

3. Reality as a Narrative Fiction: Intertwining Perspectives

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Abstract: Based on a comparative analysis of various authors in the fields of philosophy and cognitive studies, this paper proposes a shift of perspective regarding the concept of reality, as well as its relation to what has long been considered its opposite, i.e., fictionality, narrative, imagination, creativity, poetry, lie, madness, magic, and irrationality. Nietzsche's perspectivism and Heidegger's *Da-Sein* are linked to 4E Cognition (Johnson, Varela, Rietveld), Derrida's *différance*, Foucault's analysis of sociopolitical exclusion, and other hermeneutical, anthropological, and ontological works (Sini, Geertz, Arnau). With different insights—and sometimes distant backgrounds—these authors share a similar assumption: reality is a narrative co-construction of our bodily lived experience in the world, in a dynamic interaction with others. The result is a shared speech of complexity, whose elements -both as generative conditions and effects- provide an opportunity to understand which social, political, and anthropological instances shape our identities and narratives.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Heidegger, 4E Cognition, perspective, narrative, reality, world, building

1. Premise

Traditionally, the concept of reality has been associated with those of objectivity, truth, rationality, science, value, and shaped in relation to what is usually considered its opposite, i.e. the realm of fictionality, narrative, imagination, creativity, poetry, lie, madness, magic, and irrationality. When analyzed more closely, the dichotomy is far from unproblematic, and appears biased by a hyper-rationalistic reductionism. Not only can it not be held as ontologically universal, but also, more deeply, it implies a certain hierarchical prejudice, which consequently brings to the exclusion of one side of the polarity from the official scientific and

philosophical discourse. Such an exclusion – which is, broadly speaking, political¹—affects the field negatively, leveling its complexity and nuances and denying important aspects of it. In the last two centuries, the deep implications of this removal have come into light, and the concept has been widely problematized by authors from various backgrounds in the fields of philosophy, literature, anthropology, and cognitive studies, thus bringing into question the relation between the two opposites, as well as their very existence and value.

In order to reintegrate the discourse and offer a more balanced picture, this paper draws a comparative (yet not complete) analysis of some of these major contemporary authors. My aim is not to force one interpretation over another, nor to dismiss the differences and peculiarities that each philosophical system presents, but rather to draw a possible line of continuity among them, in order to offer a tool for complexity and a shift in perspective regarding some major assumptions and categories of the philosophical discourse. Given the complexity of the topic, the analysis is meant as an open suggestion for a possible restructuring of the field, towards a richer and more layered shaping of the problem.

Assuming that the misunderstanding – at least in its modern version – plausibly originated from Cartesian dualism and from its consequent objectivistic prejudice – I mainly focus on some contemporary interpretations, developments and attempts to overcome it. Even though alternative frameworks for reality already exist in the philosophical tradition itself, as well as in the fields of literature and poetry, Nietzsche's and Heidegger's ways of presenting the problem constitute a breaking point and an innovation in perspective. Besides that, if we consider Western philosophy as a long path of re-translation and re-interpretation of previous philosophical problems, we can also recognize the trace of ancient questions through the words of contemporary authors. As a result, all elements are essentially intertwined, including those from heterogeneous backgrounds or even distant times.

In this wider picture, concepts such as Nietzsche's *Wille zur*

¹ See Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1972). See also Jacques Derrida, "Cogito et histoire de la folie", in Jacques Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), 51- 54. Conference pronounced as an answer to Foucault's *Histoire de la folie*, 4 March 1963 at College Philosophique, then published in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 1963 nn 3 e 4.

*Macht*² (will to power), Heidegger's *Ereignis*³ (revelation of reality), and Derrida's *différance*, can be coherently put in relation with the most recent studies in 4E Cognition and Radical Embodied Cognition (Rietveld's *rich affordances* and Skilled Intentionality Framework), as well as with Sini's hermeneutical work⁴, Arnau's idea of *extended mind*⁵, and even with elements from other disciplines, such as Geertz's *thick description*⁶ in applied cultural anthropology. Such a widened perspective can contribute to shedding a new light on the topic and to tracing a line of consistency, towards a theoretical mark of the problem. With different insights and degrees, the authors analyzed seem to share a common concern and a similar assumption: fiction is not opposed to reality. On the contrary, it creates it. Reality is a narrative co-construction of our bodily lived experience in the world, in a dynamic interaction with others. Far from an idealistic illusion, as well as from a solipsistic *impasse*, the result is a shared speech of complexity that allows us to inhabit our social world, and in which interwoven elements of fiction and reality are both generative conditions and effects in a history of consequences.

2. The disruption of reality in Nietzsche's perspectivism

The concept of reality runs consistently throughout Nietzsche's body of work as part of a more general quest for sense, and it is essentially connected to other aspects of his philosophy. The concept is thematized significantly in *The Gay Science* (1882)⁷, in *The Twilight of the Idols* (1888)⁸, and in various aphorisms from *The Will to Power* (1906; 1968)⁹.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House Inc., 1968).

³ Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1985).

⁴ Carlo Sini, *Filosofia e Memoria* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2025).

⁵ Juan Arnau, *En la Mente del Mundo* (Barcelona, Galaxia Gutenberg, 2022).

⁶ Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture", in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London, Basic Books, Inc., 1973).

⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge-NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols. How to Philosophise with a Hammer*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1998).

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House Inc., 1968).

In the fourth section of *The Twilight of the Idols*¹⁰, Nietzsche poses the problem of the real world, intending it as “the history of an error”¹¹, as clarified by the subtitle of the paragraph. The declining trajectory goes from the initial naive assumption of a “real world” which is fully present and close to the subject (“I, Plato, am the truth”)¹², to the final awareness of the impossibility of the concept of a “real world” itself. In the process, the real world gradually becomes “unattainable, unprovable, unpromisable”, “unknown”, incapable of any “consolation”, “redemption”, or “obligation”¹³, and finally just a “useless, superfluous, and refuted idea”¹⁴, whose destiny is to be eliminated. Having erased the possibility for the “real world”, no other world is left, not even the apparent one. Nonetheless, this is not a bad thing, as the new awareness marks the “end of the longest error” for humankind and opens the chance for Zarathustra's arrival after the announcement of God's Death.

In *The Gay Science* and *Will to Power*, the same concepts are presented from different angles and in a more layered perspective, with some inevitable differences due to their heterogeneous years of composition. In these aphorisms, Nietzsche gradually dismantles the classical dichotomy that opposes reality to fiction, truth to falsity, objective to subjective, by linking all these concepts to that of *will to power*, i.e. the strong drive towards life, health, and power that guides not only our actions, but also our beliefs and judgements. As Nietzsche states in *The Gay Science*¹⁵, we play an essential – even though unaware – role in the process of world building. “By positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content [...], we “have arranged for ourselves a world in which we are able to live”¹⁶. This is a “world of valuations, colors, weights, perspectives, scales, affirmations, and negations”¹⁷, and of other “articles of faith”¹⁸, which are not found in nature itself, but are rather projections of our human nature. Far from being mere spectators or listeners “before the

¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 20.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §121, 117, §301, 170.

¹⁶ Ibid., §121, 117.

¹⁷ Ibid., §301, 170.

¹⁸ Ibid., §121, 117.

great [...] play that is life”¹⁹, but also irreducible to its mere actors, we are its “actual poet[s] and ongoing author[s]”²⁰. This is especially true if we assume the German term *die Macht* in its wider meaning, which is not limited to *power, force*, but indicates also *the ability to create effects*. “It is we, the thinking-sensing ones, who really and continually make”²¹ the world exist through the creative act of judging it, i.e. through assigning value to it. Value, morality, and reality are radically interconnected with our creative process, which however is never the result of a deliberate act of decision by an individual subject. On the contrary, it “is constantly internalized, [...] translated into flesh and reality, [brought] into the commonplace”²² until it becomes familiar, and therefore unseen, since the familiar – “what we are used to”—is both what “we no longer marvel at; the commonplace; some rule in which we are stuck [and] the most difficult [aspect] to know—that is, to view as a problem”²³, or to recognize as a theoretical issue. In this sense, “judgment is our oldest belief, our most habitual holding-true or holding-untrue, an assertion or denial, a certainty that something is thus and not otherwise”²⁴, an implicit habit whose status we misjudge and underestimate precisely because of its familiarity and pervasiveness. If so, all our certainties – including those about objectivity, science and logic – are based on metaphysical assumptions. “There is simply no *presuppositionless* science”²⁵, but only an undeniable and widely accepted “faith in science”²⁶ grounded on “some prior conviction”²⁷. Against the common positivistic attitude and its delusional claim that “there are only facts”²⁸, Nietzsche states that “facts don't exist. Only interpretations exist”²⁹. “This perspectival character of existence”³⁰ brings into question the essence of reality and of knowledge.

First of all, at the shallowest level, if we assume “all thought,

¹⁹ Ibid., §301, 170.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., §355, 214.

²⁴ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §531, 288.

²⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §344, 200.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §481, 267.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §374, 239.

judgment, perception as comparison”³¹, then their necessary “precondition” is the “positing of equality”³², i.e. a dialectical opposition between two terms, only one of which can be true and acceptable. This is already an act of synthesis and interpretation, as well as a moral choice. At a second level, since “all existence is an interpreting existence”³³, it follows that all knowledge is prospective. On the one hand, “we cannot reject the possibility that [the world] includes infinite interpretations”³⁴ and that our angle of perspective is just one possibility among an infinity of chances. On the other hand, we need to acknowledge that “we cannot look around our corner”³⁵ in order to explore any of the possible alternatives. That means, we can never stare at our own experience from an external, objective, or presumably absolute point of view. This idea of Nietzsche's anticipates various philosophical concepts from the 20th and 21st century: all experience is inevitably partial and biased by subjectivity. In such a context, the concept of an objective reality would be as naive and incomplete as the initial assumption of a *real world*. “A *thing-in-itself*”³⁶, as well as “a *sense-in-itself*, or a *meaning-in-itself*”³⁷ are meaningless concepts. “There are no *facts-in-themselves*, for a sense must always be projected into them before there can be *facts*”³⁸.

