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An Implexic Genealogical Analysis of the Absurd

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Abstract: According to some, humanity's search to answer the question "What is the meaning of life?" fuels the creative fires that forge all of civilization's great religious, spiritual, and philosophical texts. But how seriously should we take the question? In the following paper, I provide an implexic genealogical analysis of the cognitive structures that make the very articulation of the question possible. After outlining my procedure, my paper begins by explaining the main components of a genealogical inquiry. Next, I examine Camus's and Nagel's respective analyses of philosophical absurdity, paying particular attention to their different evaluations of avatars of the absurd, such as the myth of Sisyphus. Finally, I demonstrate how we may complete Nagel's solution to the absurd (which counsels that whenever the seeming meaninglessness of life is raised in consciousness, we address it with an ironic smile) by providing an evolutionary pathway of how the cognitive scaffolding required to ask the question about life's meaning arose. I argue that by reframing philosophical absurdity, we see the phenomenon in a different light. In this very reframing, we may become free from the malaise often connected to avatars for the absurd.

Keywords: philosophical genealogy; the absurd; joint attention; the myth of Sisyphus; Tomasello; Nagel; Nietzsche; Camus

1. Introduction

> They cannot scare me with their empty spaces.
>
> Between stars—on stars where no human race is.
>
> I have it in me so much nearer home.
>
> To scare myself with my own desert places
>
> Robert Frost (Frost 1936, "*Desert Places*", p. 594)

According to some, humanity's search to answer the question what is the meaning of life fuels the creative fires that forge all of civilization's great religious, spiritual, and philosophical texts (Frankl and Kushner [1946] 1992). But how seriously should we take the question? In the following paper, I provide a genealogical analysis of the cognitive structures that make the very articulation of the question possible, along with the impetus that spurs some to spend their entire lives in a desperate and fruitless attempt to answer the question. By articulating the possible origin for the cognitive platforming that allows the very raising of the question about the meaning of life, I hope to extend and complete the solution Thomas Nagel put forward in his article, "The Absurd", and later in his book, The View from Nowhere, which counsels that whenever the seeming meaninglessness of life is raised in consciousness, we address it with an ironic smile.

In order to show how Nagel's initial diagnosis of the problem of the absurd is correct yet incomplete, I begin by looking at the question about meaning in life through the lens

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of philosophical genealogy. Several models of philosophical genealogy are available (e.g., the documentary, the pragmatic, the ironic, etc.), but all share something in common: they put pride of place in revealing how concepts, institutions, and feelings emerged. All genealogical investigations will have two components: a diagnostic and a curative. On the diagnostic side, a genealogy attempts to expose what Foucault terms the "lines of descent" for some phenomenon. Such lines denote the social, political, and even geophysical backdrops intersecting with other causal conditions to produce the new phenomenon under investigation.

The phenomenon, however, is not value-neutral—typically, it is deemed dangerous or unhealthy to human flourishing. This makes genealogy different from other historical investigations that present an objective, dispassionate tracing of the phenomenon under consideration (Butterfield 1963). In this vein, it might be preferable to think of the object of investigation as a pathogen. The genealogist's goal is to investigate the possible source of the pathogen's origin, development, and trajectory.

On the curative side, it is believed that once the lineages of a phenomenon are revealed, we see it in a different light. That is to say, reframing the object under investigation allows us to recognize that non-traditional and novel interpretations of the phenomenon are possible. The opening up of hitherto unexplored possibilities of understanding launches new paths of agential exploration and, therefore, emancipation. It is in seeing new interpretative possibilities for the subject matter of a genealogical investigation that the cure lies.

My essay, then, highlights two features: (first) philosophical genealogy as a diagnostic and curative historical method, and (second) how one may use genealogy to reconceptualize a philosophical concept that one might think is *sui generis* but, in fact, is a historical construction of different causal origins.

My essay is divided into four components: Section 2: My Procedure; Section 3: The Power and Scope of Philosophical Genealogy; Section 4: The Absurd; and Section 5: Philosophical Genealogy as Hygiene: Joint Attention and Aspectival Captivity.

2. My Procedure

My project utilizes a special historical method called philosophical genealogy. As its name implies, genealogy is a distinct method of practicing philosophy that entails tracing the historical origins of present-day philosophical concepts, ideas, practices, feelings, capacities, and discourses. This examination aims to take ideas long thought to be metaphysical, innate, immutable, and absolute and demonstrate that they are constructs of sorts: elaborate assemblages erected from previous practices, social and environmental conditions, and feelings.

There are many types of genealogy in the secondary literature (e.g., documentary, ironic, pragmatic, etc.).[1] For the purposes of this paper, I outline what I call implexic genealogy. Implexic genealogy argues that there are cognitive and affective components when tracing the origins of ideas, practices, and emotions. These two aspects were once distinct but have intersected, becoming entwined to produce something novel in history. Historical phenomena are not *sui generis* but, in fact, products of two or more distinct lines of descent that have become so entangled in the present that they become difficult to split apart. To demonstrate how the threads became knotted, Nietzsche counsels in *On The Genealogy of Morals* Essay II 13 (Nietzsche 2000) (hereafter GM) on how to go about separating them. The separation thesis maintains that one must keep the mechanics of some event separate from its interpretation. Every kind of new, emergent historical event, from concepts, to emotions to practices, even capacities, can be thought of as composed of two threads, and presumably, one can continue to separate each new thread into distinct lines *ad infinitum*.

The first thread is the line of descent, typically connected to a somatic practice (e.g., punishment). The second thread is the horizontal line and represents a reinterpretation of a somatic ritual from an older tradition. Nietzsche maintains that the "how" of an object or event (i.e., its causal etiology) is always older than its "why" (i.e., its perceived function or purpose) and provides many different illustrations of explicating his separation technique in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. The most cited is his analysis of punishment (GM II 13). A lesser well-known example, but one that brings the separation thesis as a method into sharp relief, is Nietzsche's account of internalization (i.e., how animal instincts become human drives), which is found in GM II 16. I look at both in Section 3: The Power. and Scope of Philosophical Genealogy.

2.1. The Absurd

With the method of implexic genealogy in hand, I apply a genealogical analysis to answer questions regarding the absurd. The starting point for any genealogical investigation is to begin with a *sui generis* conceptual analysis of the object of investigation in order to map what people typically mean or state when they talk about the phenomenon. We see this way of commencing in the paradigmatic works of philosophical genealogy, such as on the topics of the ascetic ideal (Nietzsche, GM III), guilt (GM II), and even punishment (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*). The next step is to demonstrate how the concept is in fact a construction of sorts from two or more lines of descent.

Considering this framework, I look at standard examples and metaphors that seem to evacuate meaning from life. These are avatars of the absurd. I look at two in particular: the myth of Sisyphus and Nagel's example of the ant crawling along a beach, which he takes as a proxy for his own life, at least from the third-person perspective. These examples are critical in that they highlight the notion of the absurd, which, although not identical with meaninglessness, indeed, if ruminated on, empties life of all significance. For Camus, the diagnosis of the absurd is metaphysical. The absurd is a confrontation between the desires and goals of human beings with the bare existence and meaninglessness of the universe. However, from an implexic genealogical standpoint, this is incorrect: although meaninglessness as a concept overlaps with the absurd, fundamentally, the absurd rests on a cognitive capacity and an associated feeling. The genealogist must endeavor to reveal the historical and perhaps even anthropological conditions that gave rise to the new idea and feeling attached to the absurd.

