified as the predominant world-view which, for Danto, is the element that contradicts the absence of order. In other words, on Richardson’s interpretation, nihilism as the denial of order can be consistent with the will to power thesis if it is accepted that, on the will to power thesis, the ‘health’
of a perspective occurs not through its being the singularly dominant view of the world but through its maintaining the contradictions created by its accommodation of other perspectives. As such, it does not possess the singular order which can be construed as the abidance of a particular world-view or perspective.

While it might be agreed that Nietzsche’s ontology consists of wills which cannot be separated from one another, on account of their inherently oppositional nature, it could be argued that I am missing the point. Danto, the objection might run, is finding paradox not just in the constituents of Nietzsche’s ontology but also in his saying of the ontology, in the linguistic structure he has to assume in order to assert that the world has no ontological structure. There is some evidence for this. Although Danto criticizes Nietzsche for having ‘his theory as to what its structure and composition ultimately must be’, while at the same time denying the existence of order, he also draws attention to the fact that Nietzsche ‘sometimes wants to be saying what the world is like’ (1965: 80). This creates a problem for the position I have adopted from Richardson. Despite replacing the paradoxical notion of a predominant world-view with a multiplicity of competing world orders, Richardson cannot avoid the singular linguistic order necessary – but logically unavailable – for making the declarative statement that the world is made up of competing orders.

But what is overlooked here is the fact that different conceptions of the epistemology–ontology relation are at work. I have already indicated that epistemology and ontology cannot be separated in Nietzsche’s writing because his ontological thesis bears upon the entities in terms of which we theorize knowledge. In such a setting, I think it needs to be recognized that Danto’s formulation of the paradox also includes within itself an understanding of the relation between epistemology and ontology, one that is at odds with Nietzsche. On Danto’s view, saying is about the world; judgment stands like a surface or screen before and in some correspondence with reality. Nietzsche’s paradox is caused, Danto reasons, because his description of the world as having no order is contradicted by the order in his saying that the world is without order; an ontological thesis and its verbal articulation (as an epistemological or theoretical claim) are in conflict. However, with Nietzsche, the two are not separate items capable of
Conflicting perspectives

contradicting one another in the antithetical or cancelling sense given by Danto. Judgment or truth-claiming does not have a purely transitive relation with the world, with the former existing like a screen before the latter, because the two both make up the world. This is one of the shifts in conception brought about by Nietzsche’s power ontology: judgment and reality are both theorized as interactions between opposing wills.

What the difference in epistemology-ontology relations means for Danto is that his own formulation of the paradox is constructed in terms which fail to address the implications of Nietzsche’s thought. Danto enquires how Nietzsche can sometimes want to say what the world is like within a philosophy which abandons any sense of what the world is like, all the time assuming that Nietzsche’s statements are at a remove from the reality he is theorizing when, in fact, they are among the competing perspectives in terms of which he is theorizing reality. Thus, when Nietzsche asserts ‘this is what the world is like’ – for example, ‘this world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself’ (1968a: 1067) – he is offering it not as a bystander’s impression of reality which is true for all time because it corresponds to the way that reality is, but as an expression about the world which is already of the world, and has ‘aboutness’ precisely because it is part of the world and open to support or criticism from other wills. The above quotation hints at this with the declaration that the world ‘does not expend itself but only transforms itself’. What is important to grasp is that being part of the world and being open to support or criticism from other wills are not contingent properties of Nietzsche’s statement; the second isn’t merely added to the first. Rather, they are necessarily conjoined as aspects of the power ontology which presents a mind’s perception of the world and its engagement with another mental viewpoint as homologous interactions between wills to power.

