

# AMERINDIAN PERSPECTIVISM AS COUNTER- PLATONISM: A METAPHYSICS OF TRANSFORMATION

Leif Grünewald

**ABSTRACT:** This article explores Amerindian perspectivism as a radical counterpoint to Platonism, presenting a metaphysics of transformation, immanence, and multiplicity. Unlike Platonism, which constructs a hierarchical ontology emphasizing permanence and transcendence (Plato, *Republic*, 509d–510b), Amerindian perspectivism proposes a view where being is not static, but dynamic and relational. Through a critique of central Platonic categories such as form, idea, soul, and body, the article argues that Amerindian thought reveals the contingency of these concepts and affirms the primacy of change and interaction in constituting reality. Viveiros de Castro (1996) argues that the notion of “perspectivism” in Amerindian thought dissolves dualisms by demonstrating that all beings—humans, animals, spirits—are relationally constructed, not hierarchically arranged. The concept of the soul in perspectivism, for instance, is fluid and contextual, connecting all beings—humans, animals, plants, spirits, and objects—through a web of relations. This ontology of transformation challenges Western metaphysical assumptions, offering a new way of understanding existence that prioritizes difference, transformation, and the interconnectedness of all things. The article ultimately suggests that Amerindian perspectivism invites us to rethink our metaphysical frameworks and embrace a philosophy of multiplicity, fluidity, and the creative potential of relations.

**KEYWORDS:** Amerindian Perspectivism, Counter-Platonism, Philosophy of Difference, Relational Ontology

## I. PROLOGUE

Since the time of Plato, the Western philosophical tradition has been defined by a fundamental distinction between two realms of reality: the eternal and

unchanging domain of the Forms—representing what *truly is*—and the fleeting and unstable realm of matter, viewed as that which *merely seems to be* (Plato, *Republic*, 509d–510b). This dichotomy underpins not just a hierarchical ontology, but also an epistemological and ethical framework: to know is to rise from the shadows of the sensual world into the brightness of the intelligible realm. It involves transcending the body—seen as a vessel of illusion and decay—in pursuit of the purity of the soul, which resonates with eternity (*Phaedo*, 79c–80a). Within this view, the body is decay, becoming equates to error, and truth appears as a distant light, located beyond the material world (*Republic*, 514a–515c). Such dualistic metaphysics, rooted in Platonic thought and echoed by its interpreters over the centuries (Nehamas, 2009), forms a cosmology that elevates the universal and transcendent while diminishing the contingent and relational.

In contrast, Amerindian cosmologies—far from being fixed systems—are characterized by anthropologists as dynamic configurations that continuously evolve. Central to *Amerindian perspectivism*, as articulated by Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1996, 2015), is the rejection of any absolute ontological divide between soul and body, essence and appearance, or between human and non-human entities. Instead of conceiving a reality governed by transcendental essences that precede and dictate sensible manifestations, Amerindians understand reality as comprised of subjects that occupy numerous perspectives, each shaped by their bodily position relative to the world. As Viveiros de Castro (1996) emphasizes, the diversity of worldviews in Amerindian thought does not imply a relativistic free-for-all, but a series of situated truths, each valid in its own right, depending on the place and position of the perceiver." This understanding is not a mere trivial relativism, where 'everyone has their own truth.' Rather, it embodies a relational ontology in which the body serves not as a barrier to truth but as a mediator that organizes and produces it.

In this context, differences between beings—humans, animals, and spirits—do not arise from fixed essences but from the unique capabilities of their bodies. What each body perceives and experiences shapes the reality that unfolds before it. For example, a jaguar sees blood where a human sees beer, and a vulture views decaying flesh as sustenance. Yet, beneath these perceptual differences lies a fundamental universality: all beings share an inner experience—a soul that confers agency and humanity. As Viveiros de Castro contends, the soul in Amerindian cosmologies is not a fixed, transcendent essence but a relational and

transformative principle that allows beings to engage with the world from multiple positions. In this framework, it is the position of the body—rather than an ideal Form or transcendent essence—that defines how the world is experienced. Humanity is not an exclusive ontological privilege conferred only on humans; rather, it is a relational attribute exercised by all beings from their unique perspectives.