Nagel correctly diagnoses the absurd by noting that it is a psychological phenomenon. To experience the absurd is to recognize that our feelings of absurdity do not come from the meaninglessness of the universe itself, a mistake made by Camus and other existentialists, but arise from a clash between two perspectives: the first-person point of view and the third person. The absurd surfaces when I transcend my first-person point of view and see myself objectively as just another object in the world. The problem is neatly captured in the following statement: I am TN (Thomas Nagel).[2] According to Nagel, this is not a statement of identity but a crisis of agency. On the one hand, I use "I" as an indexical to refer to my subjective experience (e.g., "I am writing a paper". "I am participating in a scholarly conference". etc.). Insofar as I restrict myself to the subjective viewpoint, questions about the meaningfulness of the activity are not raised. However, when I consider the same activity from a third-person point of view (e.g., I look at myself engaged in the activity from some disembodied, "view from nowhere" state), the meaningfulness of the activity may come into question. From this third-person perspective, I see myself as just another object in the world, referred to by others not as "I" but by my first and last name–the designations my friends and colleagues (and government bureaucrats) call me.

This meeting of the first-person and third-person points of view platforms and augments feelings of meaninglessness and absurdity, or so Nagel argues. We attempt to resolve this contest between the two views of the self by domesticating the third-person perspective to the first (Nagel 1986, p. 223). The attempt is, however, futile. The third-person point of view of ourselves, when taken to its most extreme manifestation of seeing our embodied selves through the eye of nebula "gives us more than we can take on. (Nagel 1986, p. 231)". There is no real solution for our problem, or so Nagel evinces. The absurd will pass, Nagel assures us, and perhaps the best we can do is to smile, note the irony of the situation, and refrain from dwelling on it.

2.2. Philosophical Genealogy as Hygiene: Joint Attention and Aspectival Captivity

Genealogy is also curative, however. The antidote for the absurd is not inoculation or even an antidote but is best construed as hygiene. In this regard, I cleave to the original ancient Greek understanding of the word. Hygiene comes from Hygeia, the Greek Goddess of health and daughter of Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine. It is often translated as health, strength, and living well (*Eu zen*). Thus, in this medical sense, the so-called cure for the absurd is similar in some ways to the philosophical and physical measures recommended by Empedocles, Epicurus, and Socrates in pursuing the good life.

I argue that rumination all by itself on such imageries as the myth of Sisyphus intensifies meaninglessness in one's life. Therefore, my focus is on the absurd, not meaninglessness per se. Thus, the absurd is not so much a concept even though it is often defined as an incongruous situation (See Camus 1955; Nagel 1986; Taylor 1970, 1987; Metz 2013) but is rather more like a causal mechanism—merely reflecting on existential absurdity as exemplified by Sisyphus is enough to feel despair and cause one to question the very core of one's identity.[3] Its harmful effects are felt across all dimensions of human living. In keeping with the Separation thesis, there are two components to the absurd: a "feeling seizure", (in the words of Dewey), and this capacity for third-person viewing (Dewey 1894). Genealogy argues that we must untangle these threads and discover how they merged. A fulsome answer to this question cannot be given here, so I endeavor to discuss the origin of one of these threads: the ability to see oneself from a third-person perspective.

With this goal of philosophical hygiene in mind, I return to Nagel's treatment. While salubrious, Nagel's therapy is ineffective because he fails to identify the vector of the absurd's transmission. For consider that if, as Nagel maintains, a mouse's life is not intrinsically meaningful nor meaningless because it lacks the ability of self-transcendence, then it is incumbent to discover how we, as *homo sapiens*, came to be blessed or cursed with this capacity. I argue that we can only work with Nagel's hygienic therapy by tracing the possible starting point of this causal yet contingent pathway of transcending our first-person point of view. For this purpose, I invoke noted primatologist Michael Tomasello's notions of early hominid joint intentionality on the hand and full human joint attentionality on the other. In demonstrating one possible cause for the cognitive, biological, and neural platforming for the Nebula eye viewpoint, I show how we have simply exapted an ancestral and very successful survival feature of our hominid past and placed it in a maladaptive setting. By understanding the pathogenesis of the absurd, we can laugh and smile with Nagel because we get the joke of existence.

3. The Scope and Power of Philosophical Genealogy

There are several models of genealogical theorizing; I cannot detail all of them here. In this paper, I employ the model of implexic genealogy. Briefly stated here, implexic genealogy claims that the overall project of philosophical genealogy—which is to trace the threads that allowed a new concept, practice, value or feeling to emerge—is best conducted

by thinking about the threads that comprise this tracing as an intersection of vertical lines on the one hand and horizontal lines on the other, just as we would in ancestral genealogy. The vertical lines are those of descent—causal conditions that pre-existed the formation of the object under investigation and are analogous to the lines that move from the earliest known ancestor of a family tree to the most recent. For example, in tracing my family genealogy, I am connected to my grandfather because he is my direct ancestor (e.g., my mother's father). There are biological conditions, including genetic, epigenetic, and social factors, that ensure that I would not exist had my grandfather been killed in World War 1 or had never been born. Without my grandfather, I could never be.

Vertical lines of descent are analogous to causal pathways responsible for producing the object of a genealogical investigation. Novelty is introduced into history when two or more of these vertical pathways intersect, forming a new branch, just as entirely new individuals with their own DNA coding are introduced to the world when two individuals from different family trees marry and have children. Genealogy is the study of this novelty. The purpose of genealogy, in the words of Foucault, "... is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are but the exteriority of accidents. This is undoubtedly why if every origin of morality from the moment it stops being pious–and *herkunft* can never be–has value as a critique" (Foucault 1977, "*Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*", p. 146).

The second component of implexic genealogy pertains to the horizontal lines of the family tree. When tracing one's ancestry, horizontal links represent the union (marriage) of individuals from two different families. When the two vertical lines combine, they form a new node of the family tree, which then produces a new vertical line.

Consider when one informs someone else about their family pedigree. The characteristics of each person forming the new union (and perhaps new lines of descent, i.e., children) are discussed (e.g., profession, temperament, cause of death), how the two met, and what their marriage was like. The story concocted to discuss the significance of the union is perspectival; facts about the union of the two lines and the new descendants are salient in connection to the one asking the questions about the new node of the family tree. Analogously, the horizontal lines of a genealogy explain the ramifications of the intersection of two or more lines of descent. The explanation is underdetermined in that other narratives might provide a different explanation as to why the intersection of these causal conditions is significant. The purpose of offering an alternative narrative to the traditional one to explain the object of a genealogical investigation is curative: by offering a new lens through which to view a phenomenon, we see it in a different light. In David Owens's words, we are no longer captured by just one perspective—myriad perspectives are available. In the last section, I will return to the emancipatory power of genealogy by examining Owen's notion of aspectival captivity.

The model of genealogy that I articulate here is implexic because implex may be defined as "enfolding". I use the term in its zoological context as "the point where muscles are attached to the integument of an arthropod".[4] A genealogy is the juncture where the strands of descent meet with, but are not reducible to, the narrative that one provides to explain the emergence from the intersection of vertical lines. For the genealogist, a capacity, an idea, but more often than not, a feeling, is continuously reinterpreted towards new ends—and while we think that such an interpretation is necessarily connected to the original functional purposes that gave rise to the feeling or practice, it is not; it signifies that some other force or power has adapted and repurposed practices underpinning the object of inquiry. In exposing the lines of a lineage that gave rise to some phenomenon, we recognize that it is not *sui generis* but is an emergent: contingent and arbitrary like anything else in history. As Foucault puts it,

> "As it is wrong to search for descent in an uninterrupted continuity, we should avoid thinking of emergence as the final term of a historical development; the eye was not always intended for contemplation, and punishment has had other purposes than setting an example. These developments may appear as a culmination, but they are merely the current episodes in a series of subjugations: the eye initially responded to hunting and warfare; and punishment has been subjected throughout its history, to a variety of needs–revenge, excluding an aggressor, compensating a victim, creating fear". (Foucault 1977, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, p. 148).