As I will articulate in section 3 of this paper, a strong analogy can be found in Heidegger's analysis of the process of meaning in paragraphs §43 and §44 of *Being and Time*³⁹, where the disclosure of the world is read as part of *Dasein*'s quest for meaning in its essential being-open-in-the-world. Besides, Nietzsche's assumption that “science too rests on a faith”⁴⁰ also resonates with the problem of the foundations of

³¹ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §501, 273–274.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §374, 239.

³⁶ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §556, 301.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962).

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §374, 239.

sciences later posed by Husserl in *The Crisis of European Sciences*⁴¹, as well as, in a weaker sense, with Hume's statement that "all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature [and] are in some measure dependent on the science of Man; since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their powers and faculties. [...] And consequently we ourselves are not only the beings, the reason, but also one of the objects, concerning which we reason"⁴². In a different context, Clifford Geertz states that "there are no raw data. [...] What we call our data are really our own constructions, [i.e. the product of a] stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which [the facts observed] are produced, perceived, and interpreted, and without which [these facts] would not [...] exist"⁴³.

In Nietzsche's philosophy, the matter of truth comes into question as a counterpart of the problem of value. Our "unconditional will of truth"⁴⁴ is moved by a moral call, which actually hides an urgency for "a regained sense of security"⁴⁵ in the struggle for survival. Through assigning values for truth and false in the process of knowledge, "something unfamiliar is traced back to something familiar"⁴⁶, and moral and ontological coordinates are created, in order to reduce what feels "strange, unusual, and doubtful"⁴⁷ to "something which no longer unsettles us"⁴⁸. This process aims towards a more inhabitable and comprehensible categorization of the field of meaning for the subject⁴⁹. Broadly speaking, such a process implies "the opposition of a truth and an error"⁵⁰, of real and unreal. More specifically, a mechanism of exclusion and limitation is at work in this

⁴¹ Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Verlag, 1976).

⁴² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: being an Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects* (London: John Noon, at the White Hart, 1739), 4.

⁴³ Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture", 313–314.

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §355, 214.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §513, 277.

⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §171, 103.

transaction⁵¹. By reducing the process of knowledge to its coherent, familiar, and reassuring elements, what gets lost is precisely the ability to marvel at the world⁵², i.e. to recognize, assume, and embody its creative, irrational, chaotic and more powerful aspects⁵³.

Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference between “ascertaining *truth* and *untruth* [and] facts in general”⁵⁴ on the one hand, and “creative positing, from forming, shaping, overcoming, willing, such as is of the essence of philosophy”⁵⁵. It is “the degree to which we feel life and power (logic and coherence of experience) [that] gives us our measure of *being* and *reality*”⁵⁶.

This brings into question yet another level of complexity, which challenges the possibility itself of a traditional Cartesian subject. If, on the one hand, the objective “concept of substance is a consequence of the concept of the subject”⁵⁷, on the other hand, even subjectivity is a result of perspective, and the subject itself is something added to the background of a dialectical movement between the world and the will to power, i.e. “a simplification” for “defining the force which posits, invents, thinks, as distinct from all individual positing, inventing, thinking as such”⁵⁸. In order for the world to be meaningful, and for any knowledge to be possible, interpretation is essential, but “it is our needs that interpret the world, our drives and their *for* and *against*”⁵⁹; not our ego, nor a presumed metaphysical subject. If we assume, as Nietzsche does, that truth, reality, and objectivity are complex constructions of meaning derived from perspectives, then even the will to truth cannot be considered an exclusive path of knowledge, but rather finds its place *in the struggle among truths* as just one drive among the others.

Moreover, the faithful assumptions on which we construct our knowledge are not necessarily true, and “the conditions of life might in-

⁵¹ For a complete analysis of the mechanisms of exclusion, see Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1972).

⁵² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §355, 214.

⁵³ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch, für Alle und Keinen* (Leipzig, Naumann Verlag, 1891).

⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *ibid.* §605, 327.

⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *ibid.*, §556, 301.

⁵⁶ Nietzsche, *ibid.*, §534, 290.

⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *ibid.*, §485, 268.

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *ibid.*, §556, 302.