If Platonism depicts reality as a pyramid with the Forms at the apex and matter at the base (*Timaeus*, 29d–30b), then perspectivism reconceptualizes it as a horizontal network. In this new structure, significance lies not in proximity to a transcendent center but in the connections that define each viewpoint. There is no singular truth to which all things align; instead, a multitude of truths coexist, arising from the interactions between bodies and worlds (Viveiros de Castro, 2015). Perspectivism does not simply invert Platonism—by prioritizing the body over the soul or the sensible over the intelligible—but dissolves the hierarchy itself, shifting the focus from the search for essences to an emphasis on the relationships that constitute existence. This idea challenges the Platonic belief in a single, unchanging truth that exists beyond appearances, asserting instead that truth is relational and context-dependent.

This article aims to explore the relationship between Platonism and Amerindian perspectivism, not as direct opposites, but as systems that reflect and contest each other in their understandings of reality. While Plato seeks an unchanging truth existing beyond the multitude and flux of the world (*Republic*, 517a–518b), Amerindian cosmologies assert that truth is found in movement, exchange, and the continual interplay of bodily perspectives (Viveiros de Castro, 1996, 2015, 2017). This shift is not merely theoretical; it has profound implications for how we inhabit and understand the world, challenging the foundations of Western metaphysics and paving the way for a framework that prioritizes relation over substance, position over essence, and the body over transcendence. As will be elucidated in the subsequent sections of this article, the divergence between Platonism and Amerindian perspectivism is not merely a contrast in metaphysical priorities but a profound shift in how reality itself is conceived and engaged. By laying the groundwork by outlining Platonism's commitment to permanence, hierarchy, and a transcendent realm of ideal forms that serves as the ultimate anchor for truth and meaning, we highlight its cultural specificity. This

framework, however, is far from universal; it reflects specific cultural assumptions that prioritize stability over change and universal principles over relational dynamics.

In the following, I move from this foundational critique to explore Amerindian perspectivism as a radical alternative, demonstrating how its metaphysics of transformation and immanence not only dismantles the Platonic binaries of body and soul, form and matter but also offers a relational and dynamic view of existence where being is constituted through encounters and multiplicity. By shifting the focus from transcendence to immanence, perspectivism challenges the philosophical paradigms that underpin much of Western thought, inviting us to reconsider how we inhabit and interpret the world.

## 2. PLATONISM: FORM, BODY, AND SOUL

Platonism, a foundational pillar of Western metaphysical thought, can be understood as a hierarchical system that privileges the eternal over the transient, the intelligible over the sensible, and essence over appearance. This metaphysical framework is grounded in Plato's concept of the 'world of Ideas' or 'Forms,' a transcendental realm where immutable and universal truths are believed to reside (Plato, *Phaedo* 100d). According to this view, the Forms are the perfect archetypes for everything found in the material world. Material objects, by contrast, are mere imitations of these ideal Forms, existing only as imperfect, transitory manifestations of eternal truths. Matter thus plays a subservient role, acting as a receptacle for these essences, but it is intrinsically flawed, subject to decay and change.

This distinction between the world of the Forms and the sensible world engenders a dualistic understanding of being and knowledge. In the domain of the senses, everything is in a state of flux; appearances deceive, and the world is an unstable flux of becoming. The body, in this schema, occupies a paradoxical position: while it allows the soul to engage with the material world, it also limits the soul's capacity to perceive ultimate truths. For Plato, the body is a prison, and the soul's true purpose is to transcend its physical confines and return to the realm of Forms (Plato, *Phaedo* 64a). Matter, as an imperfect substrate, stands in opposition to the true, unchanging essence of the Forms.

In Platonic thought, knowledge is not merely empirical or sensory; it involves an ascent from the transient realm of becoming to the eternal world of being. As Plato argues in *The Republic*, knowledge is not about the mere recognition of sensible objects but the apprehension of the Forms, which represent pure being and ultimate truth (Plato, *Republic* 509d). Matter, therefore, is something less real—nothing more than a shadow or a reflection of the true, stable reality that resides in the world of Ideas. The role of the soul in this dualistic system is vital. Plato posits that the soul is not bound to the material world, but rather belongs to the eternal realm of the Forms, capable of recognizing truth when liberated from the distractions of the body. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato likens the soul to a charioteer driving a chariot pulled by two horses, one noble and one unruly. This allegory symbolizes the soul's struggle to control the desires and passions of the body in its quest to return to the transcendent world of Forms (Plato, *Phaedrus* 246a-254e). The philosophical life, in this context, is one of purification—a striving to escape the constraints of the body and ascend to the intelligible, eternal realm of the Forms.