Further confirmation that Nietzsche’s ontological statements should not be taken as at-a-distance, theory-external judgments is given by the style of his writing. First and foremost, he writes in epigrams, issuing thoughts in fits and bursts rather than in the
form of linear, continuous enquiry. Arguments are not ready-made, ‘on the page’ but dispersed across contrasting voices and are only brought into being as discrete arguments once they are interpreted as such by a wilful reader. In this respect, the form of his writing is an analogue for his view that ‘whatever exists, having somehow come into being, is again and again reinterpreted to new ends, taken over, transformed, and redirected by some power superior to it’ (Nietzsche 1967: II, 12). Secondly, as we have already seen with Kofman, the substitution of terms in Nietzsche’s writing, for example, will to power for perspective and, in turn, for metaphor, is itself an expression of will to power, part of a textual strategy to prevent a stable word-world mapping that would amount to a correspondence relation with the world. This means that the world as will is manifest in his writing not referentially as the content of a proposition existing in the world beyond the text (as Kofman puts it, ‘an originary music of the world – a sort of original text making human texts into mere metaphors’ (1993: 82)) but performatively as a mode of ‘all the way down’ textuality which recognizes that its own claims will be taken up and transformed by commentators as part of the very interplay of wills that is being described. In case the use of ‘description’ here is taken as question-begging reliance on a correspondence theory of reference, I should point out that the notion of ‘description’ is available to Nietzsche in terms of the ‘aboutness’ considered above: any description will be made from a perspective that is already part of the world conceived as interacting wills.

Ironically, Richardson thinks that Nietzsche cannot avoid falling back upon a correspondence theory of truth in the sense that he believes his theory of wills accords with the way the world is. This would seem to contradict the interpretation I have given of Richardson above. ‘The Nietzschean knower’, Richardson writes, ‘tries to bring it about that his synthetic viewpoint [made up of competing wills] matches or mirrors the larger structure of reality’, which means that ‘Nietzsche follows the classical correspondence model of a microcosm mirroring a (the) macrocosm’ (1996: 280). These elements of correspondence, he argues, are especially evident in the doctrine of the eternal return – a ‘genuine truth’ to which we correspond through ‘willing that everything return[s]’ (Richardson’s words) – and in The Genealogy of Morals which carries out its diagnoses chiefly from [a] broad external perspective’ in the sense of
being external to ‘our’ perspectives (1996: 282-83). In contrast, I have made
Richardson’s account of the will to power support a position where the subject or
knower is represented in terms of their acting-upon-and-being-acted-upon immersion
in the play of wills. This is distinct from the microcosm–macrocosm picture given by
Richardson here because it does not individuate the subject as an item which then
stands in a correspondence relation with the-world-minus-the-subject. I do not think I
have distorted Richardson’s view of Nietzsche in developing this account of the
subject; I have simply elaborated a consequence of an ontology which replaces the
conventional foundation of the subject–object relation with that of the will to power.

If anything, Richardson works against his own exposition of Nietzsche by presenting
him as a correspondence theorist. He can only charge him as such if it is accepted that
the subject is an already constituted ground for the interplay of wills and, therefore, an
entity which can be identified as distinct from the world as will in order for it to stand
in a correspondence relation. Yet, by Richardson’s own lights, subjectivity for
Nietzsche arises out of the ontologically more fundamental interplay of wills. To
present Nietzsche as a correspondence theorist is, at best, to compromise or, at worst,
to dismiss the will to power as a systematic ontology. One sign that Richardson does
work against his own notion of ontological wills is his characterization of The Genealogy
of Morals as offering a view that is external to ‘our’ perspective. Given the scope of our
current debate, the notion of what is ours cannot be taken at face value, since it
assumes a distinction between what belongs to us as knowing subjects and what does
not belong to us, that is, what belongs to the world-as-distinct-from-us. Precisely the
question at issue is whether the subject, and all that belongs to it, is an ontological
distinction-marker or a phenomenon generated by the overlapping of more
fundamental ontological distinctions (namely, wills). It is not the case that Nietzsche
discards the subject–object distinction; it is just that his will to power ontology
transforms how we understand the distinction, with one consequence being that we
should be wary of employing its terms uncritically as epistemological or ontological
building blocks.
A much more defensible approach would be to characterize Nietzsche as a coherence theorist, with some qualifications. Whereas the coherence theory of truth customarily defines truth as agreement between beliefs, with the accompanying image of a web of beliefs pulling together through agreement, Nietzsche’s coherence theory of truth or perspectival health would be one which coheres through the accommodation of contradictory views, with an image of strands or muscles being made stronger or healthier through the pushing and pulling of agreement and opposition. This model would have the additional advantage of meeting one of the main objections against the coherence theory, as it is traditionally conceived: that is, it leaves propositions out of touch with reality, because propositions are held only to cohere with each other and not to correspond to the world in itself (Walker 1989: 176-77). Nietzsche’s model would not have this worry because proposition and reality are already in contact as epiphenomena generated by cohering and flexing wills to power.

