About this document:

This creative invitation to learn more about our new organisation, Perspectiva, has been released in Beta. The hard copy was prepared in time for sharing at the Alter Ego event in Kent, UK, on the weekend of June 4th and 5th 2016. It felt timely to accelerate the publication, to share it with almost a hundred leading intellectuals and social activists from around Europe, meeting to consider the relationship between personal change and political change in depth.

Based on feedback from participants at Alter Ego, and after discussing the ideas more broadly, we plan to create a revised version of the document, which will also include a fuller set of references, additional images and fewer typos.

We are therefore eager to receive all forms of feedback from the reader. Please contact Director of Perspectiva, Dr Jonathan Rowson on Jonathan@perspectiva-institute.co.uk.

We anticipate there will be a revised digital copy of this document on our website: www.systems-souls-society.com later in 2016.

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Thank you to Tomas Bjorkman, Ian Christie and Ronan Harrington for feedback on the text. I am very grateful to Charlie Norman for preparing evocative illustrations on complex ideas at short notice, and to Tom Hartshorne for giving up the best part of his bank holiday weekend to help the document look enticing to read. And thank you to Siva, for love, food and time. I take full responsibility for any remaining errors, conflations or exaggerations.

Dedication:

To my wonderful sons Kailash and Vishnu, who will have to live it...
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1. Introducing Perspectiva

Maybe you are searching among the branches for what only appears in the roots. – Rumi.

It is a curious feature of the modern world that those who dare to think philosophically are often told to ‘get real’. This injunction usually means narrow your sphere of concern, and don't expect too much of people. Perspectiva was created because we believe ‘getting real’ means moving in the opposite direction. We need to look broadly and deeply at where we are, and grow to meet the challenges of our time.

Whether you seek a sane economy, a caring society, an empowering constitution or a rapid clean energy transition, your political hope will probably rest upon an understanding of systems change. Perspectiva exists because our conventional notions of ‘understanding’, ‘change’ and ‘system’ are limited, and part of the inertia we need to overcome.

We believe the world’s major challenges stem from the failure of political culture to honour the fullness of reality. In response to crises assumed to be about things ‘outside’, we stand for the legitimacy and relevance of our inner worlds; lived experience, forms of attachment, relationship and identification, love, hope, myth, desire, narrative, memory, meaning, belonging, becoming, flourishing, attention, projection, empathy, trust, personal growth, purpose, transcendence...

Our research platform seeks to inform and inspire, generating networks and practices to build intellectual confidence in those who seek to bring these realities to bear on the critical policy challenges of our time.
Sometimes ‘systems change’ just ain’t enough.

To help locate Perspectiva’s work, it is worth briefly reflecting on how our position on ‘systems change’ compares with other ‘social change organisations’. However, ‘social change’ doesn’t mean very much by itself, and ‘systems change’ often means too much, so we need to sketch the context.

Work on ‘social change’ is usually about attempting to solve problems within given policy areas. For instance, how do you change government policy on solar tariffs so that the UK can increase its proportion of renewable energy? Or, what’s the best way to lobby to try to increase the proportion of health spending on mental health within the NHS?

At a slightly deeper level, sometimes social change attempts to address the policy areas in question by recognising their place within larger systems, often at a global level. For instance, can you change cultural attitudes towards climate change as a whole by reframing it not as one environmental problem of many, but as a unique threat to public health, social cohesion or national security? Would we even need a welfare system if we had a universal basic income? Are technological breakthroughs likely to be significant enough to allow indefinite economic growth on a planet with ecological limits?

In attempting to answer these questions about social change, it becomes clear that beyond problems, policies and systems there are also paradigms – clusters of ideas and practices that constitute the system and the meanings it gives rise to, including processes of resistance and system change.
We don’t just have an ‘economic system’, we have a particular kind of finance and competition driven capitalist economy supported and reinforced by forms of cultural discourse and advertising about what it means to be successful (‘neoliberalism’) at a time of secularisation. We should therefore ask how we can retain a vibrant market economy while shifting the emphasis away from obtuse metrics of success like GDP, towards broader outcomes relating to ecological resilience, social cohesion and human flourishing.

However, after trying to ‘change the system’ for a while, you begin to sense ‘the system’ is remarkably resilient, which is where Perspectiva comes in. Perspectiva was created because we believe efforts to change the system will continue to underachieve unless they are grounded in a deeper understanding of the immunities to change built into the paradigm. We need to work at a more subtle level to shape its evolution.

The principal mistake is conflating the system with the paradigm; for instance many who offer a sophisticated analysis of the relationship between social, economic and ecological systems have relatively little to say about the cultural, psychological and spiritual elements that define and are defined by these systems. Without a more inclusive frame that better captures the interplay between human and habitat, psyche and polis, ego and eco, we will continue to struggle.

To summarise:

Some work on problems within particular policies – Solve the problem!

Some work on policies within particular systems – Amend the policy!

Some work on systems within particular paradigms - Change the system!

Perspectiva works on transforming the paradigm - Deepen the process of system change.
What happens in the sauna...

*Perspectiva* emerged from conversations between its co-founders, Scottish Philosopher, climate campaigner and chess Grandmaster Dr Jonathan Rowson and Swedish Social theorist, entrepreneur, and Club of Rome member Tomas Bjorkman in the second half of 2015.

Jonathan had recently published an RSA report, *Spiritualise: revitalising Spirituality to address 21st century challenges* which surpassed expectations in terms of impact – many influential people seemed to be ‘coming out’ in terms of recognising that the inner life is hugely relevant politically. He was also completing a public engagement project on the seven dimensions of climate change (science, law, technology, money, democracy, culture, behaviour) and was looking for an institutional pathway to connect complex global challenges and human development.

Tomas had recently hosted a range of reflective social change retreats at his *Eskäret* Foundation. He observed a fascinating disparity between the relatively objective and conventional language in the formal meetings and the relatively subjective and spiritual language used in smaller informal groupings, for instance after a long working day during the traditional evening sauna. Professionally, people wielded reason and evidence, but when they felt free to connect at a human level they were much more curious about the relevance of longing, ultimate ends and scope for meaningful personal change.

Tomas was finishing his book on ‘The Market Myth’ and had recently helped to support an organisation focussed on ecological and systems thinking, The Bateson Institute, which launched its London chapter at the RSA, where we initially met.
Both of us were beginning to wonder why ‘system change’ seemed so elusive. For instance we both deeply admire the work of the New Economics Foundation, but their transformational ideas did not seem to be significantly influencing mainstream policy debates. We were both beginning to home in the potential significance of the blind spot in many such social change organisations; there was often a nod to well-being, identity or behaviour change, but something resembling a fear of going further. In the desire to appear rigorous and serious, deeper existential concerns about meaning, transcendence and purpose were sidestepped.

We share a fascination for human development, particularly as expressed in the work of Robert Kegan, but also as expressed in its more popular forms, for instance Spiral Dynamism Theory. The question was how to make sense of the practical and policy relevance of these ideas. A picture of ‘life as such’ began to take shape that comprised the co-arising of objective (scientific, emergent) subjective (psychological, spiritual) and inter-subjective (cultural, political) features of the world.

**Systems, Souls and Society**

Perspectiva’s focus of ‘Systems, souls and society’ is about emphasising the need to understand the world from at least three major and distinct vantage points. From considering the work of ecologists, systems theorists and looking more deeply at human development as a bio-psycho-social process, you can discern a coherent set of relationships between living processes (biology, ecology, systems) subjective processes (human experience, psychological and spiritual development, ethical commitment) and cultural outcomes (ideology, society, economy, democracy). These overlapping concerns are partly inspired by Karl Popper’s three world ontology, but we express them differently.
Systems: Complex adaptive processes, principles of emergence, and the inter-relationship of parts and wholes. We begin with an ecological view of the natural world in which consciousness is an integral part, with the *humility* of systems thinking applied to everything:

"We can't impose our will on a system. We can listen to what the system tells us, and discover how its properties and our values can work together to bring forth something much better than could ever be produced by our will alone." – Donella H Meadow
Souls: The unfolding of inner life in conscious and unconscious processes; from early emotional development to psychological integration in adulthood, and reported experiences of unity and transcendence.

We can say that there is in every organism, at whatever level, an underlying flow of movement toward constructive fulfillment of its inherent possibilities. - Carl Rogers vii
Society: Our shared and contested world of ideas and images. Shifting pattern of relationships, values, icons and signs in our communities, institutions and nations.

We are always somehow bootstrapping when we try to understand and change society. Or as Frank Pasquale puts it in ‘The Black Box Society’: viii

*What we do and don’t know about the social (as opposed to the natural) world is not inherent in its nature, but is itself a function of social constructs.*
These three aspects of our world are all in themselves complex evolving adaptive systems, but with fundamentally different ontologies, in need of different epistemological approaches. We need different tools for understanding these fundamentally different aspects of our world, while always remembering that they together form an undividable evolving complex whole.