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *ibid.*, §481, 267.

clude error”⁶⁰. Truth can then be considered as an “habitual and indispensable fiction, [which] in itself proves nothing against its imaginary origin: a belief can be a condition of life and nonetheless be false”⁶¹. In this sense, truth and reality are a kind of necessary error, a fictional mechanism that is nevertheless essential for the survival of that specific kind of living beings that are humankind. From a wider perspective, the deeper philosophical question implied in all this discourse is whether any dichotomy between a *real world* and a *fictional world* is still needed and useful. What is at stake in Nietzsche's analysis is whether the inevitable mechanism of interpretation actually requires the opposition of a truth and an error, or whether instead, we can already presuppose a totality of the world which is built from a non-exclusive multiplicity of interpretations and perspectives⁶². If we consider the problem from this point of view, interpretation itself is a form of the will to power and reality consists of nothing else than the dialectical relation that undergoes within the whole form of life. The introduction of meaning is then much more connected to a creative gesture, than to a descriptive explanation⁶³, and knowledge implies an “active interpretation and not merely conceptual translation”⁶⁴.

3. Truth as the revelation of reality in Heidegger's quest of Being

Heidegger's philosophy is the second essential step of this analysis. While Nietzsche has the credit of having set the problem, it is Heidegger who has framed it accurately and systematically in his general quest for Being. The issue becomes crucial after the 1930 Turn (*Kehre*) and is widely developed in the texts derived from his university courses on pre-Socratics – i.e. *The Beginning of Western Philosophy* (1932)⁶⁵ – or in essays such as *On the Way to Language* (1959)⁶⁶, but an early seed of

⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §121, 117.

⁶¹ Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, §483, 268.

⁶² Nietzsche, *ibid.*, §556, 301.

⁶³ Nietzsche, *ibid.*, §604, 327.

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, *ibid.*, §605, 327.

⁶⁵ Martin Heidegger, *The Beginning of Western Philosophy. Interpretation of Anaximander and Parmenides*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

⁶⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1985).

the question is already present in *Being and Time* (1927)⁶⁷, more specifically in paragraphs §43 (*Dasein, Worldhood, and Reality*) and §44 (*Dasein, Disclosedness, and Truth*).

In his analysis, Heidegger frames the problem of reality, and of its conditions and limits, within the context of *Dasein*⁶⁸ and its quest for meaning. In order to understand reality, a radical rethinking of the concept of truth is needed. Since the problem derives from a misinterpretation that can be traced back to the official beginnings of the history of Western philosophy, i.e. in Plato and Aristotle, Heidegger draws his attention to the very origins of that same philosophical tradition, i.e. to Anaximander, Parmenides, and Heraclitus, re-reading their fragments and key-concepts according to their Greek original meaning (*ursprünglicher*)⁶⁹. This gesture has no aim to induce an “uninhibited word mysticism”⁷⁰, nor to retrace “the history of the concept of truth”⁷¹. Rather, in the form of a reinterpretation through repetition (*wiederholen*), it aims to “preserve the force of the most elemental words”⁷² and overcome the harmful projections and layered superpositions imposed on them by Western philosophy, thus illuminating that general question of Being, which in Heidegger's perspective is at the same time the most intuitive and familiar⁷³, and the most obscure and hidden to an ontological inquiry⁷⁴.

The analysis revolves around the concept of ἀλήθεια (*alētheia*) – truth – in relation to λόγος (*logos*) – thought, speech, reason, judgment, concept – and φύσις (*physis*) – nature, world, reality⁷⁵. As Heidegger notes, “the traditional conception of truth”⁷⁶ is based on the two assump-

⁶⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962). For the words quoted in the original language, cf. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1927).

⁶⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 245.

⁶⁹ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 33.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 262.

⁷¹ Ibid., 257.

⁷² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 262.

⁷³ Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 25: “What we seek when we inquire into Being is not smth entirely unfamiliar, even if proximally (*zunächst*) we cannot grasp it at all”.

⁷⁴ Heidegger, *The Beginning of Western Philosophy*, 17.

⁷⁵ Heidegger, *ibid.*, 4–23.

⁷⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 257.

tions “that the locus of truth is assertion (judgment)”⁷⁷, and “that the essence of truth lies in the agreement of the judgment with its object”⁷⁸. These axioms, which also caused Thomas Aquinas’ “formulation of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei*”⁷⁹, were generated by the distorted interpretation of the concept of ἀλήθεια as ὁμοίωσις (*omōiosis*)⁸⁰ – *conformity, correspondence, adequacy* – and ὀρθότης (*orthōtes*) – *correctness* – which has become conventional in the philosophical tradition, but actually made the original concept of truth unintelligible⁸¹. If we accept the sense of ἀλήθεια as *adaequatio*⁸² of knowledge (judgment) to reality, we also set the structure for dichotomies such as true/false, real/unreal, correct/incorrect, normal/not-normal, valid/invalid, and our judgment can be alternatively correct or incorrect, depending on the contingent situation. More specifically, “knowledge is false if it does not agree with the object to which it is related”⁸³ and it is true only in the case that the object fully corresponds to the judgment. As a necessary condition, “this object must be distinguished from others”⁸⁴ and opposed to all the remaining possibilities, since there is only one truth, whereas an infinity of chances is open for fiction, lies, distortions, unreality. Yet, this is an artificial construction of truth (*ein konstruierten Wahrheitsbegriff*)⁸⁵ based on a hierarchy of values and specific given rules, and also implies an irreversible process of degenerative transformation and oblivion.