ANIMISM IN NIETZSCHE

There are two major problems though with this ontology of wills and the epistemology it supports: (1) its configuration of the world as a series of perspectives is tantamount to a form of animism, and (2) it is by no means clear that a model of interacting wills, as that which underlies and structures the subject–object distinction, can account for knowledge and experience of an objective world, as we ordinarily think of them occurring. (1) With regard to animism, Nietzsche is aware of his tendency to ascribe mental properties to all phenomena, as the following quotation from his notebooks (made by Moore 2002: 42) demonstrates:

Neither of the two explanations of organic life has been hitherto successful [Nietzsche writes], neither the one from the perspective of mechanics, nor the one from the perspective of the mind. I emphasize the latter… The governance of the organism occurs in a such way that both the mechanical as well as the mental world can be invoked only symbolically as a means of explanation.
Conflicting perspectives 177

(Original emphases, quoted in Moore 2002: 42, from the notebooks in Nietzsche 1967–: VII 2, 26 [68])

And in *Beyond Good and Evil*, also noted by Moore, Nietzsche asserts that the inorganic world should be regarded as a ‘more rudimentary form of the world of emotions, holding everything in a powerful unity, all the potential of the organic process to develop and differentiate’ (Moore 2002: 43; Nietzsche 1998: 36). Animism, Moore suggests, is part of Nietzsche’s challenge to contemporary science and its reduction of life to matter, the forces of Newtonian physics, and Darwinian mechanisms of mere survival. But despite Nietzsche emphasizing that ‘his conception of nature is merely an interpretation with no more epistemic justification than any other’, Moore argues, ‘it seems to me that it is virtually indistinguishable from the widespread crypto-Idealism of contemporary German biology’ (2002: 43). He is wholly oblivious to the fact, Moore continues, that 'his anthropomorphic vision of the world permeated by spirit and will is… strikingly reminiscent of the pan-animism of Leibniz… and its derivatives in German *Naturphilosophie*’ (2002: 43).

But I don’t think Nietzsche’s position should be characterized, let alone dismissed, as such. Animism is the ascription of soul, mind or agency to inanimate matter. Nietzsche appears to make such an ascription but *the nature of this apparent ascription* needs further examination since the process of applying a concept to something to which it does not belong is a highly significant gesture, given our focus on metaphor. There is a difference between speaking of matter as if it literally possesses mind, as if we were being asked to think of matter as having a mental life in exactly the same way as human beings, on the one hand, and speaking of matter as if it possesses mind metaphorically or symbolically, on the other. As Nietzsche writes above: ‘The governance of the organism occurs in a such way that both the mechanical as well as the mental world can be invoked only symbolically as a means of explanation’ (quoted in Moore 2002: 42). Much could be written on what a metaphorical or symbolic ascription amounts to but, in relation to the theory of metaphor as will that is being developed here, I suggest the ascription needs to be considered as part of the network of opposing perspectives. A perspective can be construed as symbolic (following Nietzsche’s use of the term) in the
Conflicting perspectives

sense that it explains one thing (the organism) in terms of something else (in this case, mind). Furthermore, as a perspective, it acknowledges and includes other, opposing judgments which, in the present case, would be the mechanistic conception of nature. Moore, when he sums up Nietzsche’s position as ‘merely an interpretation’, fails to take into account the ontological significance which interpretation has for Nietzsche: as far as Moore is concerned, interpretation is simply one view among others whereas, on the view I am setting out, we need to recognize that interpretation is conducted by Nietzsche in such a way that judgments are not outright assertions but statements that embrace opposites within a dynamic, for example, his inclusion of the competing perspectives of mind and machine. On this basis, Nietzsche does not resort to wholesale animism, understood as the literal ascription of mind to matter, since his ascription belongs to a tensional dialectic of wills where the tension prevents mind from becoming a property of matter.

