

Reginster, “Perspectivism, Criticism and Freedom of Spirit”
PHIL 449, Spring 2014

Focus of this article: How can a perspectivist like N be justified in criticizing views emanating from other perspectives, not his own?

-- “in the absence of ‘objective’ (non-perspectival) standards of justification, how could Nietzsche claim legitimacy for his criticisms of other perspectives?” (41)

R’s answer: N engages in a particular form of immanent critique, not to say that views from other perspectives are wrong, but that some others are wrong to hold them because these beliefs are inconsistent with other beliefs and values held within a particular perspective.

N’s perspectivism, according to Reginster

1. a view about justification of beliefs, values, actions: “there is no coherent notion of justification other than ratification in the terms provided by one’s perspective” (40)

-- when we provide reasons for what we think and do, these are always grounded in particular perspectives

a. Reginster’s book called *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Harvard UP, 2006):

-- perspectives “provide the terms in which we think and reason”; “They supply the concepts in which we form judgments, as well as the standards in which we reason about them” (84)

-- perspectives provide “the conditions of rational thought” (84), and these can be different between times, places, individuals

b. this means that we can’t adjudicate between conflicting perspectives in any “objective” sense

-- N denies “that we have access to foundational, ‘objective’ beliefs or principles in terms of which all disagreements could possibly be adjudicated” (40)

2. Why does one hold one perspective rather than another? Reginster suggests it is because of our affects, interests, needs, drives

-- N says our judgments have their origin in these (Reginster 43), such that, e.g., “the reasons we adduce in support of our beliefs about values are, ultimately, rooted in our ‘needs,’ ‘affects,’ ‘desires’ and so forth” (44)

-- thus, perspectivism about value judgments means: “an agent has a reason to accept the judgment that it is good or right for him/her to do a certain action only if there is some need, affect or desire the agent possesses which is served or somehow furthered by the agent’s doing this action” (44).

Reginster on how N uses internal criticism

1. internal criticism: criticizing the views of someone who holds a different perspective, from within the terms of that perspective itself (42)

2. N does not use internal criticism to show that views from other perspectives are *wrong*

-- the only way for him to show that a belief or value is justified is to justify it in terms of his own perspective, not in terms of some other perspective (or else it would not be a matter of saying it is justified for *him*) (48-49)

-- “For a critic to show that a view is wrong is to show that *she* has no reasons to accept it, or has reasons to reject it” (49).

3. Rather, N uses internal criticism to argue that some people should not hold particular views, given their own perspectives

a. to show than an interlocutor “is wrong in *holding* a view is to show that *the interlocutor* has no reasons to accept the view, or has reasons to reject it” (49)

b. N shows that his interlocutors, those who hold Christian values, are wrong to have certain beliefs and values because these are not consistent with other beliefs and values they also hold (49-50)

-- e.g., N criticizes the Christian value of compassion, that relieving the suffering of others is always good, but noting that they also believe in the value of truth, and pursuing truth often requires suffering (47)

c. N trying to either make readers more self-reflectively critical in general, or get them to drop one belief he finds problematic given other beliefs they hold and are unlikely to give up (51).

4. internal criticism and freedom of spirit

a. why does N use internal criticism to change his readers’ minds in this way? Why appeal to reasons they themselves could find convincing?

-- especially when he could use other rhetorical tools to change people’s minds rather than appealing to [their] reasons

b. because of the ideal of “freedom of spirit” that he holds to himself

(i). what is freedom of spirit?

-- the free spirit is someone who demands reasons, who doesn’t believe things on faith (52), who doesn’t let their impulses determine their actions but insists on basing them on reasons (53)

-- see Nietzsche, *Antichrist* #54: <http://www.egs.edu/library/friedrich-nietzsche/articles/the-antichrist/the-antichrist/54/>

-- the free spirit engages in continual critical self-reflection, examining her beliefs and her reasons for them (54-55)

-- Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, aphorism 370: http://nietzsche.holtof.com/reader/friedrich-nietzsche/daybreak/aphorism-370-quote_d169a14e0.html

To what extent the thinker loves his enemy. Never keep back or bury in silence that which can be thought against your thoughts! Give it praise! It is among the foremost requirements of honesty of thought. Every day you must conduct your campaign also against yourself. A victory and a conquered fortress are no longer your concern, your concern is truth but your defeat is no longer your concern, either!

(ii). N is not trying to instill freedom of spirit in his audience, but rather appeal to it

-- internal criticism as appeal to reasons others already hold will not work if they don't already have a commitment to basing their beliefs on reasons (53)

-- rather, N uses internal criticism b/c it's the only way to "bring about the conversion of an agent to a new way of seeing without violating her freedom of spirit" (54)—it appeals to her need for reasons

(iii). But N certainly does use rhetorical techniques that seem to appeal to readers' affects—how does this square with the above claims?

-- Reginster: such rhetorical strategies are meant to "engage the critical *agency* of his readers" (55)—the demand for reasons, the need to continually be self-reflective about the reasons for one's beliefs

-- *How could rhetorical appeals to affects do this?* Reginster isn't clear on this, I think.