The idea of ‘systems change’ risks only dealing with the world as ‘it’. We also need ‘soul change’ and ‘societal change’ which means, in addition to dealing with ‘it’, we need to address issues from the myriad ‘I’ and ‘we’ perspectives too.

**Why The Beatles were wrong...**

In personal and professional relationships over many years, we have often heard arguments that go roughly as follows:

1. We are facing a crisis that manifests most acutely and urgently in ecological terms but which is also social, economic and political. If the violent weather of a four degree world doesn’t get us, the youth unemployment, income inequality, deteriorating mental health, breakdown of social trust, democratic disengagement, or terrorism will.

2. This predicament stems from a paradigm of thought and feeling that is built upon erroneous and superseded ‘Newtonian’ and ‘Cartesian’ assumptions about mind and matter. These distortions about reality give rise to delusions at the level of values and priorities at a political level. We find ourselves adrift and bemused as the world is denatured and devalued. We are perpetually hijacked by a virulent form of capitalism fuelled by a misunderstanding and misapplication of economics (‘neoliberalism’).
3. The proper response to the crisis and the ideology that underpins it is to forge a new paradigm of ecological awareness and societal transformation that is more firmly rooted in a truer grasp of reality. This deeper grasp of objective reality is informed by Science, particularly theoretical biology or post-Newtonian Physics. The language of complex adaptive systems, emergence, relativity and observer effects is asked to bear the burden of political hope. The deeper grasp of subjective reality also recognises the importance of spiritual insight and practice which is sometimes religious, but need not be. Sometimes the science and spirituality appear to inform or echo each other in encouraging ways. Jonathan’s work as Director of the Social Brain Centre at the RSA was partly in this space – intrigued by what follows from humans being deeply ‘social’.

That's 'the setting' of many conventional discussions of transformation. 'The plot' is then something like:

4. ‘We need to discuss how we get from our deluded world of crisis (points 1 and 2) to the roots and fruits of the promised land (point 3). The outcome of such discussions then goes:

5. ‘From attempting to discuss the transformation we need, it seems we need to learn more about the deep diagnosis(point 3) and how to communicate it better.’ The group in question typically feels nourished and inspired but the world as a whole is broadly unaffected.

This deliberately provocative formulation does a disservice to a lot of great work, often conducted with passion in a spirit of service and dedication, but we have experienced it directly enough, often enough, to wonder why it keeps recurring.

What tends to happen in spiral dynamic terms (a map of the unfolding of human consciousness) is that in a spirit of conviviality the group stays at a mostly at a 'spiritually progressive' or 'green meme' level of consciousness i.e. the emphasis is broadly communitarian and is about love, relationships,
respecting differences and a turn away from acquisitive materialism towards open affiliation, creativity and compassion. ix

What tends to be missing however is a heartfelt recognition of the fundamental weaknesses of this form of consciousness; particularly reluctance to:

- Respect competing forms of value eg loyalty, individuality, status or honour.
- Acknowledge value conflicts and personal projection inherent in power struggles.
- Recognise the addictive feel-good quality of indignation
- Work through discomfort with the kinds of hierarchy needed to set direction and resolve conflict and impasses.

Since these knots tend to remain untied, when you strip back the green meme conversation it often sounds uncomfortably close to: "If people were better, the world would be better."

**Power and Love**

Perspectiva exists partly to address not so much the faults and needs of the world directly, but the immunity to change within this kind of 'green meme' worldview that tends to hold sway in the domain of systems change. We have to get beyond the tacitly held view that: "If only the rest of the world were a bit more like us, everything would begin to sort itself out."

We believe the vision of a world where we had more time, better relationships and richer spiritual lives on a healthier planet is a good one, but also that this worldview is unlikely to take hold universally. Indeed this worldview will remain niche unless it grows into something that is politically generative rather than merely hoped for or idealised. As Professor
Ursula King put it to me (JR): "If it's not transformed, it can't be transformative".

To paraphrase, love is not all you need (The Beatles were wrong). Those seeking to bring love and peace into the world need to get better at understanding the legitimate desire for power. Martin Luther King’s famous challenge is more relevant than ever:

“Power properly understood is ... the strength required to bring about social political, and economic change... One of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites- polar opposites- so that love is identified with the resignation of power and power with the denial of love... Now we’ve got to get this thing right... Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anaemic... It is precisely this collision of immoral power with powerless morality which constitutes the major crisis of our time.”

Perspectiva’s challenge is this: How can we act on the understanding that the world is ‘reckless and abusive’ in a way that doesn't risk becoming 'sentimental and anaemic'? To give one example, in the context of climate change, our view is that the divestment movement is starting to do that in a powerful way. The challenge is to see that - properly understood and directed – even money can be a *spiritual* tool.

The fundamental intuition that we have to build a new paradigm is absolutely right, it's just that many putative builders, including ourselves, may need to acquire some new tools.
The evolving self

The world is approaching a range of ecological, social and human limits that our current economic, political, cultural and spiritual resources seem unable to properly acknowledge and address. Few deny that our challenges are connected: ecological degradation, economic insecurity, political alienation, social fragmentation, hyper-terrorism, spiritual confusion - but we need to develop the human and cultural capacity to adequately understand, integrate and act upon those connections.

In this context, ‘perspective taking’ is not merely about seeing things from more than one point of view, but also having the capacity to see how views are constructed within and between people. The ongoing challenge is to develop fluency in a wider range of ontologies (realities) epistemologies (theories of knowledge) and methodologies (forms of research and innovation) to better connect the human condition with the ecological and political conditions of the world.

As Political Strategist Ronan Harrington puts it: "We need to understand how the world is socially constructed in order for it to be remade." To do that, however, we need to grow in what Harvard Professor Robert Kegan calls 'mental complexity' which means significantly improved capacities for perspective taking; particularly an ability to 'take as object' that which we were previously subject to. In practice that means avoiding unnecessary values wars and disagreeing more productively and creatively.

Becoming curious towards the nature of perception, emotion and perspective taking characterises much of psychotherapy and mindfulness-based practices, but it also applies to things like our political spectrum - an uninspired heuristic that we nonetheless struggle to talk about politics without. The same point applies to the fixation with 'jobs and growth' and
'productivity'. In Kegan's terms, many of our central political and economic ideas 'have us' rather than us 'having them'.

To get beyond such blind spots and limitations we need rapid evolution of consciousness at a cultural level and at an individual level. This is a crucial notion, but it's very hard to give it public traction because of the implicit hierarchy in the idea that there is developmental diversity in society, and a range of levels of ‘mental complexity’. We need to find a way, not least because such levels are never fixed. Perspectiva will keep this conversation going.

The world is approaching a range of ecological, social and human limits that our current economic, political, cultural and spiritual resources seem unable to properly acknowledge and address.
2. About Us

Purpose

Perspectiva's overall purpose is nascent and evolving, but our commitment is long term. We are sceptical about most theories of change and our goal is not to immediately have 'policy impact' by speaking on national news, 'secure a minister' for our public events or shape primary legislation. Our intention, rather, is to slowly but steadfastly transform academic, public, policy and practitioner perceptions of the validity and coherence of examining real world problems with a deeper appreciation of the influence of our inner worlds.

We are keen to make swift progress, but the success of the venture will be judged over decades rather than months or years. In the early stages we will build intellectual foundations and weave a network of interested parties, with innovative methodologies, practices and forms of engagement co-arising.

Activities

2016 is a developmental year for Perspectiva. Our intellectual contribution will take shape on our blog site - InsideOut - and the material from the blog, including comments, will form the basis of a book to function as the intellectual foundation of Perspectiva, which we hope to publish towards the end of 2017.

Throughout 2016 Director Dr Jonathan Rowson is completing an existing book project for Palgrave Macmillan, The Seven Dimensions of Climate Change (Science, Technology, Law,
Money, Democracy, Culture, Behaviour). This integrated and systemic approach to the world's toughest problem will begin to illustrate Perpsectiva's approach to complex global issues.

This year we will also be hosting some private events to build our network of associates and advisors, and preparing some funding applications for projects to show the practical value of our philosophy. In the second half of 2016, we anticipate a significant updating of our website, with details of projects, advisors and associates, and further details of planned activities.

Our contribution will be experiment with forms of inquiry, evidence, relationship, dissemination and impact that illuminate aspects of knowledge and reality that are often ignored, neglected or distorted. Our role is to show, for instance, that metaphor, meaning, narrative, intuition and emotion can sit alongside data and reason in the public domain, without any sense of displacement or shame.

Advisory Board and Associates

We are in the process of assembling an advisory board of academics, thinkers, policy analysts and social innovators. We are currently considering how best to structure forms of engagement, membership and affiliation with Perspectiva and welcome inquiries or suggestions.

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Dr Jonathan Rowson

Dr Jonathan Rowson is co-founder and Director of Perspectiva. He was until recently Director of the Social Brain Centre at the RSA where, over the course of six years, he authored a range of influential research reports on behaviour change, climate change and spirituality, and curated and chaired a range of related events.