In order to radically rethink the concept of truth, and consequently mark the foundations and horizons for an ontological analysis of reality, Heidegger recalls the primordial meaning of ἀλήθεια as *Unverborgenheit*⁸⁶, being un-veiling, un-covering, un-hidden (*entdecken*)⁸⁷, and let-itself-be-seen (*sehen lassen*)⁸⁸. That is, as ontological manifestation of what is present in-the-world. In this sense, λόγος is ἀπόφανσις

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 257.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 258.

⁸¹ Ibid. 262.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid. 258.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 33.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 33.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

(*apóphansis*)⁸⁹, revelation, presentation, and philosophy is “ἀποφαίνεσθαι περὶ τῆς ἀληθείας (*apophàinesthai perì tes alethéias*) – exhibiting something and letting it be seen with regard to the truth”⁹⁰ – as well as “ἐπιστήμη περὶ τὸ ὄν ἢ ὄν (*epistēmē perì to on e on*) – a science which contemplates entities as entities”⁹¹. In this sense, “to say that an assertion is true signifies that it uncovers the entity as it is in itself”⁹², with regard to its being.

In Heidegger's analysis of Anaximander's fragment in *The Beginning of Western Philosophy*, the philosopher defines what presents itself (ἀποφαίνεσθαι) as τὰ ὄντα (*ta onta*)⁹³, “the things themselves”, as “the whole of beings”⁹⁴ within-the-world in the totality of their “appearance as emergence” (*Erschienenheit*)⁹⁵. In this sense, reality is nothing else than all “what manifests itself as a structure of Being”⁹⁶ and “truth signifies the same as *Thing (Sache)*, something that shows itself”⁹⁷.

The analysis is connected to the concept of φύσις (*physis*), nature. According to the original meaning of the verb φύειν (*phyein*)⁹⁸ – to generate, *physis* is what is born and grown, what transforms itself through time, but also what unfolds and becomes exposed, i.e. what appears and manifests itself in its being visible (*erscheinbar sein*)⁹⁹. *Physis* then means the reciprocal and dynamical relation among the totality of entities (*ta onta*), which is generated by time according to necessity, as a harmonised combination (*Fügung*) of agreement (*das Gefüge*) and fight (*Un-fug*)¹⁰⁰. Reality is essentially accessible to *Dasein* only as the totality of entities within-the-world. This does not mean that it is unreachable as a phenomenal experience, and that we should therefore believe in the world by means of faith, nor, on the contrary, suspend our faith in existence. As Heidegger specifies, both options of a naive realism and of a

⁸⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 258.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid. 261.

⁹³ Heidegger, *The Beginning of Western Philosophy*, 3.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁹⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 256.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Heidegger, *The Beginning of Western Philosophy*, 15.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 9.

rigorous idealism are biased by an “inappropriate formulation of the question”¹⁰¹. The question of reality is an ontological problem¹⁰², and does not involve any psychological subject, unless we confound reality “with a discussion of the problem of the external world”¹⁰³, based on the wrong assimilation of entities – τὰ ὄντα – to τὰ πράγματα, *res*, *things*, *objects* in the sense of “a context of things [...] ready-to-hand”¹⁰⁴ among other objects. Such misinterpretation would cause various pseudo-problems, i.e. the unsolvable “question of whether an external world [exists] at all, and whether its Being can be proved”¹⁰⁵ as an object *in-itself*, and of what kind of relation should subsist between this reality and a Cartesian subject¹⁰⁶.

As Heidegger explains, these problems “make no sense if [they were] raised by *Dasein*”¹⁰⁷, since *Dasein* is the condition of possibility for all interrogation, as well as “the necessary and preliminary condition to all reality”¹⁰⁸, and “cannot be conceived in terms of mere substantiality”¹⁰⁹, i.e. as a *res* or a mere object. “The substance of human being is existence”, and its nature lies in its essential state of being-in-the-world” (*in-der-Welt-sein*)¹¹⁰ as projection and *Entwerfenheit*¹¹¹ (being-thrown-in-relation). Therefore, “the question of the meaning” can only be possible if, as a precondition, we assume the *disclosedness* of *Dasein*¹¹², i.e. its unavoidable, preliminary *openness to/opening of* the world and meaning. This is the only possibility we have, “for who else would raise [the question]” if not *Dasein*?¹¹³ As a matter of fact, we can never go outside of ourselves in order to pose our philosophical quest.

In this sense, the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* that almost all the phi-

¹⁰¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 251.

¹⁰² Ibid., 252.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 246.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 244.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 246.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 262.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 246–247.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 245.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 245.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 80.