The body, for Plato, is more than a mere obstacle to the soul; it is a locus of desire and decay. It is subject to time, aging, pain, and death, all of which symbolize the impermanence of the material world. The body, as a receptacle of desires and sensations, obstructs the soul's ability to perceive pure, unchanging truths. Thus, the philosopher, in the Platonic worldview, is someone who learns to transcend bodily needs and desires in order to contemplate the Forms, living a life of asceticism, discipline, and intellectual pursuit (Plato, *Phaedo* 66b). The metaphysical dualism that Plato elaborates extends beyond his epistemological and ontological concerns; it also influences ethics, politics, and conceptions of humanity. The soul is valued as superior to the body, spirit as superior to matter, and the eternal as superior to the temporal. In this system, human beings are considered distinct from non-human animals, who do not partake in the same transcendent truths. The wise philosopher-king, as described in *The Republic*, stands above the populace because of his superior access to the eternal truths of the Forms (Plato, *Republic* 473c-474a). This ontological hierarchy between spirit and matter, universal and particular, the soul and the body, forms the bedrock of Platonic ethics and politics. In Platonism, difference is not understood as a fluid, relational concept but as an essentialist and transcendent category. Differences

among entities reflect their proximity to the Forms. The material world, with all its diversity and change, is seen as a pale imitation of the ideal, unchanging world of the Forms. This hierarchical and static ontology undergirds much of Western metaphysical thought, fostering a worldview that prioritizes stability over change and universality over relationality.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that in Plato's metaphysical system, the body holds a dual role. On the one hand, it is necessary for the soul's interaction with the material world, serving as the vehicle through which the soul apprehends the sensible realm. On the other hand, the body is an impediment, distracting the soul from the pursuit of truth and its true purpose—ascending to the world of Forms. This dualism—body and soul, appearance and reality—constitutes the very fabric of Platonic cosmology. For Plato, the body is not merely a passive instrument but an active obstacle, for it anchors the soul to the world of sensory illusion. As he articulates in *Phaedo*, "the body fills us with countless hindrances in our pursuit of truth" (*Phaedo* 66b). The body thus symbolizes the chaotic, mutable nature of the sensible world, whereas the soul, which seeks truth through dialectical reasoning, longs for the stability of the eternal Forms (*Republic* 510b).

The dualistic conception of the self in Platonic thought, which posits a strict separation between the soul and the body, leads to a conception of human existence as inherently incomplete and trapped in the material world. The soul, although divine and eternal, is imprisoned within the body, which is subject to the ravages of time, illness, and death. This existential condition is seen as tragic, a result of the soul's descent from the world of Forms into the chaotic and corruptible realm of the sensible. The ultimate goal of life, according to Plato, is to liberate the soul from this material prison through the cultivation of wisdom, virtue, and philosophical knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge, then, is not merely an intellectual endeavor but a moral and spiritual one, aimed at freeing the soul from the distractions and degradations of the body and guiding it back to its true, eternal nature (Plato, *Phaedo* 64d-69e).

In Platonic thought, the body's role in human existence is marked by suffering, desire, and death. The body is a site of imperfection, a "shadow" of the true, eternal nature of the soul. The philosopher's life, then, is a life of renunciation: renouncing bodily desires and pleasures in favor of the contemplative pursuit of higher knowledge. This existential condition is one of

alienation—an alienation from the body, from society, and from the material world. The ultimate liberation comes through the intellectual ascent to the world of Forms, where the soul can once again encounter the eternal truths of existence. The human condition, in this sense, is one of longing for transcendence and return to a pure, incorruptible realm (Plato, *Republic* 614b-621c)