Jonathan is an applied philosopher with degrees spanning a range of humanities and social sciences from Oxford, Harvard and Bristol Universities. In a former life he was a chess Grandmaster and British Champion (2004–6) and views the game as a continuing source of insight and inspiration. His book, The Seven Dimensions of Climate Change: rethinking the world’s toughest problem will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in early 2017.

He lives in Putney, London, with his wife Siva, an academic lawyer from South India and their two sons, Kailash and Vishnu.

His recent work includes Money Talks: Divest Invest and the Battle for Climate Realism and Spiritualise: Revitalising Spirituality to address 21st Century Challenges

You can reach him at jonathan@perspectiva-institute.co.uk and on Twitter @jonathan_rowson
Tomas Björkman

Tomas Björkman is co-founder of Perspectiva. He has a long career behind him as entrepreneur in a variety of businesses within financial services, media, property and banking – working all over Europe. He founded Investment Banking Partners AB and served as chairman of EFG Investment Bank.

In 2008 Tomas established Ekskäret Foundation in Stockholm. The foundation developed a conference facility on its island Ekskäret (eng: Oak Island) in the Stockholm archipelago, and the mission of the foundation is to facilitate personal development and social change. A special focus of the foundation is supporting the development of social entrepreneurs and the understanding of the complexities of social change.

He is also a member of The Club of Rome, co-founder and director of the publishing company Fri Tanke Förlag, and co-founder and chair of the foundation Reinventing Learning and of the company Growing Minds. You can reach him at tomas@perspectiva-institute.co.uk
There are many ways to introduce a new organisation, but when its scope is broad and deep and its purposes are emergent, attempting to make sense of who you are too quickly is self-defeating, and ultimately confusing. Instead, we have scrolled through the alphabet and unpacked the words that jumped out at us as the elements of the context in which Perspectiva is situated, including the main issues it seeks to respond to, and decided on one word in particular to give some felt sense for the emphasis and priorities that define what we’re about. It is hoped that readers will thereby begin to discern a pattern, and situate themselves in relation to our work.

A is for Attention
(awareness, automisation, artificial intelligence, alienation, anomie)

We see Perspectiva playing a leading role in shaping ‘the politics of attention’.

Matthew Crawford’s idea of the ‘attentional commons’ deserves to be more widely known. Here is how he puts it in his wonderful book, The World Beyond your Head:

“There are some resources we hold in common such as the air we breathe and the water we drink. We take them for granted, but their widespread availability makes everything else we do possible...the valuable thing that we take for granted is the condition of not being addressed...Attention is
the thing that is most one’s own: in the normal course of things, we choose what to pay attention to, and in a very real sense this determines what is real for us; what is actually present to our consciousness. Appropriations of our attention are then an especially intimate matter.”

The idea of ‘the commons’ is familiar, but linking it to attention is close to Perspectiva’s heart because we are focussed on how our inner and outer lives connect; how our experience is generated and our sense of what is possible formed by the structures of the world we live in. Crawford(p11) again: “Just as clean air makes respiration possible, silence, in this broader sense, is what makes it possible to think.”

And we need to think, but there are fewer places where we are truly free to do so. A palpable example is that on some low cost airlines passengers have to sit looking at an advert on the chair in front of them for the duration of the flight – they do not have the freedom ‘not to be addressed’. Crawford even links attention directly to wealth and income inequality because the attentional conditions for having good ideas tend to be much more available to the rich than to the poor.

The issue has wider significance. Thinking of attention as a resource is partly about finding an antidote to advertising, which lies at the root of overconsumption. The importance of this point relates to ‘the economy of attention’, a huge growth area directly related to our screen time combined with the proliferation of data. The more people know about you, the more opportunities they have to grab your attention, but usually in ways that you won’t particularly welcome.

Thinking of the attentional commons today matters because we mostly don’t live in worlds that are simply given; we are constantly influenced if not manipulated, and we struggle to make judgments about competing forms of value as a result. As Crawford puts it: “The question of what to attend to is a question of what to value, and this question is no longer answered for us by settled forms of social life.”
Smart phones – now ubiquitous in almost any modern society, have been described as ‘weapons of mass distraction’ and Crawford (p16) suggests “Distractibility might be regarded as the mental equivalent of obesity.” However, the point is not about technophobia at all; it’s a broadly spiritual insight that modern life conditions militate against sustained quality attention, and the social and political relevance of mindfulness (broadly conceived) is just beginning to be sensed:

“Something in our soul has a far more violent repugnance for true attention than the flesh has for bodily fatigue. This something is much more closely connected with evil than is the flesh. That is why every time we really concentrate our attention, we destroy the evil in ourselves.” - Simon Weil

\[xii\]

\[B\] is for Bildung

(belonging, becoming, Buddhism, black swans, blockchain technology, Bateson)

‘Bateson’ was a very close second here, because Gregory Bateson and Mary Catherine Bateson are major influences on our understanding of the world, but just slightly closer to our core concern is the self-cultivation of human beings in response to societal trends. The German word ‘Bildung’ captures that in a way that can’t be readily translated.

Apparently Gandhi never actually said “You must be the change you want to see in the world”, but he said similar things and embodied that message, which is the essence of Bildung.\[xiii\] Unlike mere ‘personal development’, Bildung (with roots in Hegel, Schiller and Von Humboldt) is about discovering and forging one’s individuality (not individualism) through attempts to improve the world, and central to the notion is the struggle involved – it’s about sacrifice and skin-shedding as much as mere ‘growth’. In this sense Bildung is truer to
the etymology of ‘development’ which is about growing out of that which envelopes you. The Wikipedia entry is helpful here: xiv

“Fulfilment is achieved through practical activity that promotes the development of one’s own individual talents and abilities which in turn lead to the development of one’s society. In this way, Bildung does not simply accept the socio-political status quo, but rather it includes the ability to engage in a critique of one’s society, and to ultimately challenge the society to actualize its own highest ideals.”

C is for Consciousness
(climate change, cultural theory, crisis, complexity, caring, common good, compassion, complexity, co-creation, constellations)

Climate change is clearly of singular importance, but while all forms of ecological degradation is a central motivating factor for Perspectiva, we view them all as a preeminent part of the setting and merely an aspect of our ‘plot’ rather than the defining feature of it. Many have argued that climate change is not really about climate change and we broadly agree. I’ll (JR) be writing a book for Palgrave Macmillan later in the year called The Seven Dimensions of Climate Change: rethinking the world’s toughest problem.

What Perspectiva wants to say about climate change is that understanding it properly is a challenge to human consciousness. The issue is just so big and multi-faceted that it’s hard to grasp what it means for us as individuals. Even thinking in seven dimensions, or viewing the climate issue systemically
is a stretch for many, but this is the kind of approach that we believe to be essential.\textsuperscript{xv}

By choosing consciousness we are not wedded to a particular view in intractable philosophical debates about the origin of consciousness, and whether it is ‘merely’ an epiphenomenon of physical processes, or whether, as Physicist Sir Arthur Eddington once said, ‘The ultimate stuff of the universe is mind-stuff’. Our view is that from a higher perspective those distinctions between mind and matter don’t mean very much.

We are more interested in forms of ‘false consciousness’, not motivated by Marxian outcomes, but recognising that much of what passes for our perception of normality is socially constructed by powerful economic and political interests, and in ways that may not be helpful for improving the world.

What matters to us most fundamentally is how consciousness evolves from relatively simple organisms to complex symbolic forms in humans, and what it means to speak – as many do - of ‘levels of consciousness’. For instance, Bill Clinton, speaking at Davos, once spoke approvingly of Ken Wilber’s ‘theory of everything’ as a premise for the world’s main challenges, but he added ruefully that the problem was that you needed “A level of consciousness that is way up here (raising arm high)” to think like that.\textsuperscript{xvi}

Perspectiva is about raising the level of consciousness in this way, as well as raising awareness of the need to do so.

D\textsuperscript{is for Democracy}
(development, disinterst, direction, debt, dissonance, diversity, death)
If death were a more salient part of public life, our public priorities might look very different. Mostly we do appear, as Ernest Becker once put it, to be in denial of death, individually and collectively. Perspectiva will do what we can not to fall into the primary delusion that shapes so many others. xvii

We have chosen democracy as a more immediate concern because our experience of democracy is thin, and mostly getting thinner. At its best, democracy is about a disinterested and ongoing participation in the public good by a discerning population of critical thinkers, informed by a free press. In the classic text *Democracy in America*, Alexis De Tocqueville even spoke about the moralising power of participation—the sense that democratic processes created better human beings.

In practice, democracy is often a competition among powerful corporate interests for regulatory influence, with a disengaged population becoming citizens only periodically at elections, and even then often voting on a poorly informed and superficial basis.

The Canadian philosopher John Ralston Saul makes a strong case for the notion of disinterest being a critical feature of a healthy democracy. xviii This feels odd at first blush, but ‘disinterest’ does not mean ‘lack of interest’ at all—it means the capacity to engage in a way that is not trying to advance any particular interest.