Above is Foucault's gloss on the famous separation thesis passages of GM II 12, 13 in Nietzsche's *Genealogy.* Concrete examples of the separation thesis are required, however, to understand, truly, Foucault's commentary.

Illustrating Impexic Genealogy: Two Examples

To illustrate these two lines (the lines of descent on the one hand and the horizontal line on the other, i.e., the narrative informing why the intersection of these two lines is significant), I turn to a much-discussed chapter in the genealogical literature: sections 12 and 13 of the second essay of Nietzsche's *Genealogy*. In GM II 13, Nietzsche explains how the meaning we give to some practice must be kept distinct from the practice itself. Sections 12 and 13 of GM II are the focal point of this project, for contained within these passages is the separation thesis, a methodological rule that Nietzsche applies over and over again throughout the *Genealogy*.

The sections on punishment in the *Genealogy of Morals* are not significant in terms of their substantive content, i.e., what they say about punishment. They are noteworthy for the methodology they teach. The sections serve as a training manual of sorts for burgeoning genealogists. Nietzsche will show how one can separate the threads that comprise a (seemingly) singular, homogenous phenomenon into heterogeneous parts.

In GM II 12 and 13, Nietzsche famously divides our understanding of punishment into a stable and fluid element. As Nietzsche explains, "Second in accordance with the previously developed major point of historical method, it is assumed without further ado that the procedure itself will be something older, earlier than its employment in punishment, that the latter is projected and interpreted *into* the procedure which has long existed but been employed in another sense. . ." (Nietzsche 2000, GM II 13). It is critical to keep these two components distinct in this specific case when performing a genealogical inquiry. Nietzsche once again emphasizes "One must distinguish two aspects: on the one hand, that in which is relatively enduring, the custom, the act, the "drama", a certain strict sequence of procedures; on the other that in it which is fluid, the meaning the purpose the expectation associated with the performance of procedures". (Nietzsche 2000, GM II 13). . . The lesson to be learned, as Nietzsche evinces, is that the separation between bodily practices and their interpretation is *toto coelo* or worlds apart.[5]

To illustrate the method, Nietzsche asks his readers to think about punishment. Nietzsche posits that the first aspect of punishment, namely its somatic component, is the enduring part. It is the stable element, the practice stripped of any functionality, symbolism, or utility. It is the mere action of causing pain to a body. It is a difficult concept to grasp, and Nietzsche provides several descriptors to capture what he means to convey: "It is the custom, the act, the 'drama'; a certain strict sequence of procedures. . ." Why does Nietzsche take such pains to explain what this first aspect is?

What Nietzsche is communicating here that we cannot get at what this aspect is *simplicter*. We may strip down the meaning of punishment, for example, to examine how a regime of force or *dispositif*, to use Foucault's parlance, disciplines the body, and, in modern

society the "soul" but even here, we cannot be sure what is being targeted nor how the discipline, torture, or punishment, depending on how one looks at it, works. Punishment may cause the body of an individual direct pain, or the suffering may take an indirect form, such as when a prisoner is sentenced to solitary confinement, but what is important to remember is that we cannot completely say with any confidence what the function of the punishment is; "Today it is impossible to say for certain why people are really punished: all concepts in which an entire process is semiotically concentrated elude definition; only that which has no history is definable. . ."; "The form is fluid, the meaning even more so". (Nietzsche 2000, GM II 13).

The other aspect of implexic genealogy is the fluid element; it is projected onto the older causal component(s). It changes, Nietzsche suggests, depending on how one views the first aspect (e.g., the procedures of torture that platform what the "punishment" means). Let me explain. Again, Nietzsche provides many descriptions to capture how we may untangle the threads of a seemingly singular phenomenon (e.g., punishment) such that a genealogy of these individual threads reveals how these strands came together and how they can come apart. Nietzsche looks at the Roman practice of cutting shares taken from the Twelve Tables to prove his case. A historian from Nietzche's era looking at the ancient Roman punishment of "cutting shares" might conclude that the punishment is meant to deter debtors who take on loans with no intention or means of repaying will have a pound of flesh removed to cover the debt.[6] That is one possible meaning for the Roman practice. However, Nietzsche says there is another interpretation: the cutting of shares was a symbolic return to an earlier social condition: the restoration of "the masters" a codified right to cruelty. Indeed, in GM II 13, Nietzsche provides no less than nine different interpretations of "punishment."[7]

Analogously, implexic genealogy explains how two or more lines of descent, once distinct from a previous epoch, fused to form a new phenomenon. While each vertical line is grounded on ample historical, anthropological, biological, etc., evidence, as the case may be, to confirm its existence, the narrative (horizontal connections) one constructs to explain the emergence of the new phenomenon from these lines is perspectival being predicated, as all investigations are, on some predetermined slant or agenda (Nietzsche 2000, GM III 12). In this manner, implexic genealogy affirms the reductive-like features of the standard approach to genealogy in the secondary literature (i.e., the documentary model), and yet it is not, in the words, of Bernard Williams, advocating a "brute naturalism" that is naively reductive (Williams 2002, p. 30).[8] For infused into the very methodological features of the model is an acknowledgment that a thing's function can never be fully explained.

I mentioned the example of punishment in GM II 12 above, but there are several exemplifications of the method in the *Genealogy*. It is critical to view these here as this example will bring Nietzsche's methodological rule into sharper relief. One of the most obvious illustrations of the separation thesis, yet rarely discussed in the secondary literature, is the explanation for the emergence of the "soul". In GM II 16, Nietzche explains how animal instincts became drives to carve out something new in the world, namely, subjectivity, which Nietzsche describes as cyst-like ("*dunn wie Zwischen zwei Haute*"). The latent animal energies of our early ancestors needed to be drained per biologically designated channels or instincts (e.g., there is a hunting instinct, a sex instinct, a hunger instinct, and so on). If the demands of these instincts cannot be offloaded outwardly, they turn inward by becoming drives and sculpting out ever-new recesses of the "soul". As Nietzsche explains,

> "All instincts that do not discharge (*Entladen*) themselves outwardly (*Aussen*) turn inward—this is what I call the internalization (*Verinnerlichung*) of man; thus, it was that man first developed what was later called his 'soul' (*Seele*). The entire inner world, originally as thin as if it were stretched between two membranes,

> expanded and extended itself, acquired depth, (*Tiefe*) breadth, (*Breite*), and height (*Höhe*), in the same measure as outward discharge, was inhibited". (Nietzsche 2000, GM II 16)

The new phenomenon of the soul was created by fusing two previously distinct vertical lineages. This explanation and significance of the new phenomenon in history, namely subjectivity, represents Nietzsche's functional narrative or what I have called the horizontal line of our genealogical tree. The narrative is perspectival in that other explanations that look at different functions may also explain the phenomenon. The phenomenon emerges because two previously distinct vertical lineages intersected. On the one side, we have, in Nietzsche's words, "semi-animals", early human beings who acted following their animal instincts. This lineage of our genealogy is underpinned by pre-existing biological structures platforming cognitive and emotional capacities. The other genealogical vertical line came from those warrior-artists who constructed the first political states by capturing and enslaving peoples from more peace-like communities (Morrisson 2021). Slavery, according to Nietzsche, created the first social hierarchies in the new states and was supported through the introduction of new social, somatic, and geo-physical technologies: socially through the creation of codified rules of conduct (i.e., laws), somatically through severe punishments or tortures related to the transgression of said laws (GM II 5), and geo-physically through the erection of walls that enclosed these new states (GM II 16–17). On this note, walls served two purposes: to protect the inhabitants of the first political states from rival nomadic peoples and two to serve as enclosures ensuring that the principal labor force, namely slaves for the elite, could not escape from their newly created pens.[9]