It should also be pointed out that Nietzsche’s ontology of wills can meet the charge of animism from the other direction: namely, by contesting the certainty with which we believe mind to be a human property. This is not the point that mind remains a philosophically contentious term and so any charge of animism is weakened due to the uncertainty of its central concept. Rather, the point is that Nietzsche’s ontology, as a wilful, metaphorical ontology, upsets conventional notions of conceptual propriety or belonging, that is, our customary sense of which predicates belong to which subjects. On this model, the denotation of terms such as mind, consciousness or subjectivity cannot be taken for granted because the concept of the human (subject as) receiver or constructor of experience which the terms customarily serve is now represented by a tension between wills. Thus, to say that Nietzsche, in describing nature as a series of competing perspectives, is assigning human properties to nature is to assume that we are clear on the denotation of ‘human’. Connotations of human mind and nature are undeniably present and are intended to be present, otherwise why speak of ‘perspective’ and ‘world’, but, within the framework of competing perspectives, suspended from their conventional denotations, they work to generate different perspectives by promoting alternative combinations of concepts. Nietzsche’s philosophy, it should be remembered, aims to challenge established concepts of knowledge and being. His
intention is not to humanize nature through simply grafting the (supposedly agreed) properties of the human onto nature but to create an ontology which can reinvigorate our sense of the human and the world by turning conventional oppositions, for example, mind and world, into tensional perspectives (or wills acting) on one another. This is an important point for the second objection to Nietzsche’s ontology – to what extent we can recognize it as a theory of knowledge – and I shall return to it shortly.

Locating the apparent ascription of mind to nature within the ontology of perspectives also helps to distance Nietzsche from Leibniz. Moore accuses Nietzsche of being ‘oblivious’ to the similarities between his anthropomorphism and the pan-animism of Leibniz. However, the two are quite distinct. Animism is a modern, secular concept, formulated from the modern perspective in which matter is distinct from and devoid of soul or mind. Technically speaking, Leibniz only appears to us to present a form of animism because we view him from a modern perspective. In pre-Cartesian terms (that is, before Cartesian dualism becomes orthodox metaphysics), he does not ascribe mind to matter because he doesn’t have to: he is working with a theistic metaphysics which accepts matter as animate; in other words, the concept of soul already belongs or is close to the concept of matter. In Leibniz’s ontology, each being, from the level of human being to that of particles of matter, is constituted by a soul or (what Leibniz terms) a monad (Leibniz 1973: 179-94). A being’s interaction with other beings, including its knowability by other beings, is derived from each monad being a reflection or an expression of every other monad within the God-given universe (Leibniz 1996: 440). In contrast, although Nietzsche appears to ascribe mind to matter in the modern sense, no ascription is taking place because the exchange of terms is in fact an expression of the interaction between competing perspectives.

THE WILL TO POWER AS A THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

The second objection to Nietzsche’s ontology I am anticipating is the question of whether a model of interacting wills can account for experience and knowledge of an objective world, as we ordinarily think of them occurring. At first glance, the question
might appear to miss the point because Nietzsche does not set out to preserve reality, knowledge and experience as we ordinarily regard them. However, it is not so much ordinariness that I think Nietzsche has to accommodate; rather, the question asks – in a fashion that is true to his ontology – what it is about a seemingly diffuse interplay of wills that meshes with our traditional subject–object awareness sufficiently for us to be able to see ourselves or the possibility of ourselves in the interplay of wills. My phrasing would appear to verge on the conversational – our ‘being able to see ourselves’ – but it is in fact philosophically precise in that we are asking how our current perspective on self and world can be seen in and transformed by Nietzsche’s perspective. If the subject–object distinction is no longer the basis upon which experience is theorized, then we need to know how a model of interacting wills can explain the subject–object character of experience, for example, the sense of experiences being mine, especially given that his account undermines conventional notions of propriety.