Disinterested democracy is the very opposite of a transactional view of democracy, giving rise to ‘retail politics’—you (demographic, group, constituency) vote for me, and I’ll give you this public service or that tax break. Disinterested politics is about placing the public interest ahead of any particular interest—about trying to view the system as a whole and thinking about what it needs to function best.

Our experience of democracy is thin, and mostly getting thinner.
The challenge for democracy is at least partly a challenge to change human consciousness so that we stop imagining we either care about everybody or just care about ourselves, and recognise that this is a false dichotomy. A healthy democracy should be a place where individuals feel they have a duty to promote the public good, not just narrowly protect or advance their own interests at the cost of others.

Perspectiva is drawn to this rethinking of democracy because that kind of thinking is a relatively rare cognitive and emotional achievement!

**E** is for Ecology

(energy transition, ego-development, ethics, emergency, economics, emergence, epistemology)

We are spoilt for choice on ‘E’. One of the major features of the setting is the necessary energy transition away from fossil fuels. Another is a complete overhaul in our understanding of economics, including its main assumptions (eg ‘rationality’) and what it chooses to leave out and how it is taught. In this we are inspired by a range of thinkers including Kate Raworth, Ha-Joon Chang and the New Economics foundation.

Epistemology is deeply important to us because we believe there needs to be a re-evaluation of what constitutes legitimate forms of knowledge, including the tacit, intuitive and visceral forms that we live by, but tend to disavow in public life. Epistemology is also centrally important in ‘how we know’ which is fundamentally about our capacity to ‘get things in perspective’.
And while the growth in ‘evidence-based policy making’ is not problematic in itself, the notion of evidence appears to be highly limited – often to randomised controlled trials, which is a function of a lack of epistemic breadth and fluency. These things go together- your view of what constitutes knowledge and what it means to act with conviction. As William Ophuls (p26) puts it in *Plato’s revenge*:

“Every change in epistemology implies an equivalent change in ontology and also in ethos.” xix

The idea of emergence is also important because it derives thinking of social issues in terms of complex adaptive systems with emergent properties that are in principle unpredictable.

However, we agree with William Ophuls that this is ‘the age of ecology’ and that spreading the capacity to think ecologically is a priority for us, and for the world. ‘Ecology’ is often wrongly conflated with ‘environment’, and we thereby risk losing the richer notions of ‘life’ and ‘systems’ that are centrally relevant to broader human and social issues. What is at stake with ecology is the deep recognition of human dependence on natural systems, and a better grasp of certain features of those systems (eg non-linearity, reciprocal influence of wholes and parts, relationships, emergence).

Phillip Slater (quoted by Ophuls) puts it like this:

“All the errors and follies of magic, religion and mystical traditions are outweighed by the one great wisdom they contain – the awareness of humanity’s organic embeddedness in a complex natural system. And all the brilliant, sophisticated insights of Western rationalism are set at naught by the egregious delusion on which they rest- that of human autarchy.”

Ophuls puts this point more positively:
“Ecology contains an intrinsic wisdom and implied ethic that, by transforming man from an enemy into a partner of nature, will make it possible to preserve the best of civilisation’s achievements for many generations to come and also attain a higher quality of civilized life. Both the wisdom and the ethic follows directly from the ecological facts of life: natural limits, balance, and interrelationship necessarily entail humility, moderation, and connection (…) For all these reasons, ecology will have to be the master science and guiding metaphor for any future civilisation.”

F
is for Freedom
(future, fraternity, fairness, friendship, Facebook)

While we are fortunate to live with a high degree of political and economic freedom, most people are trapped in various ways. Secular Buddhist theorist Stephen Batchelor puts it like this: “In theory, freedom may be held in high regard; in practice it is experienced as a dizzying loss of meaning and direction.”xx Perspectiva’s work indirectly seeks to present pathways out of these more subtle traps of identity, financial pressure and family responsibility that are not necessarily about changing our roles, but radically changing our perspective on them. For instance, Kegan’s theory of adult development can be thought of as a theory of freedom (see K below).

In ‘A Buddhist History of the West’, David Loy explains why freedom is often felt to be the implicit purpose of history:

“Since the Renaissance there has been a progressive emphasis, first on religious freedom (the Reformation), then political freedom (the English, American and French Revolutions), followed by economic freedom (the class struggle), colonial freedom (independence movements), racial freedom
(civil rights), psychological freedom (psychotherapy frees us from neuroses), and most recently gender equality and sexual freedom (feminism and gay rights) ... Today deconstruction and other postmodern intellectual developments free us from authorial intention and the structures of the text itself – 'textual liberation'”.

However, these forms of freedom deal only with what might be called ‘outer freedom’. Leaving aside the huge literature on free will and competing conceptions of freedom in political theory, for centuries Philosophy and Religion have been highlighting that the battle for ‘inner freedom’ – our freedom from social conditioning and capacity to think, feel, will and create, has not been nearly as successful. In fact, we tend to be very eager to give this kind of freedom away because it makes us responsible and anxious. In Dostoevsky’s classic scene, The Grand Inquisitor states, plausibly, that ‘Man’ has:

“No more pressing need than the one to find somebody to whom he can surrender, as quickly as possible, the gift of freedom which he, unfortunate creature, was born with.”

The experience of freedom often makes us anxious, and that’s partly because we are not trained to understand what inner freedom might look and feel like. In mainstream debate, we would benefit from extending the idea of freedom beyond the legal and political realms, not just into the social and cultural, but also into the psychological and existential.

G is for Good Life
(God, gender, government, gratitude, Gemeinschaft)
Talk of ‘the good life’ can sound quaint, but defending the legitimacy of the idea, rather than a particular interpretation of the idea, is of enormous political importance. What’s at stake is the apparently elegant but ultimately corrosive idea that all that matters is ‘utility’ and that our sense of utility is revealed through our preferences, rather than some deeper notion of quality being inherent in the nature of things. The idea that we are completely free to decide what the good life is might sound innocent enough, but this is the same presumptive logic that often wilfully collapses the public sphere and the commercial sphere, and is suspicious of any notion of the common good.

We need courage to say one thing is better than another and discernment to say why we think so. What is often hysterically overlooked is that we can do that while still having the humility and openness to recognise that while the good life may have certain key features it will never be filled out in its entirety – there will always be a meaningful variety of ways to create and live it.

One of the most confident accounts of the good life comes from Robert and Edward Skidelsky, who write about the need to see through the limitations of immature relativism:

“It’s not that the value-neutralist has concluded, on theoretical grounds, that there is no such thing as the human good independent of personal preference. Rather, the very assumption that there could be such a thing seems lacking in proper ‘humility’ and ‘respect’. ‘Who are we to tell people what they should want?’ is the telling question here. What this reveals is a terrible crisis of confidence among the intellectual class of the Western World.” (pxxi)

Similarly, in Rowan Williams’s review of Michael Sandel’s What Money Can’t Buy, he pinpoints the premise of Sandel’s critique into excessive marketisation as follows:
“The fundamental model being assumed here is one in which a set of unconditioned wills negotiate control of a passive storehouse of commodities, each of them capable of being reduced to a dematerialised calculus of exchange value. If anything could be called a “world-denying” philosophy, this is it...a possible world of absolute commodification. If we want to resist this intelligently, we need doctrine, ritual and narrative: sketches of the normative, practices that are not just functions, and stories of lives that communicate a sense of what being at home in the environment looks like—and the costs of failure as well.” xxii

Perspectiva exists partly to act as a forum for creative visions of the good life.

His for Hope
(happiness, home, hysteria, hemispheric, hemispheres)
These days confidence about the future of humanity is generally low, and perhaps for good reason. The spirit of Perspectiva’s work is deeply about hope, not in the lame sense that we think everything will turn out well, but that the orientation is fundamentally positive, trusting in the meaning of the challenge. The classic expression of this position comes from playwright and former President of Czechoslovakia Vaclav Havel:

“Hope is a state of mind, not of the world...It is an orientation of the spirit, and orientation of the heart; it transcends the world that is immediately experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons ...Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously heading for success, but rather an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed. The more propitious the situation in which we demonstrate hope, the deeper the hope is. Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.” xxiii

The challenge of remaining hopeful endures, as indicated by Psychotherapist Indra Adnan in a recent article for Open Democracy: "We need to know where hope sits, not just in relation to our activities but within ourselves. Is hope an emotion—a physical response to changes in the body, what’s sometimes referred to as affect? Or is it, as Antonio D’Amasio defines it in The Feeling of What Happens, the meaning that we attach to that emotion, denoting our spirit? And if it is the latter, can we forge it ourselves—can we actively cultivate that spirit?"

