In this essay, I intend to show how Searle’s thought on aspectuality of intentionality and his critique of subjective perspectivism, on the one hand, and Zhuang Zi’s relevant insights concerning how to look at seemingly competing points of view, on the other hand, can make their joint contribution to a kind of objective perspectivism, which I call ‘transcendental perspectivism’, a meta-philosophical methodological framework of how to look at seemingly competing perspectives towards an object of study for the purpose of constructive engagement to be explained.

My strategy in this writing is this. First, in Section 1, after briefly examining the major points of Searle’s thought on aspectuality and his critiques of subjective perspectivism, I spell out some significant implications of Searle’s relevant ideas and argue that they point to a kind of objective perspectivism; I then address two issues for the sake of developing a complete account of objective perspectivism. Second, in Section 2, I present an interpretation of Zhuang Zi’s ontologico-methodological strategy of how to treat different or seemingly competing points of view; in so doing, I explore how Zhuang Zi would respond to the two issues addressed in the preceding section. Third, in Section 3, I present a meta-philosophical methodological framework, which I might as well call ‘transcendental perspectivism’, of how to look at seemingly competing perspectives towards an object of study, especially concerning its guiding-principle dimension, in view of the preceding discussion of Searle’s and Zhuang Zi’s relevant insights, views and resources.

1. Searle on Aspectuality of Intentionality and Perspectivism

Let me first clarify the meaning of one key term used in this discussion, i.e., ‘perspectivism,’ to avoid conceptual conflation. The term
‘perspectivism’ *per se*, instead of a clearly used word, is a blanket term used to (ambiguously) refer to a number of different kinds of meta-
philosophical attitudes, methodological guiding principles, or even more systematic methodological frameworks concerning how to look at the nature and status of a variety of perspectives taken to approach an object of study. There are two kinds of perspectivism, a subjective one and an objective one. When the term ‘perspectivism’ is used to mean the former, it is sometimes used as another label for, or characterized in terms of, a radical ‘anything goes’ version of conceptual relativism: given an object of study, it renders relevant and eligible any (methodological or substantial) perspective so long as that perspective is projected from the subjective agent (or its validity merely being relative to the subjective agent’s conceptual scheme is sufficient for its relevance and eligibility), whether or not the perspective really points to (some aspect of) the object. There is no wonder that subjective perspectivism is actually taken as one major argument against external realism and for idealism/antirealism. In contrast, objective perspectivism bases the eligibility of a perspective (given an object of study) on whether the perspective points to some aspect that is really or objectively possessed by the object of study. It is clear that, from the point of view of objective perspectivism, given an object of study and given that the identity of the genuine aspect(s) of the object is thus determined, it is not the case that any ‘perspective’ can go but that only eligible perspectives that point to genuine aspects of the object can go.

When examining features of consciousness and intentionality, Searle identifies and emphasizes one intrinsic feature of intentionality, i.e., aspectuality. He asserts that all intentionality is aspectual. By this he means that consciousness of some object is always consciousness of it as such and such from a certain perspective or from a point of view. “Seeing an object from a point of view, for example, is seeing it under certain aspects and not others. In this sense, all seeing is ‘seeing as’,” aspectuality extends beyond the object of perception to the more abstract object of study. The perspective can be physical (e.g., I see the house from its front door, while you see it from its side door) or metaphysical (e.g., one thinker focuses on the universal, unchanging aspect of the object of study while another thinker on the particular, changing aspect) or theoretical (e.g., a Marxist sees it as class conflict).

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