This tension between the body and the soul, between the sensible and the intelligible, is more than an intellectual construct. It serves as the foundation for Plato's moral and political philosophy, which prioritizes the philosopher's soul over the material concerns of the body and society. The philosopher, through rigorous training, ascends from the deceptive realm of appearances to the higher, more stable realm of true knowledge—the Forms. Such a path to knowledge is not purely theoretical; it is a moral and spiritual journey that involves the purification of the soul from the distractions of the body and the earthly realm (Plato, *Phaedo* 69e). This journey toward truth, however, is not confined to the individual. Platonic dualism, with its rigid metaphysical hierarchy, has profound ethical and political consequences. In Platonic philosophy, the soul's ascent toward truth necessitates a strict organization of society, with each individual fulfilling their prescribed role according to their nature. The philosopher-king, as described in *The Republic*, stands at the pinnacle of this hierarchy, possessing the wisdom to govern because of their knowledge of the eternal Forms. This hierarchical worldview extends beyond metaphysical thought into the realm of ethics and politics, legitimizing authority based on a transcendent knowledge of what is truly "good" and "just" (Plato, *Republic* 514a-520a). The political implications of this system are significant: the philosopher-king, as a custodian of the Forms, is seen as the only one fit to rule. The lower classes, lacking the intellectual capacity to perceive the true Forms, are assigned roles based on their material needs and skills. This vision of society mirrors the metaphysical dualism that separates the intelligible from the sensible, the eternal from the temporal. In *The Republic*, Plato establishes a rigid social structure that mirrors his metaphysical hierarchy, with the philosopher at the top and the workers and slaves at the bottom, all governed by an overarching principle of transcendent justice.

The contrast between Platonic dualism and Amerindian perspectivism will become clearer as we explore their implications in more detail. To begin, Platonic dualism constructs a metaphysical framework characterized by static,

hierarchical relationships, where the world of Forms represents the ultimate reality, and the material world is a mere shadow. In stark contrast, Amerindian perspectivism offers a radically different model, one defined by relationality and multiplicity. Perspectivism challenges the Platonic hierarchy of essence over appearance, soul over body, and the eternal over the temporal, proposing instead a dynamic ontology where truth arises not from a singular, transcendent Form, but from the ongoing interactions between beings.

While Platonic thought privileges the intellect and the philosopher-king, perspectivism disperses knowledge across various beings, each with its own perspective, and power emerges from the relations between these beings. The body, rather than being seen as a prison for the soul, becomes a means of accessing truth through its connections to other bodies. Likewise, the soul is not a transcendent essence but a relational presence, existing through its entanglement with the world. In embracing multiplicity, contingency, and relationality, Amerindian perspectivism not only challenges the Platonic model of a static, hierarchical cosmos but also dissolves its fundamental assumptions, offering a new metaphysical paradigm. This paradigm shifts the focus away from seeking immutable truths and towards understanding reality as a web of interconnected beings, each constituting and being constituted by its relations.

As we proceed, we will explore how this relational and perspectival understanding of truth transforms not only our conception of reality but also the ethical, political, and existential questions that arise from it. By reorienting our attention from the pursuit of absolute truths to the relational constitution of existence, perspectivism provides a more fluid, dynamic framework for engaging with the world—one that not only challenges Platonic thought but also invites us to rethink our place within the intricate web of relations that defines the fabric of reality.

### 3. AMERINDIAN PERSPECTIVISM: BODY, SOUL, AND MULTIPLICITY

Amerindian perspectivism, as articulated by anthropologists such as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, offers a profound challenge to Western epistemological frameworks by proposing a radically different conception of reality grounded in relationality and multiplicity. This theory, emerging from the ethnographic study of Indigenous cultures in the Americas, suggests that beings—human, animal,



plant, or spiritual—perceive the world from distinct vantage points, shaped by their specific modes of existence. In this view, each entity is not simply a fixed, objective object in the world but exists in relation to others, and its reality is contingent upon the perspective from which it is encountered. For example, an animal might see itself as a human, while humans might experience animals and plants as possessing human-like qualities, depending on the perspective they adopt. Perspectivism does not simply invert the human-animal distinction but posits a more fluid, dynamic ontology where beings' identities are constantly shifting in relation to one another.