Perspectiva wants to play a leading role in the forging of meaningful hope.
is for Ideology
(interiority, identity, integration, inequality, intelligence)

Many research institutes and non-governmental organisations around the world are concerned with inequality, which is an important part of the setting because inequality of opportunity and outcome is directly relevant to our capacity to grow as human beings. Our weakness for ideology is however even more fundamental, as unpacked by John Ralston Saul in The Unconscious Civilization (1997):

"I would say that what we are suffering from is a fear of reality. Who are "we"? Frankly, there is little difference in this mental state between those inside the elites and those outside. We have by all our actions or lack of them agreed to deny reality...We suffer from an addictive weakness for large illusions. A weakness for ideology. Power in our civilization is repeatedly tied to the pursuit of all-inclusive truths and utopias...At the time of each obsession we are incapable of recognising our attitude as either a flight from reality or an embracing of ideology...Trade is the miraculous cure for all that ails us. And globalisation is the Eden or paradise into which the just shall be welcomed on Judgment Day...I would suggest that Marxism, fascism and the marketplace strongly resemble each other. They are all corporatist, managerial and hooked on technology as their own particular golden calf."

We have come to associate ‘ideology’ with Marx, and the main competing ideologies as capitalism and communism, but we need a much more subtle and critical engagement with the idea of ideology. Many who object to the use of the term ‘neoliberalism’ for instance, do so because they struggle to think in ideological terms. In an excellent analysis of why the term annoys people Will Davies writes:
“At the root of the difficulty and meaning of neoliberalism is the way it straddles the terrain of sociology and economics. One way of understanding it is as an effort to anchor modernity in the market, that is, to make economics the main measure of progress and reason. Economics is amplified by neoliberal intellectuals, to address problems that might otherwise have been viewed as political or sociological. For example, mutual or intergenerational commitments, on which the institutions of ‘society’ or ‘nation’ are dependent, become reconfigured in monetary terms as debts, rendering them explicit and quantitative in the process.”

A related claim is made by George Monbiot in his Guardian piece: Neoliberalism – The ideology at the root of all our problems and although different language is used, a similar claim is unpacked by the co-founder of Perpspectiva Tomas Bjorkman in his online essay: The Market Myth.

While ideology is part of the plot and the setting, a related concern for Perspectiva is to understand the forms of consciousness that allow us to think ideologically i.e. think about ideology rather than think through it, and thereby move beyond its clutches. In this respect psychological integration might be a part of the antidote to ideology; what does it mean to ‘grow’ by drawing together the competing parts of ourselves, and then have some degree of autonomy over those parts?

J is for Jungian
(joy, jobs, judgment, justice, Jevons)

The Jevons Paradox is relevant to the idea that technology (alone) will not avert crisis for long; the claim that efficiency
gains made through technology are matched by an increased demand for the purposes served by the technology strikes us as valid and important to understanding ecological constraints, even if that’s empirically hard to confirm.

Clearly the ‘jobs’ of the future will be different, and while we cannot take economic subsistence for granted, we will need to change our idea of meaningful and purposive human activity to something bigger and better than ‘jobs’. In this respect the universal basic income may be an idea whose time has come; we need the ontological security of homes and basic needs being met before we can consider anything else.

However, while Jung has a mixed reputation, the range of ideas broadly considered ‘Jungian’ is of central relevance to Perspectiva. The role of archetypes, Gregory Bateson’s take on Jung’s distinction between Pleroma (descriptive world) and Creatura (explanatory world) as a superior distinction to matter and mind, the idea of individuation and the relationship between the individual and collective unconscious are all relevant to unpacking the link between systems, souls and society.

Jungian writer Andrew Samuels puts it like this: xxvii

“Jung notes that psychic energy was not confined in its expression to sexuality alone. He considered that energy flowed down into ‘channels’, citing biological, psychological, spiritual and moral channels. If there were also to be a political channel for energy, what would it involve? Political energy involves bringing imaginative creativity to bear on seemingly intractable problems, trying to solve them in ways that reflect a concern for social justice, however that might be defined. Hence, there are usually moral and spiritual aspects to it as well(...)Politics has left its home base and gone out into the world to redefine itself and find other and new places to settle. Political energy is not the same as political power(...)This is the kind of politics that feminism prepared us for but did
not take far enough in a psychological direction – a politics that goes beyond the level of what individuals know (the personal) to the level of what is not yet known (the unconscious), where the radical imagination sleeps.” (Politics on the Couch, 2001, Karnac Press, p 18-21)

The idea of personal development as Bildung outlined earlier also has Jungian elements; the process of individuation is closely connected to the collective social and political situation we find ourselves in.

“We humans are a volatile mix of animal, primal and civil – a tangle of emotions and drives that all but guarantees inner and outer conflicts (...) Individuation is not a purely individual matter and cannot occur in a social vacuum. The unconscious holds formidable archetypal energies that must be personally sublimated and culturally channelled lest they assume dangerous forms. Making greater self awareness (along with greater cognitive sophistication) a social reality, if not the overarching goal of human life, therefore presumes the existence of a social and political framework capable of modulating the psychic impulses of a multitude of individuals for the mutual benefit of all – in other words, a rich culture, a strong community, and a government devoted to this end. In short, individuation entails a real politics of consciousness.”

K

is for Kegan

(kleptocracy, Kairos, kinship)

A fundamental feature of Perspectiva’s work is revealing the practical and policy relevance of an issue that is often misunderstood due to its philosophical and psychological complexity – adult development - which might simply be called
‘personal change’ or more ambitiously ‘spiritual growth’. In this domain, Robert Kegan is an intellectual hero. xxix

While the idea that we grow in mental complexity is familiar from childhood development, and informs education policy, in adulthood policymakers typically focus on the need to acquire skills, while organisations are more likely to focus on psychometric testing, resulting in personality measures like Myers-Briggs. Despite a considerable literature on adult development and post-formal thinking (i.e. beyond the mental development of an eighteen year old) public policy appears to operate in what the American Philosopher Ken Wilber calls ‘flatland’: the view that all adults operate at the same level of mental complexity, and differ only in horizontal skills, intelligence, knowledge and proclivities.

This distinction between horizontal and vertical dimensions of human development is important, because our argument is quite specific. We are not saying that the world’s challenges call upon people to be nicer, or cleverer, or more informed, much as these things might help. Our point is that a growth in social productivity and harmony requires people to be able to disembed themselves from certain social and psychological influences (‘ideology’) that undermine autonomy, responsibility and solidarity, so that they can relate to those influences more flexibly and constructively.

This kind of growth is ‘vertical’ in the sense that it changes how we know the world rather than ‘horizontal’ in the sense of changing what we know about the world. And such vertical growth is progressive in the sense that it transcends and includes our prior ways of knowing the world. Moreover, such models of mental complexity are theoretically highly developed, and amenable to empirical measurement.

In light of the explanatory power of this perspective, when policy makers try to change behaviour through incentive structures, environmental influences and choice architectures, they show, as Kegan puts it, “an astonishingly naïve
sense of how important a factor is the level of mental complexity”.

Perspectiva exists partly to make that case more widely known.

L

is for Language
(life, longing, love, longevity, legitimacy)

“A talent for speaking differently, rather than arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change.” – Richard Rorty

Perspectiva is fascinated by life as understood from a biological and systems point of view of increasing complexity and the emergence and development of consciousness. We are also impressed by Roberto Unger’s claim that what it means to be progressive is to work towards ‘a larger life’ for ourselves and others: “A progressive is someone who wants to see society reorganised, part-by-part and step-by-step, so that ordinary men and women have a better chance to live a larger life.” Unger defines ‘larger life’ as ‘a life of greater scope, greater capability and greater intensity’. The question then becomes what kinds of social and economic and political structures make those kinds of life possible.

However, we have chosen language as our key term because it often feels like language has been stripped of energy through overuse. Consider how little descriptive and explanatory power ‘social change’ has, or ‘left wing’, or ‘bankers’ or ‘progressive’. Sometimes our words don’t seem meaningful even to ourselves, or help us reach the people we need to reach. However, every so often we come upon a form of words and we think ‘that’s it!’ – that’s what I’ve been trying to get at over the last few years. Perspectiva sees that kind of
linguistic ‘aha’ moment as productive work, even if, of course, it doesn’t end there.

Many are disparaging about ‘wordsmithing’ and emphasise ‘action’ as the key to progress, but as indicated above, this is often epistemological panic in disguise. Language is hard currency; finding, adapting and sometimes inventing words to communicate optimally is ‘action’ in the truest sense. Words are social and political tools; it’s an ethical responsibility to wield them wisely and well.

M is for Metaphor
(markets, myths, meditation, mindfulness, money, meaning, metanarratives, McGilchrist, multiphrenia)

“Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.” — George Lakoff and Mark Johnson

Metaphors are undervalued. They are often thought to be a quaint and derivative form of understanding, when in fact they are the heart of creative intelligence. As Thoreau once put it, “All perception of truth is the detection of an analogy.” The power of metaphor lies in combining analogy with imagery and the work they make us do in generating our own felt sense of a comparison. We have to visualise and feel metaphors, and then consider the sense in which they ‘fit’ any given phenomena; in the process we often generate synaesthesia – a mobilisation of all the senses.