The concept in Nietzsche’s writings which would seem to respond explicitly to these questions is der Übermensch, the ‘overman’, the person who is able to synthesize competing wills into a dynamic unity: ‘active, successful natures act, not according to the dictum “know thyself”, but as if there hovered before them the commandment: will a self and thou shalt become a self’ (Nietzsche 1977: 232). For Nietzsche, it is one of the tasks – if not the most pressing task – of philosophy to make people aware of the capacity or the liberty they have to become overmen. The first words spoken by Zarathustra to the townspeople he meets assembled in the square are: ‘I teach you the superman. Man is something that should be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?’ (1977: 237). But this takes us back to the Nietzschean project of exceeding the values and definitions ordinarily ascribed to human being, and does not assist us with the epistemological questions which have arisen for the systematic version of Nietzsche given here.

The question of how a model of interacting wills can account for experience and knowledge of an objective world, I think, only arises because we are not used to subject and object being made up of the same kind of thing, i.e. wills. Such an account goes against our Cartesian belief that mind and world are wholly distinct and separate
entities. However, the notion that subject and object emerge from a common ground is a central principle of Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy, for example, Kant’s claim that conditions of the possibility of experience are at the same time the conditions of the possibility of objects of experience (1929: A111). Kant, it could be argued, is not a helpful comparison because the world which his subject opens onto is only (so the majority of commentators have it) the subjective realm of appearance whereas, with Nietzsche, we are asked to consider subject and object occurring between competing wills where the appearance–reality distinction does not apply. But the comparison stands, I think, because the central issue is one of proprietorship: what belongs to the subject and what belongs to the world. We are asking the question of Nietzsche’s ontology of wills because he seems to be saying that subject and world, rather than possessing distinct kinds of will, are constantly exchanging their wills or drawing them from the shared realm of interaction. Kant’s predicament is also one of proprietorship because, in articulating a world which belongs to the subject, ‘belonging’ is taken by Hegel and successive critics to be a relation of confinement – confined to the realm of appearances – when the relation can also be taken (against the majority of Kant’s commentators) as one which, through interrelating mind and world, modifies the denotation of both terms so that they no longer conform to the appearance–reality opposition.

There are recent developments in the theory of knowledge and the philosophy of mind which bear comparison with Nietzsche’s ontology in that they rethink what belongs to subject and object. They are contentious, as one might expect, but my reason for introducing them is not to engage in their debates but merely to illustrate how challenges to proprietorship in relation to the subject–object distinction are active in recent philosophy. I shall focus on two examples. The first is John McDowell’s response to the stalemate between realism and anti-realism (1994). McDowell would probably regard himself as more Kantian than Nietzschean, given that his theory builds upon Kant’s dictum that ‘thoughts without intuition are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind’ (Kant 1929: A51, B75), but what is significant for us is that he overtly challenges the spatial metaphors with which we demarcate subject and object. His position is based upon a ‘naturalized’ reading of Kant’s epistemology, ‘naturalized’
in that human cognitive faculties are acknowledged as belonging to the nature they access. Because of the inextricable tie between mind and world, McDowell argues, we are in error if we frame epistemological debate in terms which assume that there are isolated and individually identifiable entities such as mind and world, scheme and content, and concept and intuition. In the stalemate between realism and anti-realism, participants are limited to arguing either, with the realist, that nature impresses itself upon mind or, with the anti-realist, that mind constructs nature. However, with McDowell’s approach, the impasse is avoided

because of how we place the reality that makes its impression on a subject in experience. Although reality is independent of our thinking, it is not to be pictured as outside an outer boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere. That things are thus and so is the conceptual content of an experience, but if the subject is not misled, that very same thing, that things are thus and so, is also a perceptible fact, an aspect of the perceptible world.