This relational and perspectival understanding of reality goes beyond anthropocentrism, suggesting that different beings occupy multiple, overlapping worlds. For Amerindian perspectivism, the world is not divided into a hierarchy of forms or categories but is constituted through the ongoing interactions among these diverse perspectives. This contrasts sharply with Western thought, which tends to privilege human cognition and experience as the yardstick for truth. Instead, perspectivism proposes that knowledge and truth are dispersed among different beings, and that power, agency, and even morality are rooted in these interrelations. The concept challenges essentialist notions of identity and existence, urging a recognition of the fluid, contingent nature of reality itself. It reorients the question of what constitutes knowledge not toward a search for immutable, universal truths, but toward an understanding of the shifting, relational dynamics that define all forms of existence.

At the heart of Amerindian perspectivism lies a fundamental inversion of Western metaphysical thought. Whereas Platonism posits a universal transcendence that hierarchizes and fixes reality, indigenous cosmologies unfold a pluralistic, relational, and immanent ontology (Viveiros de Castro, 2017). For Amerindian thought, the world is not a static theater where eternal essences project onto mutable forms; rather, it is a living web of perspectives that intersect, negotiate, and constantly redefine the very nature of reality (Viveiros de Castro, 2017). In this view, the body and soul are not opposites but complementary aspects that co-constitute one another (Viveiros de Castro, 2015). Similarly, form is not a transcendent archetype, but a contingent phenomenon that emerges from each subject's position within the relational fabric of the cosmos.

In Platonism, the body is often viewed as a prison, an obstacle to the soul's transcendence (Plato, *Phaedo*). By contrast, in Amerindian perspectivism, the

body is the starting point and condition for any relation to the world. It is more than a mere material structure; it serves as an ontological operator (Viveiros de Castro, 1996). The body organizes the world and gives rise to the categories of being and reality. Each species, whether jaguar, human, or spirit, perceives the world through the body it inhabits. This bodily perspective is not merely perceptive but constitutive; for instance, a jaguar sees blood where humans see wine, and a vulture sees fresh meat where humans see decay (Viveiros de Castro, 2015). Reality is not a universal constant but a multiplicity of emerging realities, each defined by the body's relational position. This principle challenges the Platonic split between appearance and essence: in perspectivism, the body does not conceal truth but configures it. There is no singular, transcendent truth that subsumes all perspectives; instead, truth is an interplay of transformations, each body offering its version of the real. Thus, the body is not the soul's prison but the condition for its expression in the world.

If the body represents difference, the soul embodies equivalence. In Amerindian perspectivism, all entities—human, animal, and spiritual—share a common interiority, a soul that grants them agency, intentionality, and humanity (Viveiros de Castro, 2015). Unlike the Cartesian soul, which is individual and unique, the Amerindian soul is a universal principle that permeates all forms of life. However, unlike the Platonic soul, which seeks to transcend the body, the Amerindian soul manifests precisely through it, shaping the way each being perceives the world.

The soul is not an exiled entity yearning to return to an eternal homeland; it is a principle of continuity that links all forms of existence. As Viveiros de Castro (2017) notes, ethnographies of lowland South American indigenous peoples describe humans, jaguars, and spirits as sharing the same soul but living in different bodies. It is this bodily difference that defines their perspectives on reality. The soul is universal, but the perspective is singular. Amerindian perspectivism dissolves the Platonic dichotomy between the universal and the particular, asserting that the universal exists only in the plurality of perspectives. By rejecting the hierarchical relationship between essence and appearance, perspectivism redefines form. In Platonism, form is a fixed, transcendent entity that pre-exists material things and gives them meaning. In perspectivism, form is relational, contingent, and emergent—it arises through the encounter between

bodies and worlds, not as an eternal model but as a temporary configuration (Viveiros de Castro, 1996).

Consider the example of a shaman in transformation. When a shaman adopts the perspective of a jaguar, he does not abandon his humanity; rather, he reconfigures it. His form is not a static given but something created and remade through new relationships. This ontological flexibility, which allows beings to move between forms and perspectives, is central to perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro, 1996). What matters is not what a being "is" in essence, but what it "does" in relation to others. In contrast to the Platonic conception of being as a pyramid—with pure Forms at the top and the formless chaos of matter at the base—Amerindian perspectivism organizes the real into a network of relations (Viveiros de Castro, 2017). The world is not a place where essences manifest; it is a field of relations in which differences are produced and negotiated. This relational ontology dissolves the rigid boundaries between essence and appearance, human and non-human, spirit and body. Everything is relation, and it is through these relations that being emerges.