We believe that playing with metaphor is often much more productive than debating definitions, which is often circular and interminable. Metaphors are also high sticky, restricting
thought and imagination in important ways; we need to get better at calling them out when they are not helping. For instance the mind is not a computer, the economy is not a household, the planet is not a patient.

We see metaphor design as a way to tap into one’s ‘felt sense’ of things, not least purpose; communicating visceral feelings in sensory and imaginative modalities so that vision and mission can be better tested against our (bodily, emotional) experience of it.

As anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson puts it: “There are few things as toxic as a bad metaphor. You can’t think without metaphors.” Even more directly, the Physicist Robert Shaw argues: “You don’t see something until you have the right metaphor to let you perceive it”.

We anticipate metaphors will be a key part of Perspectiva’s methodology.
N is for Neoliberalism
(networks, narratives, normativity, noosphere)

The political equilibrium that much of the developed world finds itself in is often called ‘neoliberalism’ - part economic theory, part sociological analysis, part cultural critique. That’s a lot of rhetorical work to ask from one word, but as a shared reference point to characterise our ideological predicament, the term is now widely understood and accepted. Will Davies sums it up as “The state-led remaking of social and political relations around the model of the market”. Or in Michael Sandel’s language: a ‘market society’ seems to have gradually usurped ‘a society with a market’.

In essence, economics has gone rogue on a massive scale. The problem is that the kind of economics utilised by policy makers seems simultaneously to be narrow in scope (little history, highly orthodox, little complexity) blind to the limitations of its own assumptions and modalities (utility maximisation, quantification, simplifying assumptions, cost benefit analysis, externalities, deregulation, competition) and yet still applied to an increasingly broad sphere of human activity (energy policy, welfare system, labour market, health and education).

Most progressive thinkers tend to assume critiques of neoliberalism have to offer alternative visions of political economy, but that’s easier said than done. As George Monbiot put it in the Guardian: “The left and centre have produced no new general framework of economic thought for 80 years.”
Assuming there are alternatives, where will they come from? Perspectiva exists partly because we think we will need to look inwards as well as outwards.

O is for Ontology
(ordoliberalism, oligopolies, oligarchy)

“The genius of culture is to create an ontological system so compelling that what is inside and outside of a person are viewed as of a piece, no seams and patches noticeable.” - Richard Shweder

Ontology is concerned with the study of what is real and what it means to be. That sounds abstract, but once you get a feeling for ontology you can sense its relevance everywhere. Most PhD Social Science programmes introduce researchers to ontology (and epistemology) at an early stage because to produce meaningful knowledge about reality it helps to grasp that much of what we assume to be ‘real’ and ‘given’ is constructed, and can be unmade.

There is even a practice of ‘guerrilla ontology’ to help shake us out of our complacency about reality – our assumption that things just are as they are.

Ontology is also the central concern of ‘Popper’s three worlds’ – his contention that reality is comprised of three broad kinds of ‘stuff’:

1. Objective (natural) stuff like organisms, molecules and ecosystems,
2. Subjective stuff like thoughts and feelings and experiences,
3. Quasi Objective (intersubjective) stuff like language and institutions, which we often treat as ‘real’ but don’t notice we have created, for instance ‘the economy’ ‘society’ or ‘the market’.

Popper’s three world ontology distantly inspired Perspectiva’s overarching emphasis on ‘systems, souls and society’.

P
is for Purpose
(power, passion, postcapitalism, play, Popper, peace, progress)

“Our time has become, in many respects, one of forgetting ends and sacralizing means”. - Tzvetan Todorov, In Defence of the Enlightenment (2009)

Perspectiva aims to work with individuals and organisations on clarifying their sense of purpose. Purpose is a much deeper and fuller notion than goal-seeking, and an inquiry into purpose illuminates the practical relevance of a range of psychological, cultural and spiritual questions that might otherwise be considered abstract.

Organisations are institutional vessels of purpose(s), and fulfilling purpose typically depends upon aligning organisational purpose with the purposes of employees and those whom the organisation seeks to serve or attract. However, many organisations merely pay lip service to this exacting challenge. When taken seriously, purpose should be transformative, in the sense that it obliges an organization to stretch and adapt beyond its existing form; manifest in structure, assumptions and practices.
Transformation arises from recognizing that the legitimacy of ends sought are always constrained by the feasibility of means available, and by competing commitments; from noticing that when organisational values are articulated it becomes clear that they are plural, contested and sometimes incommensurate; and from accepting that the kinds of purpose people really care about are not conceptual – they emerge from visceral or intuitive modalities that organisations struggle to recognize as valid.

The process of deepening purpose is best pursued as a cooperative and explorative endeavour that requires innovative forms of organisational practice. Professor Guy Claxton gives an indication of why with a line from a personal communication that is worth mulling over: “The trouble with organisational purpose is that organisations don’t have stomachs.”

Q is for Quality (quantum, Quakers)

We chose quality, mostly due to the distant inspiration of Robert Pirsig’s 1974 Classic Zen in the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance and his latter work, Lila. For Pirsig, ‘quality’ is the fundamental feature of the world, and something beyond the subject/object distinction we tend to build our ideas of reality around. The full philosophical vision of ‘quality’ would take us beyond the scope here, but the following extract from right at the end of Pirsig’s second book captures the main idea; goodness, quality or value is something we can intuit directly when we unlearn our cultural conditioning.

“...They were all walking down the road ... when one of those raggedy nondescript dogs that call Indian reservations home came onto the road and walked pleasantly in front of them ... [the woman] asked John ‘What kind of dog is that?’.”
thought about it and said, ‘That’s a good dog’... The woman... wanted to know what genetic, substantive pigeonhole of canine classification this object walking before them could be placed in. But John Wooden Leg never understood the question. He wasn’t joking when he said ‘That’s a good dog’. He probably thought she was worried the dog might bite her... John had distinguished the dog according to its Quality, rather than according to its substance. That indicated he considered Quality more important...

"Good is a noun. That was it. That was what Phaedrus had been looking for. That was the homer, over the fence, that ended the ball game. Good as a noun rather than as an adjective is all the Metaphysics of Quality is about. Of course, the ultimate Quality isn't a noun or an adjective or anything else definable, but if you had to reduce the whole Metaphysics of Quality to a single sentence, that would be it."

R is for Reflexivity
(radical, risk, realism)

“I am taken seriously; indeed a bit too seriously. But the theory that I take seriously and, in fact, rely on in my decision-making process is completely ignored.” – George Soros. xxxii

Billionaire philanthropist and founder of The European Central University, George Soros, has stated that reflexivity is absolutely central to his investment and philanthropic decisions. ‘Reflexivity’ is not a term of everyday language, but a simple way to describe it is ‘self-awareness in action’. Without an appreciation for the recursive nature of self-awareness and behaviour we will not be able to achieve the forms of agency or autonomy that are demanded of us to adapt to modern challenges.

Far from being esoteric, reflexivity is relevant to any situation with thinking participants. In Soros’s account of reflexivity,
the basic cognitive function of thinking is to understand the world in which we live, but there is also a participating (or manipulative) function that seeks to change the situation to our advantage. When the direction of causation is from world to mind, reality is supposed to determine the participants’ views; but when the direction of causation is from the mind to the world, the intentions of the participants have an effect on the world. This point was central to my (JR) argument in *Money Talks: Divest Invest and the battle for climate realism.* In essence, the decision to divest from fossil fuels is not a ‘world to mind’ financial assessment, but more fundamentally a ‘mind to world’ cultural signal to try to bend the arc of reality.

Soros uses this model to explain how pricing distorts market fundamentals because of their role in signalling future value. Soros also argues that Enlightenment Philosophers wrongly thought of reason as a searchlight (metaphor!) illuminating a reality that lay there, passively awaiting discovery, but reason’s active role in shaping reality was largely left out of the account. In other words, the Enlightenment failed to recognize reflexivity, resulting in a distorted view of reality.

The point is that humans do things differently as a result of *knowing* why they are doing them or being asked to do them – sometimes as a form of defiance, but mostly as a form of creative and generative intelligence. Our descriptive and explanatory accounts of how and why people behave as they do become part of the very thing they purport to describe and explain. Reflexivity is a feature rather than a bug in human behaviour, which is therefore only ever partially predictable in principle. The ill-fitting, multiply-influenced, volatile, situation-al and porous nature of human behaviour will always elude or subsume the best models designed to capture it. You might even say we are at our most human when we do not *behave.*
We can say that there is in every organism, at whatever level, an underlying flow of movement toward constructive fulfillment of its inherent possibilities. - Carl Rogers

By Souls we refer not to metaphysical essences, but to the totality of our inner worlds. We mean those fundamental fea-
tures of being human that cannot be readily defined, quantified or operationalised which are relevant to the kinds of world we want to live in, but are rarely mentioned in political debates, for instance; the quality of lived experience, forms of attachment, relationship and identification, love, hope, myth, desire, narrative, memory, meaning, belonging, becoming, flourishing, attention, projection, empathy, trust, personal growth, purpose, transcendence.