¹¹¹ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 145.

¹¹² Ibid., 263.

¹¹³ Ibid., 247.

losophical Western tradition has accepted, needs to be “turned around”¹¹⁴ from its initial sense that *I have thoughts (cogitations), therefore I exist*, “into the sense that *I am in a world*. As such an entity, *I am* in the possibility of comporting myself in various ways [...] as ways of being alongside entities within the world”¹¹⁵. Said otherwise, “we do not presuppose [truth] as something outside and above us, towards which – along with other values – we comport ourselves”¹¹⁶, but, with our quest for sense, we are co-essentially implied in the dialectic creation of truth. At the same time, “it is not *we*, who presuppose truth”¹¹⁷ as a value, but, on the contrary, “truth is what first makes possible anything like presupposing”¹¹⁸.

Thus, the existence of the world, with its essence and projections, is the necessary pre-condition that makes any subject possible, and not *vice-versa*. As Heidegger claims, knowledge does not come as an abstract, dichotomous grasping of a concept, but rather “from possibilities”—*aus Möglichkeiten*¹¹⁹ – that are encountered in the world and predetermined by the scope of what can be essentially disclosed within the process. Such trajectory is always influenced by its history, past, and relation to others/to the world itself, and implies a comprehension of existence from within, in its essentially projective character and dynamical state of being-thrown. In this sense, the world is the revelation (*Ereignis*¹²⁰) of a dialectical totality that includes also our presence and existence as *Dasein*, as well as our gesture of interrogating the essence of the world and of being. As Heidegger warns, “we of today must first be educated to this glancing”¹²¹ as well as to this new opening, i.e. we must learn to look from an angle that goes beyond the classical dichotomies of real/unreal, true/false, and even of subject/object, in order to reintegrate the discourse as a whole. Building on Heidegger's conclusion, we can deduce that no preconceived metaphysical subject is possible, and as a further consequence, no normative dichotomy between true and false, real and fictional, is convenient, at least in its traditional sense.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 254.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 270.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 146.

¹²⁰ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 27.

¹²¹ Heidegger, *The Beginning of Western Philosophy*, 9.

4. Reshaping perspective through differences.

The creative agency of cognition

All the arguments drawn in the previous analysis seem to suggest a new perspective and converge towards a new paradigm for thinking reality in a non-exclusive form. Instead of a hierarchical opposition, these philosophies suggest a relational approach. The argumentation can be expanded to other authors who have dealt with the topic from different angles and a peculiar perspective. Among them, phenomenology emphasizes the world-entangled nature of the experience of perception. Husserl¹²² analyzes how, in order to understand an object in its essence, we need to examine it dynamically, from various perspectives, i.e. build its meaning through our intersubjective relation to it. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty states that meaning doesn't originate from a fixed *a priori* significance, but rather arises in the act of significance itself¹²³. As quoted by Ezequiel Di Paolo, “the world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject who is nothing but a project of the world”¹²⁴.

Throughout his whole work – and especially in his reinterpretations of Husserl¹²⁵, Heidegger¹²⁶, Merleau-Ponty¹²⁷, Foucault¹²⁸ – Derrida interrogates the philosophical discourse through a continuous reshaping of its borders from within¹²⁹, in the awareness that any shared

¹²² E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. F. Kersten (The Hauge/Boston/Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), 52-53.

¹²³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Sur la phénoménologie du langage”. Communication held on 13 April 1951, at I Colloque international de Phénoménologie, then published in *Problèmes actuels de la Phénoménologie* (Desclée de Brouwer, Bruxelles 1952), 89-109; then in *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 105 ff.; now in Jacques Derrida, *La scrittura e la differenza*, trans. Gianni Pozzi (Torino: Einaudi, 2002), 14.

¹²⁴ Ezequiel Di Paolo, “The Enactive Conception of Life”, in Albert Newen, Leon de Bruin, Shaun Gallagher, *The Oxford Handbook for 4E Cognition*, 71.

¹²⁵ See Jacques Derrida, *La Voix et le Phénomène, Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1967).

¹²⁶ See Jacques Derrida, *De l'esprit: Heidegger et la question* (Paris: Galilée, 1987).

¹²⁷ See Jacques Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967).

¹²⁸ See Jacques Derrida, “Cogito et histoire de la folie”, in Jacques Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, 51- 54.