Nietzsche's explanation of the emergence of subjectivity, which he defines functionally as the capacity and need to deliberate, reason, infer, and reckon, runs something as follows: individuals caught up in the straightjacket of civilization functionally defined as a society with walls preventing flight and laws and punishments found their animal instincts transformed into drives (GM II 16–17). These drives could no longer be expressed outwardly according to natural channels, as doing so would entail suffering various gruesome punishments (as noted above). They were deemed false as following them would get one killed or punished (GM II 16–17). The recognition of one's primal instincts being false, albeit primitively construed, produced a bad conscience: one had the urge to follow the natural channel of the drive to reaching catharsis; however, in doing so, one might transgress the few "thou shalt nots" of civilization, resulting in painful torture or even death. The psychic dissonance leads to a schism within what Nietzsche calls the semi-animal, man, causing these animal energies to turn inward, carving out ever deeper recesses of subjectivity. As Nietzsche writes in this regard,

> "The situation that faced sea animals when they were compelled to become land animals or perish was the same as that which faced these semi-animals, well adapted to the wilderness, war, to prowling, to adventure; suddenly all their instincts were disvalued and 'suspended.' From now on, they had to walk on their feet and bear themselves, whereas hitherto they had been borne of water: a dreadful heaviness lay upon them". (Nietzsche 2000, GM II 16)

The substance of Nietzsche's account is not important here. What is significant is the method. To observe, one could, if so inclined, continue to trace the origin of these threads. For example, if human drives are transformed animal instincts, then one could think of an instinct as a historical emergent comprised of two threads: a physiological underpinning and a narrational quality. Regarding the biological structuring of instinct, neurologist Jacob Panksepp identified several causal pathways that platform goal-directed animal behavior.[10] Turning to the narrational or fluid side, an animal instinct to build houses

(bird nests) and protect territory (e.g., wolves) is meant to serve as functional narratives that we employ to understand the behavior following what we find meaningful. Though such species-specific behavior is based on genetic and cognitive architecture, we seem only interested in assessing these behaviors because we find them salient according to our interests. Only in assigning purpose to these behaviors do we find them meaningful in the same way that punishment is more than just a sequence of painful procedures performed on a body. The meaning that we give to a phenomenon spurs us to examine the causal factors that gave rise to it.

It is believed that by tracing the lineages of some significant phenomenon, we come to see it in a different light. We provide the phenomenon with new meaning. Reframing the item under investigation forces us to rethink our relationship with it, opening up new possibilities for self-transformation. I will explore this curative dimension of philosophical genealogy in the last section.

4. The Absurd

I now examine Nagel's article "The Absurd" to demonstrate how a genealogical analysis helps to reinforce his initial diagnosis and cure for the feeling of cosmic insignificance and meaningless that we sometimes experience. First, it is critical to consider that Nagel's account reflects and corrects Camus's earlier analysis of absurdity, as presented in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. One of the goals outlined by the Algerian author in his retelling of the myth is to use it as an allegory about life. The image of Sisyphus, a wanton, plotting king who tortured and killed mortals but who tellingly also tricked the gods on countless occasions, finally receives a punishment from which there is no escape. The punishment is ingeniously simple, physically exhausting, not particularly painful, and yet maximally distressing: Sisyphus must push a single boulder up a hill for eternity. The irony in the punishment is that before reaching the top of the hill, the boulder rolls back to its starting position, where Sisyphus must start the process again.

Both Nagel and Camus agree that the image captures the meaninglessness of life, and hence, its absurdity for the task is without inherent significance—Sisyphus is not utilizing the boulder to damn a raging river, build a temple, or crush his enemies. The mere pushing of the boulder is its own significance, and we find this absurd. This image causes onlookers to think of Sisyphus as a tragic surrogate of humanity's suffering; in thinking about Sisyphus, we see the desperate plight of all human beings who struggle to find significance in a meaningless universe.

Here, the similarities between the two interpretations regarding the significance of the myth end. Each author gives a different account of the causes behind this unsettling confrontation: the meaning we ascribe to our actions and our lives as a whole, and how these actions appear utterly insignificant when contrasted with the universe's seemingly spatial and chronological infinitude. Camus's diagnosis, as we will investigate shortly, is such that the universe is genuinely meaningless; it is aimless, silent, and without intrinsic purpose. In contrast, we are the sort of creatures who cannot help but give meaning to, and take meaning from, our actions, desires, thoughts, and dreams. The absurd, according to Camus, captured by the myth, arises due to this clash of two realities. For Nagel, meaninglessness stems from a clash of perspectives within us. We are the only sort of creatures capable of self-transcendence, the capacity to view ourselves from a third-person perspective (i.e., as an object within the world or the universe). This explanation is the difference between the two philosophers in a nutshell.

However, we must develop this initial analysis before providing a genealogical diagnosis of the absurd. Before articulating the absurd *per se*, both Nagel and Camus explain the absurdity of everyday life. Their examples help clarify and deepen our understanding

of philosophical absurdity, to be sure, but these analyses leave out something critical. The critical element I am speaking of, which is salient for a genealogical investigation, will be placed in sharper relief by starting with a dictionary definition of the absurd.

Several dictionaries define absurdity as "wildly unreasonable" or "illogical". Going perhaps one step further, Merriam-Webster defines absurdity as "ridiculously illogical". It is vital to note two components of these definitions: a cognitive element and an emotional one. The absurd is not something incoherent *simpliciter*; 347 + 682 = 929, for example, is incorrect, and one might say it is illogical but not wildly or ridiculously so. We might tell the person who utters the wrong answer to this addition equation to "check again and make sure to carry the one!" That is not the case when thinking about the myth of Sisyphus; one cannot help but feel his despair and despondency. We live these feelings vicariously when we put ourselves in the situation of the punished mortal, symbolically thinking of our own boulders, which we push daily, year after year. As I will argue, one must keep these two components, seeing oneself push a boulder and the feeling that such rumination generates, separate, per the separation thesis explained above. More perspicuously put, the cognitive architecture that allows us to view ourselves from a third-person perspective and the feeling of meaninglessness often generated from the mere thinking of ourselves in the third person must be kept distinct.

In looking at the examples Camus and Nagel draw from mundane absurd events as the scaffolding for philosophical absurdity, it is worth noting that the latter is simply an intensification of the former, or so the two philosophers hold. That it not the case. Philosophical absurdity is not a conceptual ratcheting up of incongruity between one's expectation of how reality should be and how that reality is in itself. Philosophical absurdity is not an unfolding but an intersection of what were once two distinct causal pathways, or so I will now show.

4.1. Everyday Absurdity

Mundane absurdity is similar to existential absurdity, so Camus and Nagel argue that it is essential to clarify the former before discussing the latter. Although Camus and Nagel provide similar examples of quotidian absurdity, what is essential to notice is the different lessons that they draw from these cases as they scale them up in speaking about the absurd *per se*. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus gives the following examples of an absurd event: "If I accuse an innocent man of a monstrous crime, if I tell a virtuous man that he has coveted his own sister, he will reply that this is absurd. The virtuous man illustrates by that reply the definitive antinomy existing between the deed I am attributing to him and his life long principles. It's absurd means It's impossible but also its contradictory". (Camus 1955, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 29).