(McDowell 1994: 26)

The stalemate is averted, McDowell reasons, because subject and object are freed from their conventional either-or opposition. Rather than what belongs to subjectivity and what belongs to objectivity being pictured as mutually exclusive realms, the two terms – in the above quotation, the concepts extended by the subject on the one hand, and the world on the other – are arranged so that they belong to the same ontological space, without subject and world collapsing into one another.

McDowell reaches this position by examining what belongs to the subject in Kant’s transcendental deduction. Kant writes: ‘There can be in us no modes of knowledge, no connection or unity of one mode of knowledge with another, without that unity of consciousness which precedes all data of intuitions’ (1929: A107; 136). To forestall critics who view this as evidence of the anti-realist, ‘mind imposing on world’ Kant, McDowell points out that the unity of consciousness is not to be read as a Cartesian ego standing before the world. When Kant speaks of an ‘I think’ that must be able ‘to accompany all my representations’, McDowell asserts, he is not referring to ‘the
substantial identity of a subject who persists as a real presence in the world she perceives’ (1994: 99). Rather, it is merely the unity provided by temporal continuity – a sense of things being held together from the future, through the present and into the past – which stands as the minimum condition necessary for experience of a world to occur. In support of McDowell’s reading, I would argue that Kant in fact borrows the notion of ‘I think’ (unhelpfully in this context, it has to be admitted) as a way of articulating the unity he requires, since inner experience is the most familiar space in which we can conceive of such minimal unity taking place. The key point to grasp is that the unity does not belong to the human subject; it is not a structure imposed on experience by an already-defined mental agent. The process of constructing experience is too complex to be reduced to a one-way opposition with one term acting upon the other; the stalemate in the realism–anti-realism debate is arguably attributable to its limited epistemological apparatus. The act of casting a dividing line between mind and reality, normally carried out within epistemology by presenting ‘subject’ and ‘object’ as mutually exclusive domains, now has to be realized some other way: a means of creating or articulating a sense of subject–object transitivity within the ontological space which embraces them both. McDowell does it in terms of the concept of ‘second nature’: a concept of nature that ‘does not exclude the intelligibility that belongs to meaning’, which is to say that it is a ‘realm of law’ whose lawfulness belongs to the same ‘space of reasons’ or space of concepts in which human thought operates (1994: 72-74, 84-86).

A second debate in recent philosophy which exhibits a Nietzschean challenge to proprietorship is Dennett’s critique of qualia (2002). ‘Qualia’ refers to the way things seem to us or are experienced by us, for example, the blue of the book cover I am looking at as it occurs privately and subjectively to me is the quale of my visual experience at the moment. Qualia are generally held to be ineffable, private, immediately apprehensible in consciousness, and intrinsic to experience. Of particular interest to us is the notion that qualia are ‘intrinsic to experience’, that is to say, a particular quale is datum-like in possessing a particular determinacy or content of its own, as famously summed-up by Nagel’s claim that there is ‘something that it is like to be a bat’ (2002: 219). As Dennett observes, ‘propriety’ is a metaphor that is highly active in determining our thoughts about intrinsicality. People who disapprove of his attacks on
Intrinsicality, he writes, still insist that ‘I know how it is with me right now’, but this, he thinks, is essentially people wanting ‘to reaffirm their sense of proprietorship over their own conscious states’ (2002: 233). Further, the ‘seductive step’ taken by the same people upon learning that colour is not an intrinsic but a relational property – constituted by a relation between our faculties and the world – is ‘to cling to intrinsicality… and move it into the subject’s head’ (2002: 241; emphasis added).