¹²⁹ See Pier Aldo Rovatti, “Cercare mezzodi alle quattordici”, in Jacques Derrida, *La scrittura e la differenza*, trans. Gianni Pozzi (Torino: Einaudi, 2002), XIII.

quest for meaning implies at the same time also the questioning of its limits¹³⁰, and that any critics to *logos* can only be operated in a language, i.e. from within the field of *logos*¹³¹. According to Derrida, the whole philosophical tradition is an ontology¹³² dominated by reason, logic, and a certain privilege of the voice¹³³. With an original violence,¹³⁴ *logocentrism*¹³⁵ has set the rules for attribution of the values of truth and reality, as well as the limits of what can be considered properly (*eigen*-) human in opposition to its *other*, i.e. the world, or animality¹³⁶. This dichotomy – which is not a unique, indivisible, and normative border between the two sides¹³⁷—hides an implicit prejudice towards alterity, which brings into question the problems of the subject and of reality, and their definition within the logical discourse. Meaning is never found *a priori*, but always situated within a dialectical opening, which is historic and narrative in itself¹³⁸. An original difference (*différance*)¹³⁹ is at work in the process of individuation, and constitutes the necessary condition of every subject, as well as of every speech. Thus, the individual is actually a *dividual*, a dynamical relation essentially inhabited by its alterity in a dialectic ongoing process¹⁴⁰. Such alterity is way more com-

¹³⁰ See Maurizio Ferrari's interview to Derrida about the place of philosophy, "Iride", 12, Agosto 1994, 336; then in Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *Il gusto del segreto* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1997).

¹³¹ Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, 25.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 34.

¹³³ See Derrida, *La Voix et le Phénomène. Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*.

¹³⁴ Jacques Derrida, *De La Grammatologie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967). Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Della Grammatologia*, trans. R. Balzarotti, F. Bonicalzi, G. Contri, G. Dalmasso, A.C. Loaldi (Milano: Jaca Book, 1969), 19.

¹³⁵ Derrida, *Della Grammatologia*, 15.

¹³⁶ Derrida, *L'animale che dunque sono*, trans. Massimo Zannini (Milano: Jaca Book, 2006), 86.

¹³⁷ Derrida, *ibid.*, 81.

¹³⁸ Derrida *L'écriture et la différence*, 122.

¹³⁹ Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, 295. "La différence, pré-ouverture de la différence ontic-ontologique". See also Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, 1029. As a provocation of meaning, Derrida plays with the mis-spelling of the word *différence*, transforming it in *différance*, where the *a* adds a difference, a shift in perspective, which can be written and read, but not heard.

¹⁴⁰ See Jacques Derrida, *L'animal que donc je suis*, Paris, Gallimard, 1967; Jacques Derrida, *Donner le temps. La fausse monnaie* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1991); Jacques Derrida, *La Dissémination* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972).

plex, various, and heterodox than depicted by logocentrism. Any quest for sense is only possible in the form of an autobiography¹⁴¹ i.e. in the writing of a trace which creates meaning through its tracing¹⁴² and is the inaugural freedom of a different answer¹⁴³ to logocentrism, one which defuses it with its unfitting and irreducible complexity. Since the attribution of sense is first and foremost an “adventure of the gaze” (*une aventure du regard*)¹⁴⁴, Derrida suggests a prospective shift: not a mere balance or reversal from one side of the metaphysical opposition¹⁴⁵ to the other, but rather the possibility of erasing the dichotomy as such¹⁴⁶ through a patient multiplication of the differences¹⁴⁷, i.e. through an oblique gesture of writing¹⁴⁸ that goes beyond (and reintegrates in itself) the values of origin, reason, history, by showing the fragility and porosity of the supposed frontiers¹⁴⁹. In such context, even that rich and complex field of madness, dementia, extravagance, insanity, irrationality, emotional, fictional, symbolic, metaphorical, narrative, that Foucault reported as distanced, excluded, expelled from the philosophical field, turns out to be part of that same discourse¹⁵⁰.

In a very different context, but with a compatible approach and aim, the paradigm of 4E/5E Cognition offers a similar perspective, shaping cognition as an embodied, embedded (situated), enactive, extended (context-dependent), and ecological (relational)¹⁵¹ system of mind-body-world¹⁵². Challenging both Cartesian dualism and the classical and incomplete model of cognition as computational, representational, and

¹⁴¹ Derrida, *L'animale che dunque sono*, 97. See also Jacques Derrida, *Otobiographies. L'enseignement de Nietzsche et la Philosophie du Nom Propre* (Paris, Galilée, 1984).

¹⁴² Derrida, *L'animale che dunque sono*, 24.

¹⁴³ Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, 15.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 25.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 71.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Derrida, *La scrittura e la differenza*, 14.

¹⁴⁹ Derrida, *L'animale che dunque sono*, 69.

¹⁵⁰ Derrida, “Cogito et histoire de la folie”, in Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, 42.

¹⁵¹ Erik Rietveld, Damiaan Denys, Maarten van Westen, “Ecological – Enactive Cognition as engaging with a field of relevant affordances – The Skilled Intentionality Framework (SIF)”, in Albert Newen, Leon de Bruin, Shaun Gallagher, *The Oxford Handbook for 4E Cognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 41.