While Amerindian perspectivism rejects the hierarchical view of reality, this does not imply an absence of order. In perspectivism, the real is organized, but this organization is not fixed or transcendent; it is fluid, contingent, and situated. Each body organizes the world in its own way, and these organizations coexist within a multiplicity that is not reducible to any universal principle (Viveiros de Castro, 1996). Unlike Platonism, which seeks to unify the multiplicity of the sensible world into a singular truth, perspectivism asserts that multiplicity is irreducible—it is the very condition of being.

Perspectivism is not merely an inversion of Platonism; it is a radical displacement. It does not replace one hierarchy with another but destabilizes the very concept of hierarchy. It does not propose a new essence but an ontology of relations. It does not seek truth in a transcendent realm but in the exchanges and transformations that occur in the here and now. If Platonism attempts to "fix difference," perspectivism celebrates its mobility. It does not freeze reality into a singular and universal form; instead, it allows it to flow, multiply, and reconfigure. It does not seek to transcend the world but to inhabit it in ever-new ways. Thus, Amerindian perspectivism is not just a cosmology; it is an anti-metaphysics—a way of thinking that rejects fixed categories, rigid dualisms, and universal

hierarchies.

By deconstructing Platonism and offering a relational alternative, Amerindian perspectivism not only challenges our conceptions of body, soul, and form but also reimagines the very act of philosophizing. It invites us to abandon the search for eternal truths and embrace the multiplicity of the real—not as an obstacle but as the very condition of possibility. At the core of Amerindian perspectivism, the body ceases to be a prison or a mere vehicle for the soul's transcendence; it becomes the locus of agency, transformation, and relationality. The body, in this view, is not a fixed entity but a malleable operator that shapes and is shaped by the relations it establishes. To be human, a jaguar, or a spirit is not a matter of essence but of positionality—the body conditions how one inhabits and perceives the world. However, the body is not merely physical; it is defined by its capacity to be affected and to affect other bodies. In Amerindian thought, the body can be transformed without losing the continuity of the soul. For example, when a shaman dons the skin of a jaguar, he does not cease to be human; rather, he acquires the capacities of the jaguar—its strength, vision, and position within the cosmos. The body, therefore, serves as the interface connecting the shared interiority of all things with the specificities of each perspective.

This understanding destabilizes the Platonic dichotomy between matter and spirit. The body is not a receptacle for the soul, nor an obstacle to truth; it is the means by which the soul manifests and interacts with the world. Moreover, it is the foundation of the multiplicity of reality: each body inaugurates a world, not by embodying a transcendent form but by constituting a singular perspective (Viveiros de Castro, 2017). In perspectivism, form is not a fixed essence but an emergent event, created in the encounter between bodies. Unlike Platonic ontology, where form gives identity to things, Amerindian thought views form as a relational effect—contingent and constantly reconfigured according to context. A jaguar is a jaguar in relation to the human who observes it, but from the jaguar's perspective, it may be something entirely different—a "human" inhabiting another world.

This ontological flexibility is evident in shamanic practices, where the change of form is not simply symbolic but a reorientation of being. When a shaman adopts the perspective of a jaguar, he is not merely "imitating" the animal; he is

---

temporarily inhabiting its world, adopting its vision, habits, and relations (Viveiros de Castro, 1996). Form, in this context, is transient, mutable, and always dependent on relational context. Perspectivism rejects the idea that there is an underlying essence that defines the being of things. Instead, it asserts that being is always a becoming—an ongoing process of transformation driven by relational dynamics. In contrast to Platonism, which views multiplicity as a problem to be resolved by returning to a universal truth, perspectivism embraces multiplicity as the very condition of reality. The world is not a singular essence manifested through many appearances; rather, it is a plurality of distinct, interconnected realities, each shaped by its own relations (Viveiros de Castro, 2015). These worlds are not merely different versions of a single reality; they are irreducible to one another, each as real as the others, and defined by the interactions between bodies and perspectives.