Dennett argues against intrinsicality on grounds which are sympathetic to Nietzsche’s perspectivism, although the connection is not noted by him. Private, immediate experience, Dennett asserts, is a relational phenomenon: ‘properties that “seem intrinsic” at first’, he declares, ‘often turn out on more careful analysis to be relational’, for example, the quale which the taste of beer has for an experienced beer drinker lies not in the sip alone but also in the reactivity or acuity of their sense of taste cultivated over many years drinking beer; the quale which the taste of beer has for someone trying the drink for the first time will be different, as they have not cultivated an appropriate sense of taste. (2002: 237). The Nietzschean element here is that an event which is customarily regarded as being intrinsic to the subject’s experience is shown to be the product of interacting components. In Nietzschean terms, the experience of drinking beer, including what occurs to the drinker as a particular quale, could be conceptualized as being made up of the competing wills of the beer and the subject’s taste receptors. This sounds wrong, if not ludicrous, on two counts. First, it seems nonsensical to be referring to the will of the beer, and seems once again to lead us towards animism. But, as I argue above, the ascription of a will to inanimate matter is not to be taken as the literal assignment of mind to matter. Rather, it is to be taken as an ascription made within the context of an ontology which holds that truth emerges not from the unambiguous assignment of predicates to subjects but from the tension created when two or more perspectives are combined.

The second respect in which talk of the will of a drinker’s taste meeting the will of beer seems wrong is that wills have been described as competing perspectives, when – the animism issue already having been dealt with – it appears to make no sense to refer to the drinker’s taste and the beer having competing views of the world. Surely, in talking
of wills as perspectives, and competing perspectives at that, I am referring to cognitive viewpoints on the world, and viewpoints which compete in as much as they offer rival but nonetheless commensurate versions of the world? In what sense can the perspective of beer be considered a rival cognitive viewpoint on the world? The reason why such a bizarre question is being asked, I suggest, is largely because study of wilful perspectives in Nietzsche tends to concentrate upon perspectives as the cognitive viewpoints of disinterested observers, and this, in turn, is simply because such viewpoints are the conventional topics of epistemology. The exchange between Clark, Anderson and Richardson above is a case in point. But while discussion tends to focus on Nietzschean perspectives in a cognitive sense, we should not lose sight of the fact that, in his ontology, all elements within the universe exist as wilful perspectives and (perhaps more importantly) the capacity for cognition which we customarily take to be intrinsic to a cognitive perspective is now, on Richardson’s view (supported above), a function of the interplay between perspectives, as Nietzsche defines them. Thus, to take from my example the notion that beer has a perspective in the conventional epistemological sense is to fail to recognize that Nietzsche’s perspectives are essentially dynamic, relational components, and that conventional cognitive judgments—which Nietzsche is still interested in— is not the province of a single perspective, say, that of beer, but the product of two perspectives bearing upon one another.

CONCLUSION

In Nietzsche’s will to power, we find a combined perspectival epistemology and ontology. Such a combination is possible, and not paradoxical, it is argued, because perspectives necessarily open onto other perspectives. This meets Kaufmann’s objection that a perspective cannot judge on matters beyond itself because it is confined to its own horizon. The necessarily open or relational nature of perspectives also meets Danto’s concern that Nietzsche has to assert a world order in denying world order because it reconfigures how we understand the assertion of a world order, on two accounts. Firstly, the world order asserted by Nietzsche is not a single, dominant worldview, which would contradict his denial of order, but a series of competing world-
views. Secondly, Nietzsche’s assertion of a world order is not given as an all-embracing thesis about the nature of the world, as Danto interprets Nietzsche’s ontology, but given as a thesis which, in part, is responding to a rival thesis and which, in another part, will itself be responded to by another thesis, due to the necessarily relational nature of perspectives. Another way of making the point is to draw attention to the ‘all-embracing’ metaphor used above to characterize Nietzsche’s ontological thesis, for it is precisely the image of a perspective as a container completely circumscribing a situation which is being rejected in favour of one where the perspective is interlaced with or brought to bear upon another. This solution also allays the concerns of Kofman and Nehamas. Extracting an ontological thesis from Nietzsche, they warn us, commits him to the existence of a realm of things in themselves, which countermands the emphasis they place on perspectival interpretation in Nietzsche. However, my ontological reading of Nietzsche makes no such commitment, since it shows him presenting an (extraperspectival) ontology not through the antithetical positing of things in themselves but through redefining perspectives as necessarily interlaced components. One apparent problem with this though is that the ontology could be construed as a form of animism because it defines all things in the world as wilful perspectives. But this is not the case, since the ascription of will to matter occurs within the context of Nietzsche’s interplay of perspectives wherein each predication is always tensional, is always seen in relation to other, alternative predications, as opposed to being the direct, one-way assignment of mind to matter.