What is essential to notice in these two cases is an inconsistency regarding the established facts at hand. As the accuser of the innocent man, Camus brings together two statements that cannot be true: an innocent man, by definition, cannot be guilty of a monstrous crime. The same may also be said of a virtuous man coveting his own sister; these two sentences cannot both be true. However, there is something else to notice: there is a yawning chasm between these two statements in the above examples such that a bridge linking the two (i.e., an interpretation that would render both statements mutually consistent) seems not only impossible but ridiculously so. Nevertheless, if the chasm metaphor is accurate, the symbolic "gap" between the two statements being compared could be bridged if we change either one or both statements. For example, if one accuses the "virtuous man" of coveting his neighbor's beautiful wife instead of his sister, one's feeling of absurdity greatly diminishes. The accusation may be false, but it no longer appears "absurd". As Camus clarifies,

> "In all these cases, from the simplest to the most complex, the magnitude of the absurdity will be in direct ratio to the distance between the two terms being compared. I am thus justified in saying that the feeling of absurdity does not spring from the mere scrutiny of a fact or an impression, but that it bursts from the comparison between a bare fact and a certain reality, between an action and the world that transcends it. The absurd is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation". (Camus 1955, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 30)

This is a rich passage, and several vital ideas are contained within it. Firstly, what is essential here is this notion of factual confrontation—the absurd is born from a conflict between two oppositional realities that necessarily cannot be merged. The statements that can be generated to reflect each reality demonstrate an inconsistency when the same two statements are compared. Second, our sense of absurdity regarding the two statements increases proportionately to the realities being contrasted. The implications of this last point are manifold, but they become particularly salient when considering one's life and juxtaposing it to the vastness, density, and even beauty of the universe. Consider, for example, the attitude one feels when viewing the images of galaxies and nebula revealed by the James Webb telescope. Behind the beauty of the "cartwheel galaxy" or that of the "pillars of God" there lies the futile quest to make such realities comprehensible. Well before the advent of advanced telescopes such as the Hubble or Webb, humans understood such feelings when looking at the night sky. Camus insightfully notes that the absurd is just this very "denseness and strangeness". (Camus 1955, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 14).

Camus thinks the myth reveals fundamental facts about the nature of human life and the universe itself. As he diagnoses the problem, the absurd arises from the clash of two very different kinds of things. On the one hand, humans crave intelligibility, order, and comprehension. We have desires, wants, and, most importantly, goals that we need to fulfill *qua* our human nature. On the other side of the equation, we have the universe, which is bare, dense, dumb, and inert. It is the inhumanity of the universe that gives rise to the absurd. As Camus summarizes, "The absurd is born of the confrontation between human need and the unreasonable silence of the world". (Camus 1955, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 21). The universe is indifferent to our concerns, plans, hopes, and dreams. Instead of seeing the world as compliant, moldable, and workable, we see it as detached, alienating, and unforgiving. The myth of Sisyphus captures these two ideas in demonstrating that whatever is accomplished in our life will always be paved over by the unrelenting force of existence that we can never fully understand or appreciate it. Our most outstanding achievements then are like sandcastles built on the coastline, no matter what we may think, awaiting the tides of existence to destroy both them and the builder.

4.2. Nagel's Diagnosis per Essence

Nagel begins his investigation with a critical analysis of Camus. He argues that Camus's diagnosis is incorrect:

What we say to convey the absurd absurdity of our lives often has to do with space or time we are tiny specks in the infinite vastness of the universe our lives are mere instance even on the geological time scale let alone a cosmic one we will all be dead a minute but of course none of these evident facts can be what makes life absurd if it is absurd. For suppose we live forever would not a life that is absurd if it lasts 70 years be infinitely absurd if it lasted through eternity and if our lives are absurd given our present size why would they be any less the universe either because we were larger or because the universe was smaller reflection on our minuteness and brevity appears to be intimately connected with the sense

that life is meaningless but it is not clear what the connection is. (Nagel 2018, *The Absurd*, p. 138)

Angst does not need to be existential. Although death is often linked to life's meaninglessness, it need not be. As Nagel demonstrates, an eternal life of boulder pushing would perhaps be even more absurd than a finite one. "For supposed we lived forever; would not a life that is absurd if it lasts seventy years be infinitely absurd if it lasted through eternity?" If an eternal life so composed of projects of boulder pushing and hole digging is absurd then what are the markers of the absurd *per se*?

Before providing his unique diagnosis of the absurd, Nagel, like Camus before him, platforms his answer on mundane absurd events. He notes,

> "In ordinary life a situation is absurd when it includes a conspicuous discrepancy between pretension or aspiration and reality: someone gives a complicated speech in support of a motion that has already been passed; a notorious criminal is made president of a major philanthropic foundation; you declare your love over the telephone to a recorded announcement; as you are being knighted your pants fall down". (Nagel 2018, *The Absurd*, pp. 138–39).

Like Camus, Nagel stresses the discrepancy between two happenings tied to the same event. But there is something different here: it is not the discrepancy *per se* that marks the absurd as Camus holds but rather the discrepancy between the onlooker's expectation of what will happen and what, in fact, does happen. As Nagel says the absurd arises "...when it includes a discrepancy between pretension or aspiration and reality". Thus, the absurd emerges for Nagel when the viewer's expected valuation of some situation does not register with the event's objective value. If that is correct, and we will see this interpretation confirmed below, then only two of the examples Nagel provides are, in fact, on target: (1) you, as the lover, thinking you are confessing your feelings to your beloved only to find that you are speaking to a machine recording and (2) you being knighted, (likely the most significant moment of your life and one that also consecrates your achievements by infusing them retroactively with a profound dignity) only to experience the embarrassing situation of being robbed of that very dignity you thought the event would confer. These examples demonstrate that the absurd in ordinary life arises when one views oneself through two different perspectives: the meaning one gives to an action or event from a subjective or first-person point of view and how the significance of this event is not just leached out but indeed transformed into a farce when one views the same situation from its objective or third person perspective. This clash of perspectives, so evinces Nagel, gives rise to meaninglessness. As he explains,

> "Why is the life of the mouse not absurd the orbit of the moon is not absurd either but that involves no strivings or aims at all a mouse however has to work to stay alive yet he is not absurd because he lacks the capacities for self consciousness and self transcendence that would enable him to see that he is only a mouse if that did happen his life would become absurd since self-awareness would not make him cease to be a mouse and would not enable him to rise above his mousely strivings bringing his newfound self consciousness with him he would have to return to his bigger yet frantic life full of doubts that he was unable to answer but also full of purposes that he was unable to abandon." (Nagel 2018, *The Absurd*, p. 144).[11]

This capacity to take what I call "the step back" and continuously reframe our actions, thoughts, dreams, and even regrets in ever broader, ever more encompassing third-person frameworks is the cause behind the feeling that our lives are meaningless, or so Nagel thinks. To concretize this more, I can look at my professional accomplishments, such as they are, and

ask the following: what do they really mean? What do they amount to? Have my writings served to move the philosophical literature in any meaningful way? If I can answer yes to this question, I can always ask a follow-up, broadening the framework: will my philosophy be read 200 years from now, 5000 years from now? An affirmative answer is almost undoubtedly not in the offing; my writings will be forgotten, but let us just suppose the supposition was true—my writings are of tremendous inspiration and influence 5000 years from now. Indeed, entire schools and later sects of my philosophy/religion emerged with millions of adherents. As awe-inspiring (and delusional) as all this may sound, I can always broaden the framework and perform the step back: does such a result matter on a seven billion-year-old planet amongst quadrillions of others in the universe? And if that fails to make me feel insignificant, I can take a step back in another direction: does humanity, of which I am simply one of billions of representations, as a whole matter?