In this way, Amerindian perspectivism offers a profound challenge to Western thought, inviting us to rethink the foundations of philosophy and the nature of being. It teaches us that philosophy need not seek fixed foundations or eternal truths; instead, it can be a continuous experimentation—a way to explore the possibilities of the real. This relational philosophy celebrates conflict, difference, and transformation as fundamental to existence and reminds us that reality is not something we possess but something we create, together, in the encounter between our perspectives.

Building on the contrast between Platonism and Amerindian perspectivism, we see that the former's focus on permanence, universal truths, and transcendent realities is fundamentally at odds with the latter's embrace of transformation, multiplicity, and immanence. While Platonism organizes the world in rigid hierarchies, positioning the body as an imperfect vessel and the soul as the divine aspirant, perspectivism dissolves these boundaries, asserting that body and soul are not distinct, fixed substances but interconnected, fluid modes of experience (Viveiros de Castro, 2017). This shift in perspective radically alters our understanding of being and knowledge, suggesting that truth is not a fixed property or a universal constant to be discovered, but rather a relational effect, born of encounters between multiple, dynamic perspectives.

In this sense, Amerindian perspectivism does not merely critique Western metaphysical structures; it proposes an alternative ontology that reconfigures our

very approach to reality. By rejecting the idea of a singular, transcendent metaphysical order, perspectivism opens up a more expansive and inclusive way of thinking about existence—one that values difference, contingency, and transformation over stasis and universality.

The preceding discussion of Amerindian perspectivism's treatment of body, soul, and multiplicity underscores its distinctive approach to being and subjectivity, one rooted in fluidity and relationality rather than fixed dichotomies. By demonstrating that body and soul are not static or hierarchically ordered entities but dynamic and contextually interwoven modes of existence, Amerindian thought disrupts the Cartesian and Platonic legacies that dominate much of Western metaphysics (Viveiros de Castro, 2017). This ontological framework, centered on transformation and multiplicity, lays the groundwork for a broader philosophical engagement with the foundations of metaphysical thought itself.

The next section extends this inquiry by placing Amerindian perspectivism in direct contrast with Platonism, exploring how these two systems represent divergent metaphysical orientations. While Platonism seeks permanence and transcendence through a universal hierarchy of forms, Amerindian perspectivism embraces immanence, flux, and contingency as the defining conditions of existence. This juxtaposition not only highlights the philosophical richness of Amerindian perspectivism but also reveals its capacity to critique and reconfigure some of the central assumptions underpinning Western metaphysical traditions. In doing so, it invites us to consider a radically different way of conceiving truth, being, and the cosmos—one that eschews fixity and embraces the transformative power of relational encounters (Viveiros de Castro, 1996).

#### 4. AMERINDIAN PERSPECTIVISM AS COUNTER-PLATONISM: A METAPHYSICS OF TRANSFORMATION

While Platonism grounds Western philosophy in an ontology of permanence, foundation, and transcendence, Amerindian perspectivism offers a radically different metaphysical approach: one centered on transformation, immanence, and multiplicity. Perspectivism does not merely challenge Platonism's core concepts—such as form, idea, soul, and body—it exposes their cultural contingency and historical specificity. Rather than presenting an “anti”

---

metaphysics, Amerindian thought affirms a new way to conceive of being, the world, and their relations. Where Platonism seeks a transcendent order to overcome sensible chaos, perspectivism demonstrates that disorder is not to be tamed; it is the very force of creation. Multiplicity, instability, and difference are not flaws to be corrected but the fundamental principles that structure the cosmos.

In Platonism, a hierarchical divide is established between the intelligible and the sensible, between eternal forms and contingent matter, with the body positioned at the bottom—a flawed vessel—while the soul, carrying reason and memory of the divine, aims for ascent. This dualism is central to the Platonic metaphysical structure. In contrast, perspectivism deconstructs this pyramid by showing that body and soul are not separate substances or hierarchically ordered, but interconnected modes of experiencing the world. In Amerindian thought, the body-soul distinction is fluid, transient, and contextual. There is no soul that transcends the body to impart form; rather, the soul is intimately tied to the body, a subjectivity that emerges through relational encounters between humans, non-humans, spirits, and the environment (Viveiros de Castro, 2016). Far from being an obstacle to transcendence, the body is the means by which being manifests and relates.