¹⁵² Rietveld, Denys, van Westen, “Ecological – Enactive Cognition as engaging with a field of relevant affordances – The Skilled Intentionality Framework”, 41-70.

disembodied, the 4E/5E Cognition paradigm also seems to have redeemed the question about Being that Heidegger left open, by retranslating it in the frame of cognitive agency. There is a “mutual and continuous influence”¹⁵³ between the individual and the “rich landscape of affordances”¹⁵⁴, i.e. all the “possibilities for action provided by the environment”¹⁵⁵. The description of reality is the result of a situated, embodied and constantly readjusting act of looking, where “the frames of signification are given by the sense-making activity itself”¹⁵⁶, i.e. “in the environmental consequences of the living process”¹⁵⁷, and the affordances presented are correlated to the skills and tools we choose in order to deal with them. Since every individual is part of an *ecological niche*, or form of life, which is the outcome of “coordinated patterns of behavior of multiple individuals”¹⁵⁸ over time, it follows that affordances are generated in the *sociomaterial* context and are intrinsically relational. Abilities are also acquired and developed through a tradition of social interactions, which in turn depends on the specific affordances, chances for learning, and challenges, presented by the environment.

Skilled Intentionality is a selective, context-dependent, action-oriented response. Out of all the available possibilities for action, only those ones which are perceived as relevant are actually selected. In turn, the only solicitations perceived as engaging are those for which the individual has already the relative skills. Thus, the possibility to perceive is also an aspect of the *sociomaterial* environment, and “gaining perceptual access to the world is [in itself] a skilled activity”¹⁵⁹.

As a consequence, the process of knowledge has the double effect of constantly modifying the whole form of life, while also reshaping the surrounding reality. Moreover, the “rational criteria” for decision are not neutral, but “ineliminably evaluative and dependent on our purposes and in-

¹⁵³ Albert Newen, Leon de Bruin, Shaun Gallagher, “4E Cognition: Historical Roots, Key Concepts, and Central Issues”, in Albert Newen, Leon de Bruin, Shaun Gallagher, *The Oxford Handbook for 4E Cognition*, 10.

¹⁵⁴ Rietveld, Denys, van Westen, “Ecological – Enactive Cognition as engaging with a field of relevant affordances – The Skilled Intentionality Framework”, 44.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 42.

¹⁵⁶ Di Paolo, “The Enactive Conception of Life”, in Albert Newen, Leon de Bruin, Shaun Gallagher, *The Oxford Handbook for 4E Cognition*, 71.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 89.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 46.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 50.

terests”¹⁶⁰. Therefore, to describe the world actually means to make the world exist under certain circumstances and specific parameters. “If the affordances of a thing are perceived correctly, we say that it looks like what it is. But we must, of course, learn to see what things really are”¹⁶¹.

5. Conclusions. A narrative response towards reality

This final passage implies a certain orientation towards the possible¹⁶² and resonates with the change of perspective urged by Heidegger. Paraphrasing the Spanish sanskritist Juan Arnau¹⁶³, the way we look at the world can change the world itself. As the Ancients already knew, and Indian philosophy reminds us, fiction and reality are co-existent and co-essential in a continuum of perception, interpretation, and action. Therefore, an education of imagination can be a useful tool for a narrative invention of the real world. If perception, speech, and actions are shaped by the environment and by our affective reaction to it, the consequent dynamical and relational process of re-attunement can reintegrate also all those aspects that the dualistic prejudice excluded as too irrational, fictional, artistic, and narrative. Paraphrasing the Italian philosopher Carlo Sini¹⁶⁴, every philosophy is an auto-biography and a narrative, in the sense that every knowledge is also the self-writing of its trace. Stories are powerful tools for world-building, and our socio-conceptual constructions represent chances for alternative narratives, which can better serve the purpose of life. Since language is embodied and embedded, our narrative choices can reshape both our self and the field of reality, through a call for perspective and a creative response towards the world, i.e. through an exercise of attention and the awakening of a different,

¹⁶⁰ Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind. The bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), xiii.

¹⁶¹ Rietveld, Denys, and van Westen, “Ecological – Enactive Cognition as engaging with a field of relevant affordances – The Skilled Intentionality Framework”, 50.

¹⁶² Rietveld, Denys, and van Westen, *ibid.*, 43.

¹⁶³ Arnau, *En la Mente del Mundo*, 73.

¹⁶⁴ Carlo Sini, *Idoli della conoscenza* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2000), now in Carlo Sini, *Opere, Vol IV tomo II. La solidarietà delle pratiche e l'origine dell'autocoscienza* (Milano: Jaca Book, 2014), quoted in Carlo Sini, *Filosofia e Memoria* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2025), 7. See also Carlo Sini, *Teoria e pratica del Foglio-mondo*, (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2007); Carlo Sini, *La virtù politica. Filosofia e antropologia. Figure dell'enciclopedia filosofica, IV*, (Milano: Jaca Book, 2004).

non exclusive gaze. Working on these mechanisms can help us acknowledge our socio – political, geo – cultural, historical, and biographical implications, thus also reshaping our identity both on an individual and collective level.