Indeed, when one looks at one's life through this framework, it is challenging not to see oneself as Nagel's ant struggling up a heap of sand carrying a speck of food for its Queen—an image he uses to convey the absurd. What is the cause of my newfound feelings of meaninglessness? According to Nagel, the answer is precisely in viewing oneself from the ledge of the "Nebula" as he puts it in 1971 and later, in 1986, from the standpoint of the "View from Nowhere". As Nagel writes,

> "Each of us lives his own life–lives with himself twenty-four hours a day. What else he is suppose to do–live someone else's life? Yet humans have the special capacity to step back and survey themselves, and the lives to which they are committed, with that detached amazement which comes from watching an ant struggle up a heap of sand. Without developing the illusion that they are able to escape from their highly specific and idiosyncratic position, they can view it sub species aeternitatis–and the view is at once sobering and comical". (Nagel 2018, *The Absurd*, p. 140).

It is from this objective, yet impossible non-human perspective, that thoughts of our own insignificance, meaninglessness, and absurdity are involved. In thinking about this cosmic view, Jeffery Gordon puts the matter well, noting that the cosmic perspective renders us blind to the daily tasks and goals that make life meaningful: "The cosmic perspective is the very worst one might adopt if we wish to comprehend the significance of facts in the human world, for that significance can present itself only in human terms, precisely the terms that are left behind in our ascendance to the cosmic perspective. The loftiness of the cosmic view of man is the flattering name for its blindness". (Gordon 1984, p. 21).

In both Nagel's original text and Gordon's subsequent commentary, there is something vital to note: there is a fusion of the cognitive and affective. We both understand and feel simultaneously. I view the ant knowing what and why the ant is doing what it is doing: it is seeking food for its Queen, it has chemical sensors which help it find said food, and it is one link in a chain of thousands of other ants just within its own colony that are on the same mission. Its behavior is not freely chosen but stochastically determined. Simultaneously, I identify with the ant's struggle to climb the symbolic sand dunes of my own life and find food (make money) along with my own struggles of existence. Whether Sisyphus or the lowly ant, each example captures a monotony, a pointless existence that does not need to be mediated to be understood. It is this capacity of the image to stir up such despondence that makes us take up the question: what is the meaning of life? This despondency, this painful emotional interoception sparks the question and therefore, a desperate appeal to various solutions to answer it. But make no mistake Nagel later counsels

> "There is no way to achieve a fully integrated attitude no matter how much you expand your objective or posthumous interests. The objectively unremarkable death of this creature will terminate both its stream of conscious experience and

> the particular objective conception of reality in which its death is included. . .The objective standpoint can't really be domesticated. Not only does it threaten to leave us behind, but it gives us more than we can take on in real life. When we acknowledge our containment in the world, it becomes clear that we are incapable of living in the full light of that acknowledgement. Our problem has in this sense no solution, but to recognize that is to come as near as we can to living in light of the truth". (Nagel 1986, *The View from Nowhere*, pp. 230–31).

Living in the light of truth is something that Nagel mentions but does not capture and work through. The hint behind a more compelling treatment, medically construed, of the absurd, is revealed in his mention of the mouse: a mouse does not consider its life absurd because it does not have the capacity for self-transcendence. But if animals writ large are incapable of self-transcendence, then perhaps if we understand how proto-forms of the capacity for third-person observation emerged in the hominid line of evolution, starting perhaps at *Homo heidelbergensis* and moving to homo *sapien*, we can flesh out the pathogenic pathway of the absurd.[12] While a permanent solution to the sort of despondency the absurd triggers is not forthcoming, we can improve Nagel's treatment by understanding the etiological channel that permits us to have the capacity of self-transcendence itself. More perspicuously put, if this pathway to absurdity has causal conditions that pre-existed the current meaning/value we give to the capacity of self-transcendence, then self-transcendence is so shot through with valuation that it becomes challenging to separate the mechanics of the capacity from its meaning. Utilizing the separation thesis would help us resolve such difficulties by demonstrating that the current function of self-transcendence is simply an exaptation that we give for that capacity of objective seeing. In short, we would realize that other functional and healthier interpretations of that ability may be given, and we can see absurd rumination in a different light. With this goal in mind, I now utilize the fundamental feature of implexic genealogy, namely the separation thesis, and apply it to the absurd.

5. Philosophical Genealogy as Hygiene: Joint Attention and Aspectival Captivity

5.1. Applying the Separation Thesis to the Myth of Sysiphus

Genealogy aims to take ideas, feelings, or capacities thought to be ahistorical, absolute, and metaphysical and to demonstrate that they are elaborate weavings of earlier practices and discourses. The genealogist exposes these threads of descent by applying the method of separation: distinguishing a civilization's older, somatic tradition from the interpretation the new society gives to that same inherited practice. In applying this method, we see such ideas not as necessary capacities, attitudes, or essences of human beings but as contingent, arbitrary, and historical. It is in this very seeing where new avenues or, in Foucault's terminology, lines of flight, of agential exploration lie (Foucault 1984). If that is right, one could argue that the absurd is a historical knot where two older threads intersect.

On the one hand, we have the capacity to see ourselves through the nebula eye, and on the other, there are feelings of despondency and insignificance seemingly attached to seeing ourselves in this way. If it can be demonstrated that such feelings are nothing more than a maladaptive interpretation of a facility that once had a beneficial survival function, then perhaps we can view ourselves from the third-person perspective in a different light. Since I cannot explore the possible origins of both threads in this paper, due to space constraints, I will examine how the capacity for objectivity evolved.[13] My analysis will examine the pathway from joint intentionality to joint attention, with the latter being an analog for objectivity. These two distinctions (joint intention and joint attention) compose a set of distinctions pioneered by the primatologist and psychologist Michael Tomasello.

In examining such distinctions, I hope to show how a capacity with a specific survival function was transformed to serve a maladaptive purpose. My argument will be in keeping with the primary method of genealogy: by demonstrating how an object, in this case, capacity, became expanded, and exapted toward new ends, we demolish the sanctity that capacity previously held in our own eyes. To wit, we demonstrate that its value and purpose are contingent and underdetermined, causing us to realize that new, more salutary interpretations are possible. This virtue of genealogy, which allows us to see an object in a new light, evokes new possibilities for freedom.

Noted primatologist Michael Tomasello provides us with a picture of how the notion of objectivity itself may have evolved. He explains how our collective social and biological development introduces new capacities seemingly specific to our species in several works, including *Becoming Human*. As Tomasello has demonstrated through extensive primate research, the capacity for perspectival cognitive representations is unique to humans. While great apes can respond collectively to an event or object (such as a threat to a Chimpanzee troop, for example), they are incapable of what Tomasello calls joint intentionality (Tomasello 2019, pp. 26–35). As Tomasello explains, joint intentionality is harnessed when a planning activity involves two or more agents. It likely evolved as a means for early hominids to coordinate their hunting roles. As Tomasello puts it, "Thus for example one individual might point for another a dead branch in a tree. With no common ground such a gesture would be meaningless. But if they were hunting together for antelope, and from previous experience together they had common ground in knowing that the recipient needed a spear but had broken his yesterday and that the simple pointing gesture might communicate something like, "There's a potential spear for you". It would communicate this, that is if the recipient could engage in a new evolutionarily new form of inference: A social recursive inference" (Tomasello 2019, p. 16). This ability to enter the mind space of other individuals and attempt to look at objects from their perspective, what we might term the second-person point of view in terms of their needs, platforms our capacity for objective viewing or third-person seeing, or so Tomasello argues.

