

# Session 12. Pluralism IV: Perspectivism

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Last week we looked at Chang's more epistemic brand of pluralism.

This week we'll look at a family of views that tries to combine both pluralism and realism—*perspectivism*.

I want to:

- (1.) Get some versions of perspectivism on the table (including Giere's).
- (2.) Present some of the objections we've talked about in previous weeks, and also talk about the relation to ignorance.
- (3.) Throw open discussion for you folks to give your opinions!

## 1 Two desiderata

Throughout the course, we've seen two desiderata that seem to be in tension with one another:

**Realism.** (From Franklin Jacoby, often motivated by the **No Miracles Argument**)

- (1.) **Metaphysical.** There is a mind- and theory-independent world.
- (2.) **Epistemic.** We can have justified true beliefs about the mind-independent world.
- (3.) **Semantic.** Our scientific terms (and theories) track this mind-independent world through reference.

**Situatedness.** (see Michaela Massimi, often motivated by examining scientific practice) Our scientific theories and knowledge are **situated** both:

- (1.) **Diachronically.** We are always **historically situated** within a particular context with particular limitations.
- (2.) **Synchronically.** We are always **culturally limited** by the particular scientific tradition we were raised in, norms of the community etc.

**Note:** This is especially problematic since there are instances of:

- (1.) **Inconsistency.** There are different theories/models that are *inconsistent* with one another (e.g. different models for general relativity).
- (2.) **Incompatibility.** There are different theories/models that might not be *formally inconsistent*, but are *incompatible* in some sense (e.g. quantum mechanics and general relativity).

**Correspondence Realism** (a term I got from Hasok Chang) claims that the following are true:

- (1.) **Monist Realism.** There is a *single* way the world is.
- (2.) **Correspondence Theory of Truth.** A statement is *true* iff it corresponds to this way the world is.

This rejects **Situatedness** as showing anything deep.

**Social constructivism** (which holds that scientific truth is wholly *socially constructed*) rejects **Realism** as showing anything deep.

Can we get the best of both worlds?

## 2 Perspectivism

Rough idea of perspectivism:

**Scientific Perspectivism.** Science (and perhaps scientific knowledge and truth) *is* about a **mind independent reality**, but it provides *perspectives* rather than *truth*.

There is a clear analogy with **vision** here.

Giere substantiates this with an examination of colour perception.

Different varieties of creatures perceive different chromatic features of the world.

e.g. trichromates via diachromates.

Is one *correct*?

Both kinds of perception are giving chromatic information about the world.

It's not clear that one is even better (it might be that dichromatic features of the world are not salient to a tetrachromat).

Giere then wants to transfer this to science more generally (this summary taken from the Jacoby paper):

- (1.) Science is built upon observation
- (2.) Observations in contemporary science requires instruments
- (3.) Vision is only sensitive to a limited range of stimuli
- (4.) Any instrument is also only sensitive to a limited range of stimuli

- (5.) Different detection systems (either instruments or visual systems) offer different perspectives on the same object in virtue of their different sensitivities.
- (6.) Instruments and observation are perspectival in the same way vision is.

Giere then argues that this analogy extends to theories, and a theory provides a "vision-like" perspective on the world.

**Note:** Giere's view of a "theory" is a collection of models, rather than what we'd ordinarily call a theory in logic.

**Note:** There's a **huge** variety of perspectivalisms. Really we could have spent a whole term on it.

Stéphanie Ruphy builds on Giere's work and makes it substantially more theoretically developed.

Michaela Massimi provides a recent highly influential variety of perspectivalism on which a theory is providing *modal* knowledge of the way the world *might* be (it's thus more *epistemic* rather than directly representational).

### 3 Problems and questions

#### 3.1 Collapses

**Question.** Is this just realism?

Why not just say that *there is a way the world is* and our perspectives are partial realisations of this perspective.

**Question.** Is this just *constructive empiricism*?

What really matters is that we accommodate the data and make predictions.

If everything is perspectival, what is gained over constructive empiricism?

#### 3.2 Reflexivity objection

**Question.** Should the claim of perspectivalism itself be understood as perspectival? If it were, would that undermine their point?

**Question.** Can we delineate the "scientific" from the "non-scientific"? This is known to be a horrendously difficult problem.

#### 3.3 What is a perspective?

We've seen a couple examples of what a perspective might be.

**Question.** Are these good representations of the notion of a perspective?

**Question.** Are there richer considerations (e.g. psychological factors)? .

### 3.4 How to handle perspective formally?

**Question.** How should we handle the notion of a perspective **formally**?

**Question.** How should we handle "information transfer" under perspectivism? Especially given the problem of inconsistent models?

**Question.** Are there new things to look for suggested by perspectivism? e.g. overlapping consensus. Does this differ from realism?

### 3.5 Relationship to ignorance?

**Question.** How can ignorance be understood within the perspectival framework?

### 3.6 What about perspectivism in other areas?

**Question.** How might perspectivism inform "non-scientific" knowledge?

**Question.** Does perspectivism generalise to mathematics?

## 4 Bookkeeping

**Remember:** If you want comments on a draft of your essay, you need to get it to me by 14th April!

**Note:** I'm writing a paper on ignorance. If you'd like to see a copy (perhaps after you've turned in your final papers) then let me know and I'll add you to the list!