We insist on the soul as a perspective deeper and broader and more generative than the mind or the brain, but recognise they are all part of the same whole. We are particularly motivated by the unfolding of inner life, from emotional development to psychological integration and the experience of transcendence.

Reclaiming the language of soul is important, not least to acknowledge the pervasive human need for spiritual experience and direction, which can be informed by religion, but need not be subsumed by it. Iain McGilchrist puts it as follows: *We think more than we can say. We feel more than we can think. We live more than we can feel. And there is much else besides* (Eugene Gendlin). *Perhaps the soul is what we mean when we reflect on that ‘much else besides’.*

This kind of capacious perspective arises from viewing the human nervous system as a complex, open, and self-organizing process that continually adapts and develops; not only from species to species in evolution, but within the lifetime of each individual. Nicholas Humphrey argues that humans actually live in *‘the soul niche’* and he means niche in the conventional ecological sense of the term – the environment to which we are adapted. *‘Trout live in rivers, gorillas in forests, bedbugs in beds. Humans live in soul land.’* Humphrey adds that *‘Soul land’* is a territory of the spirit and also that this spiritual territory is not only where humans live, but also where they give of their best.

Reclaiming the soul is also therefore partly about placing creative expression at the centre of people’s lives, and Perspec-
tive's task is to show why a deeper engagement with this process is so fundamental to the broader challenges we face.

**T** is for Technology (transformation, transcendence, Twitter, transition)

“Technology: the knack of arranging the world so we need not experience it.” - Max Frisch

It is impossible to ignore the central relevance of technology to the modern world, but it’s important not to forget that ‘technology’ is not all lights and gadgets. The word stems from the Greek tekhnologia - "systematic treatment of an art, craft, or technique”. There are ‘technologies of the self’ (Foucault), and most technological change is actually socio-technical in the sense that technology shapes and is shaped by particular kinds of human uptake. As Jaron Lanier puts it: “People try to treat technology as an object, and it can’t be. It can only be a channel.”

Perspectiva neither claims nor seeks expertise in this domain, but we are mindful of the huge human and social impact of technology. We are impressed by Jaron Lanier’s work on keeping sight of the human being in the context of techno-optimism, aware of Evgeny Mozorov’s claim that technological innovation often serves oppressive ends, rather than always leading to emancipation. And we are impressed by Frank Pasquale’s work drawing attention to ‘The Black Box Society’ and what Philosopher Langdon Winner calls “technological somnambulism.” As Pasquale puts it: “We have given the search sector an almost unimaginable power to determine what we see, where we spend, how we perceive.” - Which brings us back to A for attention.
Thinking further ahead, automisation will clearly change our idea of work, ‘jobs’ and employment. II ‘Inventing the Future’ Nick Srineck and Alex Williams suggest we should embrace a world, not of full employment but of full unemployment, where humans are free to develop and act in other ways. We are not persuaded the changes will be that rapid or that fundamental, but clearly technology will shape our default idea of what a normal life should be, and what a good life could be.

More generally, it is difficult to gauge the impact of artificial intelligence. On the one hand current research might be premised on a fundamentally faulty notion of human minds as computers rather than human beings as organisms, and may therefore never deliver on its promise. On the other hand it’s not inconceivable that the combination of advances in general AI and Synthetic biology together might give rise to forms of ‘intelligence’ that pose a threat to humanity, as outlined, for instance by Professor Nick Bostrom.

In Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies, Bostrom captures this general sense of our vulnerability to technology in discomforting and pungent terms: “Some little idiot is bound to press the ignite button just to see what happens.”

U is for Unity
(utopia, universal, unintended)

He called it "Utopia," a Greek word which means "there is no such place." - Borges.
We chose ‘unity’ because the heart of Perspectiva’s vision is creating a form of perspective that is not exclusive or totalising in spirit, but rather strong and inclusive and capacious enough to contain diversity and divergent views; a perspective that helps generate ‘a new metanarrative’ – a new view of views, a new vision of visions, a new story of stories, a new idea of ideas.

To make progress in the world, two of the biggest things that may need to be unlearned are first: how to conceive of issues often unhelpfully deemed ‘environmental’, and second: how to overcome the awkwardness some feel over sentiments that are broadly spiritual. How will those who are ambivalent about seemingly ‘green’ issues come to realise that they lie at the heart of economic and social renewal? And how can we make democratic politics feel less transactional and more soulful; less like an episodic ritual, and more like a meaningful form of life?

We believe the answer to both questions lies in understanding and creating ‘aesthetic unity’.

We need visions of progress that are beautiful enough to make us feel whole as we work towards them. Aesthetic unity sounds abstract but is deeply visceral; it’s what we feel and sense in a good book, a good film, a good song. The renowned ecologist Gregory Bateson frames the challenge like this: xxxvi

“Mere purposive rationality unaided by such phenomena as art, religion, dream, and the like, is necessarily pathogenic and destructive of life ... Our loss of the sense of aesthetic unity was, quite simply, an epistemological mistake ... more serious than all those minor insanities that characterise those older epistemologies which agreed upon the fundamental unity.”
Bateson’s concern here is the relationship between knowledge and purpose in a post-religious landscape. Some aspects of religious belief may be ‘minor insanities’, but the major insanity – one many of us suffer from – is to live without a consciously chosen myth or meta-narrative to serve as a touchstone for the myriad details of our lives. In so doing we either lose our way, or latch on to one unconsciously like ‘growth’ or ‘the market’.

‘Mere purposive rationality unaided’ is problematic, and creating a progressive sense of aesthetic unity is not easy; perhaps the defining challenge of our time. The erosion of institutions – churches, unions, political parties – matters because the fragmentation and diffusion of authoritative knowledge leaves the notion of purpose orphaned. When something we sense should be collective, intuitive and visceral becomes atomised, partial and contentious, we feel fundamentally lost.

Whatever the value of religion in channelling civic energy, there can be no naïve turning back to it as the exclusive answer. To be meaningful, and therefore ‘work’, the frame we need has to connect with every aspect of who we have become, which is why it needs an aesthetic dimension. Rediscovering aesthetic unity matters because the external world is undermining the stability and coherence of the forms of personal identity that shape political activism beyond single issue protests. We need to be reminded of the whole.

Our relational, institutional and cultural references are increasingly porous and malleable. We are asked to play multiple roles and feel obliged to have opinions on multiple issues that we barely understand or, on reflection, really care about. As the political scientist Peter Grosvenor put it, ‘Disoriented denizens of neoliberal societies may look for satisfying and durable identities in, for example, nostalgic, reactionary, nationalist, or fundamentalist ideas and movements. More commonly, they seek solace in consumerism.’

For us, the vision we hope to develop is about a world that has moved beyond values wars and become able to handle value diversity without collapsing into simplistic value relativism.
Perspectiva exists because we feel there must be better answers.

Vis for Vision
(values, voting)

“In my view, a political vision is not a grab-bag of discrete problems and solutions. It is the visionary anticipation of a direction.” Roberto Unger

We believe we expect too much of ‘values’ at the level of social explanation, and too little of values in the content of political vision. We think we feel the pinch of the decline of religious contributions to public debate most strongly when it comes to vision. It is precisely something akin to the religious gift of ‘prophecy’ that we need to build metanarratives big, beautiful and diverse enough to make everyone feel at home.

The problem is not that values aren’t relevant to anything but that they are relevant to everything. The basic function of the mind is evaluative. We are constantly making ethical judgments and people differ in their sense of what matters. From reading the Common Cause report or Jonathan Haidt’s analysis in ‘The Righteous Mind’ you can see that values are a key variable in political persuasion. There is also a World Values Report that purports to tell you how what people value may be changing over time.

Perspectiva cares not so much about propagating particular values but developing the qualities of heart and mind that make us receptive to a fuller range of values. In this respect, ‘values’ are constitutive of the development of consciousness, unpacked for instance in the theory of Spiral Dynamics. On this map, the challenge is to reach ‘tier two’ consciousness, in which we are less subject to particular values
and more adept at understanding and managing value conflicts. xxxviii

In this sense, Perspectiva's take on what Unger calls 'the visionary anticipation of a direction' is an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the role of 'values' in human development, and a grasp of how that development plays out in societal terms. For us, the vision we hope to develop is about a world that has moved beyond values wars and become able to handle value diversity without collapsing into simplistic value relativism.

W is for Wicked
(wisdom, world, worlds, willpower)

The following example from Andy Rooney helps capture the spirit of the challenges we face: xxxix

“I was thinking of installing one of those automatic garage door openers over the weekend. The directions say 'make certain the garage door is square and straight and the garage floor is level.' Directions always read like that. Is everything in your life straight, square and level? If my house was straight, square and level, I would never have to fix anything. What we all need are directions that tell us what to do when everything is crooked, off-centre and all screwed up.”