The next step is to see ourselves from what we might call a bird's eye view. This capacity Tomasello calls joint attention. This capability is not just distinctively human but represents a framework that we cannot throw off, or so Tomasello suggests. He writes the following:

> "A chimpanzee sees a monkey escaping, and he knows that his conspecific sitting next to him sees the monkey escpaing also. The conspecific knows the same as his partner. They are both attending to the monkey escaping and each knows that the other is too. But they are not jointly attending to it; they are not attending to it together as "we". Two humans in that same situation could, if so motivated, attend to the monkey escaping in joint attention. This creates between the two of them a shared world, within which they each distinguish their two perspectives. They each also understand that both of their perspectives—that is their beliefs–on the situation could potentially contrast with an objective (perspecetiveless) reality. Welcome to human reality". (Tomasello 2019, *Becoming Human*, p. 82)

There are five features of the capacity that need to be stated. There is, firstly, an understanding that my perspective on some event is conditional to my embodied situatedness; secondly, that the perspective of my partner who is attending the same event may afford more, less, or a different kind of informational data than what I can perceive from my perspective; thirdly that this information is given in the same way as my own from the unique embodied situation of my partner; fourthly, that by an understanding of this other perspective could potentially gain more knowledge of the event in question; and fifthly and finally, that my partner knows all the above four points just like I do.

The capacity to represent a shared world may have had several intersecting causes. It is likely that all were needed to produce the genetic scaffolding that allowed us to grasp objective reality effortlessly as we do today. One of the co-founding factors was surely environmental in that early human communities came under intense pressure to find new ways of foraging as they grew in size and faced climate change. "Early humans adapted to these new ecological pressures by evolving skills and motivations of shared intentionality that enabled them to form with one another joint goals and commitments and to coordinate attention with one another more sensitively in their collaborations, including through the use of various forms of cooperative and conventional communication". (Tomasello 2022, p. 7). For example, if three or more individuals within a tribe are carrying out a collective planning intention, such that they are trying to scare game from the same bush, it would be advantageous to attempt to see the bush from a bird's eye view to ensure the animal does not have an angle of escape. By attempting to see a bush from each member's point of view, there is a survival advantage in seeing it from a perspectiveless ground so that one can position each tribal member accordingly around the bush. Such continual recursive checking of one's perspective with that of others means that joint attention arose within a context of obligate collaborative foraging. Such a harsh environment then, therefore, "...created pressure for the (genetic) selection of abilities to coordinate action for collaboration, and the downsides of collaboration (such as the risk of free-riding) are offset by the reward of surviving in such an environment" (O'Madagain and Tomasello 2021, p. 3). Good collaborators would have been highly prized—both in terms of tribal hunting and for couples foraging. Thus, sexual selection would be yet another pressure ensuring the proliferation of those humans with the genetic propensity to see third-person viewing.

Suppose that the above "just so" story is at least plausible. In that case, the very idea of objectivity, which, for Tomasello, is the capacity to see the same object from different perspectives, is not a capacity that marks a natural unfolding of simian cognitive capacities. They are due, instead, to a series of contingent causal pathways that intersected to create something new: an understanding that I, too, am an object for others in a shared social world. As Tomasello notes on this score, "It is only because of the unique social organization of our early ancestors which involved complex social-interactional processes–that provided survival advantage for those participants who were capable of engaging in multiple kinds of joint attentional behaviour to mental contents". (Tomasello 2019, *Becoming Human*, p. 89). In revealing the lines of descent for a concept, even objectivity, we place that very same idea in a different light. The curative and diagnostic components are inextricably linked as one could presumably, using the separation thesis, continue to excavate the necessary neural underpinnings that gave rise to the conceptual scaffolding for objectivity, like that of joint intentionality and so on.[14]

However, discovering the ultimate threads that comprise our concept of objectivity would be impossible and unnecessary because all investigations will always be limited to the explanatory target of interest. Moreover, as noted, a genealogy is not interested in recovering pristine lost origins but instead in drawing attention to the perspectival nature of the object under investigation. As Nietzsche puts it, there is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective "knowing;" and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity," be. (GM III 12). When turning to the next section, we will see how, by exposing the multifarious threads that comprise the object of inquiry, we thereby provide a more encompassing objectivity of that same thing and, in the same token, provide new avenues of agential exploration.

5.2. Aperspectival Captivity and the Separation Thesis

Nietzsche's genealogical method places pride on perspectival knowledge. I have argued that one of the core features of implexic genealogy is its perspectival feature: a genealogy attempts to provide a functional interpretation of a new social phenomenon from the intersection of two or more lines of descent, older somatic practices inherited by a new society. As such, the explanations of the function of this intersection will be open-ended, as they are subject to different perspectives *qua* being functional. A genealogy explains why the object emerged, given the social practices/technologies that pre-empted it, by providing how the new thing served a critical function that surfaced from prior discourses and non-discursive practices. Yet functional explanations are perspectival: the same object under one framework may function differently when viewed under another. For example, the function of the heart is to pump blood throughout the body. Yet hearts also have a thumping sound. The purpose of the thumping sound, under some other functional framework of the heart, might be to alert a doctor to an arrhythmia.[15] Thus, although there are different ways to understand how a particular new technology or practice operated in the society in which it emerged, this is how it should be, or so I argue, because functional accounts are dependent on the interests of the genealogical researchers engaged in explaining the item under investigation. Genealogists support a pluralistic position concerning functional explanations (Godfrey-Smith 1993).

However, the idea that knowledge can be perspectival seems minimally paradoxical and maximally contradictory on the surface. Suppose that knowledge is defined as justified true belief, and truth is construed as a proposition that either accurately reflects reality or does not. If that is correct, then when we say that a person has a perspective on some object or event, it is implied that their view through which to comprehend that same reality limits that person from understanding the complete truth of the matter at hand. Perspectivism, thus construed, simply means that we always come to an object with prejudices, interests, and values, and presumably, many different human interests, attitudes, or perspectives come to bear when attempting to understand an object. Indeed, this received view of Nietzschean perspectivism in the secondary literature (as Brian Leiter has called it) has spurred scholars working in the neo-pragmatist tradition to work through some of the explicit epistemological issues of Nietzsche's perspectival thesis in order to establish a new perspectivist epistemological position *per se*. (Leiter 1994).

My goal in this paper is less ambitious than the neo-pragmatic Nietzscheans.[16] I do not intend to articulate a new epistemological position but rather wish to flesh out how offering different perspectives to understand an object's emergence helps undermine that phenomenon's sanctity. In order to show this, it is crucial to utilize a distinction made by David Owen when thinking about historical and philosophical methods that promote agential emancipation. One of these methods is a Marxian ideology critique, while the other is aspectival captivity. I now look at both in turn.

The purpose of an ideology critique is to discover and criticize distorted forms of communication. In order for this type of emancipatory discourse to be successful, readers must recognize that they suffer from false consciousness/neurosis and that there is a way out from said suffering. Suffering from false consciousness may be defined as follows: (i) an individual has false beliefs that legitimize oppressive social institutions, and (ii) an individual is also blocked in some way from recognizing the false beliefs that they hold (through the media, the educational system, repressive sexual laws, etc.). (David Owen (2002) "Criticism and Captivity: On Genealogy and Critical Theory", p. 217). Essential to the ideological critique model is the assumption that one may cut through distorted forms of communication, whether of the class type as with Marx or the psychic a la Freud, provided that one has the correct conduit to the truth.