This ontology is powerfully expressed in shamanism, where the shaman, adopting the perspective of an animal or spirit, does not transcend his body; he transforms it. This passage between bodies and souls is not metaphorical; it is ontological. In perspectivism, the soul is less a fixed principle than a transformative power, a capacity to inhabit the world from multiple perspectives. Where Platonism is a philosophy of permanence—searching for the unchanging amidst deceptive appearances—perspectivism is a philosophy of transformation. In Amerindian thought, reality is not what remains constant, but what changes and transforms through encounters with the other.

Transformation is central to this worldview. Being is not something possessed statically; it is something continuously made, remade, and undone in relational encounters. A jaguar may be human to itself, but not to humans. A spirit is a distinct entity, yet in different contexts, can be a relative, ally, or enemy. This variability is not a limitation but the very structure of reality. While Platonism seeks to stabilize the world and fix its meanings through a universal truth, perspectivism embraces instability as the condition of existence. There is no

foundation that transcends change—only change itself, which serves as the ground upon which everything is built and continually reformed (Viveiros de Castro, 2015).

Whereas in Platonism, the soul is the part of being that comes closest to the divine; in perspectivism, the soul is a principle of otherness. It does not connect the individual to a universal truth but enables the individual to inhabit multiple worlds, assuming different perspectives. The soul is not a reflection of the intelligible but a force of invention, allowing for transformation and the crossing of boundaries between modes of being (Viveiros de Castro, 1996). In Amerindian thought, the soul is not exclusive to humans; it is shared by animals, plants, spirits, and even objects. Everything possesses a soul, an interiority that allows it to see the world from its own perspective. The soul is not what separates humans from non-humans but what connects them in a network of relations. What distinguishes a human from a jaguar or spirit is not the presence or absence of a soul, but the unique position each occupies in the cosmos. In Platonism, truth is a property of eternal forms, a light shining behind appearances. In perspectivism, truth is not discovered but made. It is not found in a transcendent world, but in the relationships that constitute the world. To a jaguar, its prey is “people,” just as the jaguar is “people” to itself. This difference in perspectives is not a mistake or illusion but a legitimate truth, a situated expression of the relation between bodies (Viveiros de Castro, 2017).

This relational conception of truth challenges the Platonic logic of participation, where things are true insofar as they approach the forms. In perspectivism, there are no forms grounding the real; rather, forms emerge and dissipate in the flow of life. Truth is not something revealed behind appearances but something that manifests in the interaction between perspectives. By offering an ontology of transformation, Amerindian perspectivism dismantles the categories of Platonism and opens a space for thinking about the world differently. It does not replace one metaphysics with another; it rejects the need for a single metaphysical foundation to explain reality (Viveiros de Castro, 2017). More than a critique of Western thought, Amerindian perspectivism is a philosophical practice, an experimentation that invites us to abandon the search for foundational truths in favor of fluidity, contingency, and multiplicity. It teaches us that the real is not something to contemplate from the outside but something we



---

create through inhabiting, transforming, and relating. Ultimately, perspectivism offers not only an Amerindian cosmology but a philosophy of difference, an ethics of otherness, and a politics of encounter. It is an invitation to think, live, and create in a world where being is not fixed but always, inevitably, other.

leifgrunewald@gmail.com

## 6. REFERENCES

- Plato. *Timaeus. Critias. Cleitophon. Menexenus. Epistles*. Trans. Robert Gregg Bury. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1929. 656pp.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Republic, Volume I*. Trans. Trans. Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2013. 656pp.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Euthyphro. Apology. Crito. Phaedo*. Trans. Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2017. 576pp.
- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. Os pronomes cosmológicos e o perspectivismo ameríndio. *Mana*, 2(2), 115-144, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Relative Native: Essays on Indigenous Conceptual Worlds*. Trans. Martin Holbraad and Julia Sauma. Chicago: Hau Books. 2015. 366pp.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Cannibal Metaphysics*, trans., ed., and intro. Peter Skafish. Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2014, 229 pp.