There is now a huge literature on the nature of 'wicked' problems, namely problems that can’t be solved but only tamed. Such problems have a range of characteristics, including uniqueness, open-endedness, the lack of an agreed definition of the problem, multiple causes and 'expert' interventions having minimal value. People working independently on the same Wicked Problem will inevitably arrive at different answers.
Climate change is the quintessential wicked problem, sometimes called ‘super wicked’ because the urgency of the challenge means we have to ‘solve’ it, even though it clearly doesn’t lend itself to ‘solutions’ as such.

There is a growing understanding that what such wicked problems call for are not ‘elegant’ solutions in the conventional sense of a ‘fix’, but rather ‘clumsy’ or ‘messy’ solutions which typically involves a range of interventions that often appear to be in conflict in theory if not in practice. This idea is at the heart of ‘cultural theory’ (sometimes called ‘coordination theory’). Most policy problems meet with four responses to risk (fatalism, solidarity, individualism, hierarchy) that are typically in tension with each other. The key to doing policy well is overcoming fatalism and finding a constructive form of coordination between the others. Here is how Marco Verweij and Michael Thompson put it in Clumsy Solutions for a Complex World:

“People have always disagreed, and will continue to do so, about the priority that different social ills should receive, the extent to which they occur at all, what may have caused them, the manners in which they should be resolved and who should benefit most from this. But few are those who have seriously argued in favour of wholesale destruction of ecosystems, increasing world poverty, unleashing famines, creating massive flows of refugees, promoting corruption and nepotism...Hence, one simple measure of ‘success’ is whether combinations of public policy, entrepreneurship and citizens’ activities have contributed to the deterioration of any other such social ills.” – Marco Verweij and Michael Thompson – Clumsy Solutions for a Complex World (p20).

The challenge, from Perspectiva’s perspective, is that appreciating ‘clumsiness’ and recognising why it might often be necessary is in itself quite an advanced developmental achievement; it requires thinking systemically, empathetically and multi-modally. In this sense Wicked problems call for

In this sense Wicked problems call for an advanced form of pragmatism that we need to individually and collectively grow into.
an advanced form of pragmatism that we need to individually and collectively grow into.

X

is for Xenocracy
(xenophobia, X-Factor)

OK, so ‘X’ wasn’t easy. Xeocracy refers to a condition in which a country is ruled over by foreigners or foreign forces. Before independence, India was living under xenocracy, and there are many existing conflicts in international relations where the idea of xenocracy looms large. However, the idea can be extended to the more general feeling that others are in control of our lives. As Sociologist Bauman puts it: “Never have we been so free. Never have we felt so powerless.”

Psychoanalyst Paul Verhaeghe has written a book on this subject, summarised as follows: “We tend to perceive our identities as stable and largely separate from outside forces. But over decades of research and therapeutic practice, I have become convinced that economic change is having a profound effect not only on our values but also on our personalities. Thirty years of neoliberalism, free-market forces and privatisation have taken their toll, as relentless pressure to achieve has become normative.”

In this sense, the challenge is to regain and maintain a sense of autonomy – to feel less like we are living under occupation.
More than half the world is under 30. What are they going do to?

Y

is for Youth
(yoga, yearning, yourself)

There is too much to be said on this subject; the question is easy to pose, but difficult to answer. Addressing it may the key to acting on all the issues above:

More than half the world is under 30.
What are they all going do to?

Z

is for Zugzwang
(zeitgeber, zetetic, zoanthropy, zoophagy, Zachariah, just kidding...)

In chess, there are situations, typically arising in the end-game, where a player cannot move without harming his position, and would rather ‘pass’, but is not allowed to. It’s called Zugzwang. A player can be ‘compelled to move’ and thereby lose the game. There is also ‘reciprocal zugzwang’, a rare situation when neither side can move without harming their
own position. When you look deeper into Zugzwang you find the idea of certain squares being ‘mined’, and that moving on to them can lead inexorably to a situation when you no longer want to move.

Many complex personal and policy problems feature aspects of Zugwang – the sense that we are ‘damned if we do, damned if we don’t.’ It sometimes feels like we have to act, but cannot help but harm our position, at least in some way. The traditional medical injunction ‘primum non nocere’ - ‘first do no harm’ – always applies, but that’s easier said than done.

Political hope depends upon humanity not being in Zugzwang. We have to believe we can create a position for the world where everybody wants to make their next move.
4. Endnotes

i The word ‘paradigm’ is not optimal, but it seems the best available term to capture the notion that what matters are the ideas and assumptions surrounding a set of practices – in this case the practice of system change. We recognise the term paradigm has been overused, and many insist on a particular technical meaning arising from Kuhn’s celebrated book. We use paradigm shift here to mean a fundamental change in concepts and practices, which is quite similar to Kuhn’s original formulation. See: Kuhn, T., (1962) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. University of Chicago Press.


iii For project details see: https://www.thersa.org/action-and-research/rsa-projects/social-brain-centre/the-seven-dimensions-of-climate-change

iv For instance, critiques of indefinite economic growth are waged on the grounds that it is ecologically unsustainable or that it leads to diminishing returns to wellbeing, rarely that it is simply absurd or delusional. See: Skidelsky, R., & Skidelsky, E. (2012). *How Much is Enough?: The Love of Money and the Case for the Good Life*. Penguin UK.


Spiral dynamics is only one of scores of models of human development, but an accessible reference point. For a good overview of Spiral dynamics and the place of ‘green’ in that model, see freely available extract from Wilber, K., (2001) *A Theory of Everything: An integral vision for business, politics, science and spirituality*’ at: http://rationalspirituality.com/articles/Ken_Wilber_Spiral_Dynamics.htm

‘Green’ is an advanced and final stage in ‘tier one’ of the model in which consciousness (within individuals and culturally) evolves from Beige (archaic-instinctual; think-caveman) to Purple (magical-animistic; think-voodoo) to Red (power gods; think-Donald Trump) to Blue (mythic order; think-conventional patriotism) to Orange (scientific achievement; think-Blairism) to Green (the sensitive self).

“Green: The Sensitive Self. Communitarian, human bonding, ecological sensitivity, networking. The human spirit must be freed from greed, dogma, and divisiveness; feelings and caring supersede cold rationality; cherishing of the earth, Gaia, life. Against hierarchy; establishes lateral bonding and linking. Permeable self, relational self, group intermeshing. Emphasis on dialogue, relationships. Basis of value communities (i.e., freely chosen affiliations based on shared sentiments). Reaches decisions through reconciliation and consensus (downside: interminable "processing" and incapacity to reach decisions). Refresh spirituality, bring harmony, enrich human potential. Strongly egalitarian, anti-hierarchy, pluralistic values, social construction of reality, diversity, multi-culturalism, relativistic value systems; this worldview is often called pluralistic relativism. Subjective, nonlinear thinking; shows a greater degree of affective warmth, sensitivity, and caring, for earth and all its inhabitants.
Where seen: Deep ecology, postmodernism, Netherlands idealism, Rogerian counselling, Canadian health care, humanistic psychology, liberation theology, cooperative inquiry, World Council of Churches, Greenpeace, animal rights, eco-feminism, post-colonialism, Foucault/Derrida, politically cor-
rect, diversity movements, human rights issues, eco-
psychology.”

The limitation of ‘tier one’ thinking, even at the green level, is that it struggles to accept the partial legitimacy of the other tier one perspectives:

“Where the green meme begins to grasp the numerous different systems and pluralistic contexts that exist in different cultures (which is why it is indeed the sensitive self, i.e., sensitive to the marginalization of others), second-tier thinking goes one step further. It looks for the rich contexts that link and join these pluralistic systems, and thus it takes these separate systems and begins to embrace, include, and integrate them into holistic spirals and integral meshworks. Second-tier thinking, in other words, is instrumental in moving from relativism to holism, or from pluralism to integralism.”

xFor an overview of this kind of thinking, including Kegan’s luminous take on Piaget, see the extended blog post “The Unrecognised Genius of Jean Piaget” on Perspectiva’s website: http://systems-souls-society.com/journal/2016/2/29/the-unrecognised-genius-of-jean-piaget


xiiiThe closest verifiable remark we have from Gandhi is: “If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. ... We need not wait to see what others do.” See Morton, B., (2011) Falser Words Were Never Spoken. New York Times, Available online: www.nytimes.com/2011/08/30/opinion/falser-words-were-never-spoken.html


See the short clip of former US President Bill Clinton, speaking at Davos in 2006: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEjKr2gA8Wk

See: Let’s Talk About Death. RSA public event. 2014. [Video file] Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IE0uT5Kyt4 (circa 51:28)


A fuller account of why can be seen in one of Perspectiva’s first blog posts, with a title borrowed from Robert Kegan: The unrecognised genius of Jean Piaget. Online: http://systems-souls-society.com/journal/2016/2/29/the-unrecognised-genius-of-jean-piaget


Roberto Unger, BBC Radio 4 Analysis, Nov 18 2013, Programme Available online: http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03hvn6n


All references in this section can be found on pages 74-78 in Rowson, J. (2014) Spiritualise: Revitalising Spirituality to address 21st Century Challenges. RSA: https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/spiritualise-report.pdf


See endnote ix above on Spiral Dynamics for further details.