The accounts of McDowell and Dennett demonstrate contexts in which an ontology of intersecting perspectives can be applied. The way in which we conceptualize the subject–object division in epistemology needs reappraisal, McDowell avers, since reality, while independent of our thinking, ‘is not to be pictured as outside an outer boundary that encloses the [subjective] conceptual sphere’ (1996: 26). Instead, mind and world share the same ontological space, and a new means of articulating subject–object transitivity is required. McDowell does this in terms of his concept of second nature, but Nietzsche’s ontology, I assert, is also working in the same territory. Dennett provides a model which allows us to see how the intrinsic qualia of experience can be theorized as an interaction between terms. The intrinsicality of qualia, which would
have us regard them as the *content* of a subject’s experience, Dennett argues, is only apparent. The supposed ‘content’ is in fact a relational phenomenon, distributed along the ‘arc’ from the material presented to the senses, at one end, to the faculties which open onto and interpret the material, at the other end. In Nietzsche’s terms, the relation would be defined by intersecting wills.

Despite these illustrations, however, the sense might still remain that Nietzsche’s epistemology merely leaves us with a series of viewpoints in perpetual conflict without resolution, that is, without ever arriving at a state where we can say we know the world. This worry arises, I propose, because we are used to a state of knowledge being one where we assign properties to an object, for example, ‘I know this cup is red’ is understood to mean ‘I know the property of being red belongs to this cup’. This view of epistemology is arguably reinforced by the correspondence theory of truth, since the attribution of a predicate to a subject grammatically will be judged to count as knowledge if the corresponding property belongs to the designated object in the world. In Nietzsche’s ontology, the interaction of wills is not intended to leave us in a state in which nothing can be known. Rather, in a self-consistent fashion, it transforms our concept of knowledge; it brings a perspective to bear upon what we customarily regard as knowledge. On Nietzsche’s view, knowledge is a function of the interaction between perspectives. What does this mean? For Richardson, as we saw above, it signifies a state of putting oneself in the place of another which allows the difference between viewpoints to be fully felt and understood. But this seems to lead to the ‘viewpoints in perpetual conflict’ scenario anticipated above.

The key difference, noted by Richardson but not Clark or Anderson, is that ‘perspective’ or ‘viewpoint’ does not refer exclusively to the cognition of a human subject but rather refers to the will of every existing thing. Thus, the scenario of a series of conflicting viewpoints is not the conventional epistemological problem of deciding which view of the world is the correct one. Instead, the image is of *the world as a realm* of forces or wills acting upon one another. The question of correspondence or being right with the world does not arise because correspondence or *being of the world* is already built in. To ask what makes up these forces is, as Nietzsche sees it, simply to enact the
forceful process whereby one thing is referred to another. On this basis, to put oneself in the place of another, and thereby to allow the difference between perspectives to be understood (as Richardson recommends), is to act in a way which promotes interaction between wills, to recognize that if one understands \( S \ is \ P \) now, then in the next moment it could be that \( S \ is \ Q \), where the shift from \( P \) to \( Q \) is not a confusing, undermining state of affairs but a transition which asks us to consider the relation between the two predicates. Assessing the relation between the predicates will not be a purely linguistic exercise, in the sense of studying how terms are applied within a (pure) self-contained, subjective system, since the ontology does not accommodate strict subject–object or language–world divisions. Instead, it will be an examination of the interactions or tensions between the predicates and the others they may extend to, where these connections or articulations are the forceful flexing of the joints in the ontology.