In contrast, genealogy discloses to its readers that they do not suffer from a false belief (though their belief system may well be chock-full of unwarranted assumptions) because that would presuppose that there is an accurate picture of the world to be had. Instead, genealogy demonstrates that a reader's belief set is limited; there are other beliefs to consider (Owen 2002, p. 217). Owen makes the distinction more concrete by thinking about a false belief set in Marxian terms. If holding a faulty belief system is akin to Marxian false consciousness (see above), then a limiting belief set is equivalent to what Owen calls restricted self-consciousness. Restricted self-consciousness occurs when a subject is captured by a vision of reality that is neither true nor false but is taken to be the only frame of reference in which questions regarding the truth and falsity of various issues may be legitimately asked. It is also essential to notice the word "self" in "self-consciousness" compared to the more straightforward notion of "false consciousness". For subjects to suffer from restricted self-consciousness, it is implied that these individuals, to some degree, are complicit in what Owen calls their very "aspectival captivity" (David Owen 2007, *Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morality*, p. 149). In other words, they have hitherto failed to examine their beliefs critically: being held captive by a picture is more of an active form of self-imposed constraint to self-government than merely suffering from false consciousness because it is a result of the subject accepting (and failing to interrogate) the ways of construing the world that are put to her (Owen 2002, p. 217). The purpose of genealogy, in general, Owen claims, is to free its readers from restricted self-consciousness. In summary, genealogies are necessarily polemical because they strategically go to war with some component of a reader's well-entrenched belief system. By demolishing a cornerstone of a fortified belief structure, a corridor is opened, allowing other ideas, attitudes, and even feelings to infiltrate.[17]

For Nietzsche, I submit that the line of GM II 12, which reads "the more eyes, different eyes, the more complete our objectivity will be", does not refer to the denotative side of the phenomenon under investigation as some scholars hold. We are not gaining more information about the object per se by seeing it under more descriptions. Instead, the passage refers to the inferential side; expanding our frameworks to understand the object under investigation helps us draw more implications about the object. Such implications are material, logical, and ethical. Moreover, these frameworks are not doxastic but refer to concrete genealogical investigations. More precisely, the more lines of descent that can be separated from the initial object of investigation, the greater the sense of comprehensiveness of the subject matter and the increased capacity we have for agential emancipation.

To summarize, Tomasello provides an account of the origin of joint intentionality, a primitive capacity that platformed joint attention, leading to objectivity *per se*. The emergence of this capacity was seemingly grounded on the practical need to survive in an unforgiving and harsh world. The capacity allowed our ancestors to provide for themselves and other tribe members. This emergent capacity, however, is platformed on a myriad of earlier cognitive and emotional neural circuitry that became exapted to augment this potential into what it is today. Both of these developments, the conceptual one of objective truth, along with the neural and cerebral modifications that provided the necessary scaffolding for it, were no doubt enhancements that significantly increased the survival chances of our ancestors. How or when this capacity for self-transcendence became tethered to a cosmic disembodied and, in some cases, a maladaptive search for ultimate meaning is the subject for another time.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, genealogical investigations comprise diagnostic and curative elements. There are many different types of genealogy in the literature. For this paper, I have

examined one of those types: implexic genealogy. Implexic genealogy argues that when tracing the threads that make up a historical phenomenon, one must keep the lines of descent (vertical lines) separate from the interpretations one provides of these same lines. Lines of descent are very often practices that orbit the body; when two or more of these lines intersect, they become knotted, creating something new in history.

Horizontal lines denote the functional interpretations one may give this intersection of one more vertical line. Qua functional, such interpretations are always underdetermined. However, in providing different interpretations of the object under a genealogical interpretation, we can see that same phenomenon differently than how it is traditionally understood. In doing so, we deny the object's sanctity and view it as a contingent assemblage of older discursive and non-discursive practices.

I applied this method to the feeling of the absurd. I revealed that the absurd comprises a cognitive element and an affective feeling. The absurd symbolizes an intersection between our capacity to see ourselves as just another object in the world and an intense feeling of despondency and despair. I have argued that by separating the capacity for third-person viewing from the feeling of the absurd, we could trace the historical development of this capacity for objectivity and thereby recognize that, at one point in time, it had a salubrious purpose, namely to assist in helping our ancestors survive in a harsh, unforgiving world. Once we see the genealogical history of such a capacity, we view the absurd differently as we recognize that the cosmic view of ourselves is simply an intensification and exaptation of joint attention.

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Notes

1 For an examination of these different models of genealogical inquiry, see (Lightbody 2019; Koopman 2019; Queloz 2020, 2021).

2 (Nagel 1986, p. 58). Also see Chapter 11, Birth, Death and the Meaning of Life in The View From Nowhere.

3 I will discuss Camus and Nagel extensively throughout this paper. For Richard Taylor's position on the meaning of life, see his (Taylor 1970, 1987). See (Metz 2013).

4 https://www.britannica.com/animal/arthropod/Form-and-function.URL accessed on 12 February 2023.

5 See Conway *Nietzsche On the Genealogy of Morals*, 74–75, and (Lightbody 2018, pp. 167–82, 169–70). Also see (Lightbody 2023a).

6 Nietzsche examines this specific Roman practice as drawn from the Twelve Tables Rome in GM II: 5.

7 The list can be found at the conclusion of GM II 13.

8 For a fuller treatment of William's pragmatic construal of genealogy, see (Lightbody 2021).

9 For a more fulsome account of this story, see Iain Morrison's Nietzsche among the Anthropologists. See also (Frye 2018).

10 Panksepp carved out seven primary-process emotional command systems in humans and mammals. These include (SEEKING/expectancy, RAGE/anger, FEAR/anxiety, LUST, CARE/Nuturing, PANIC/sadness, and PLAY/social/joy Panksepp (1998)).

11 "I would argue that absurdity is one of the most human things about us a manifestation of our most advanced and interesting characteristics like skepticism in epistemology it is possible only because and possess a certain kind of insight the capacity to transcend ourselves in thought like the capacity for epistemological skepticism it results from the ability to understand our human limitations". (Nagel 2018, *The Absurd*, pp. 145–46).

12 (Tomasello 2014). Homo *heidelbergensis* is believed to be the Last Common Ancestor (LCA) of Neanderthals and humans.

13 On the affective side, the profound sadness associated with seeing one's life as absurd may be understood as a negatively valenced response to the goals and dreams that we take to be significant (See Fridja 1986; Carver 2004). The cosmic view of the universe demonstrates that any goal is worthless; it evacuates all value from the most significant aspirations we take as most

truly our own. The negatively valenced affect associated with the contemporary feeling of the absurd, qua feeling seizure, or Deweyean quale, must have originated from more concrete iterations of sadness caused perhaps by mundane rumination, or so the separation thesis tells us. For some researchers, numerous studies demonstrate, for example, that people who respond to adverse life events and negative moods with rumination are prone to experience recurrent depressive episodes. See (Hilt and Pollak 2012). "Rumination, passively and repetitively dwelling on and questioning negative feelings in response to distress, is a risk factor for the development of psychopathology, especially depression. The ruminative process is difficult to stop once it has begun", p. 1157.

[14] A somatic component underpins this new capacity in keeping with the separation thesis. It would be beyond the scope to examine what 'improvements' may have been made to our hominid line stemming from the Last Common Ancestor (LCA) between ourselves and Chimpanzees, but it has been speculated there would have been adaptations to the mirror neuron system: "a neural network, first discovered in macaque monkeys that allows individuals to understand, imitate, and empathize with others' actions and intentions. It plays an essential role in social cognition". See (Baars and Gage 2010).

[15] This is an example used by Millikan, see Millikan (1989).

[16] For a partial list see (Rorty 1991; Coker 2002; Hales and Welshon 2000; Cox 1999).

[17] For more on this idea of aperspectival captivity, see (Lightbody 2010, pp. 40–43; Lightbody 2023b).

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