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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

NIETZSCHE'S THEORY OF COGNITION:  
AN INTERPRETATION AND DEFENSE  
OF PERSPECTIVISM

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN PHILOSOPHY

BY

JUSTIN R. MARQUIS

CHICAGO, IL

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used for references to Nietzsche's texts. See the bibliography for information about translations used.

- A     *The Antichrist*
- BGE   *Beyond Good and Evil*
- BT     *The Birth of Tragedy*
- D     *Daybreak*
- EH     *Ecce Homo*
- GM     *On the Genealogy of Morals*
- GS     *The Gay Science*
- HAH   *Human, All Too Human*
- TI     *Twilight of the Idols*
- TL     "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense"
- WP     *The Will to Power*
- Z     *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

## ABSTRACT

Friedrich Nietzsche has long been recognized as a pivotal thinker in the history of moral philosophy, but until the last quarter century his importance for our understanding of the concepts of truth and knowledge had been largely ignored in English-language scholarship. In my dissertation, I add to the growing discussion on Nietzsche's theory of human cognition. While more attention has recently been given to this dimension of Nietzsche's thought, several key aspects have been largely ignored or insufficiently treated including the effects that the ethical or evaluative domain have on the way we cognize the world, the role that radical skepticism plays in motivating Nietzsche's theory, and the connections between Nietzsche's views on cognition and his larger philosophical project.

What is distinctive about my project is the connection I draw between Nietzsche's critique of the unconditional will to truth in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Beyond Good and Evil* and his treatments of epistemological issues. Without understanding this connection, one cannot understand how Nietzsche's distinctive positions on truth, knowledge, and cognition relate his overall project. My dissertation sets out to answer four main questions regarding Nietzsche's theory of cognition, each question corresponding to a chapter of the completed work. In Chapter One I ask what the relationship is between Nietzsche's views on truth, knowledge, and cognition and his larger philosophical project of overcoming nihilism. Here I argue that Nietzsche's views on cognition follow directly from his analysis of the nihilism of post-Christian Europe and that his project of overcoming that nihilism requires a complete reevaluation of human knowing. Chapter Two asks what Nietzsche's



relationship is with skepticism and to what extent can Nietzsche be labeled a skeptic. I show that Nietzsche can be squarely placed in the skeptical tradition in philosophy that includes the Ancient Greek skeptics and the modern heuristic skeptic, Descartes. Nietzsche, however, rejects Descartes attempts to escape radical skepticism, and so can be properly labeled a radical skeptic himself. The next chapter asks what Nietzsche's model is for how human cognition functions given that it is not designed to aim for truth (as it is traditionally understood, i.e. correspondence). I explore the ways that his favored metaphors of textual interpretation and optical perspective function in elucidating what goes on when we think, highlighting these metaphors strengths and weaknesses. I ultimately conclude that cognition is a practical endeavor with theoretical objects, leading Nietzsche to reject the Kantian distinction between the practical and theoretical employments of reason. Finally I ask, given Nietzsche's model of how human cognition functions, how should we evaluate competing knowledge claims between individuals? It has been argued that Nietzsche's perspectivism leads to an unacceptable global relativism regarding, if not truth, then at least epistemic justification. I argue that Nietzsche does not need to abandon the most radical of his conclusions, and he can still account for how and why some positions on theoretical and philosophical matters are better than others, and so an unacceptable "anything goes" kind of relativism does not follow from his views.

After answering these four main questions regarding Nietzsche's views on truth, knowledge, and cognition, I look at how a metaphysics is possible for Nietzsche given his skepticism. I argue that one of the ways a philosopher can create the conditions for overcoming nihilism and affirming life is to create a metaphysics that is both ruthlessly honest to one's cognitive commitments and an artistically creative outpouring of one's

abundant, healthy drives. I show in this final chapter how a metaphysics that is self-aware of its epistemic limitations fits into some of the contemporary interpretations of Nietzsche's positive project.

## CHAPTER ONE

### TRUTH AS A WOMAN: AN INTRODUCTION TO PERSPECTIVISM

Supposing truth is a woman—what then?

BGE Preface

#### *Introduction*

When I tell people who have at least a cursory familiarity with Nietzsche that I am working on his epistemology, I am often met with the remark, “Nietzsche has an epistemology?” In some ways, this reaction makes a great deal of sense because, as I argue, Nietzsche’s primary philosophical concerns are not epistemological—they are evaluative, cultural, and ethical. Nevertheless, at the beginning of Nietzsche’s so-called “late period”—1886-1887—during which he published *Beyond Good and Evil* and the second edition of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche offers sustained if complex and fragmentary treatments of traditional epistemological and alethic questions. He deals with these questions because he understands them to relate to his primary philosophical projects in an essential and inescapable way. While not by any means the only works where Nietzsche has something to say about human cognition, in these works Nietzsche’s focus is at times explicitly directed to such concerns.

In this dissertation I attempt to describe what Nietzsche’s view regarding human cognition is—as well as the related epistemological and alethic concepts. I will show the extent to which Nietzsche can be regarded as a skeptic, and given his skepticism what room there is for a concept of knowledge to which we have access. In order to understand the broader significance of Nietzsche’s epistemology, it is necessary to comprehend how it

relates to Nietzsche's larger, primarily evaluative project. In this introductory chapter, I discuss some of the most important terminology I use throughout this work, I give the reader an overview of the structure of this work as a whole, highlighting the most important claims for which I argue, and I do a survey of the major views represented in the contemporary literature regarding Nietzsche's epistemology and theory of cognition. But before continuing to these, by way of introduction I will present how Nietzsche introduces what I have claimed are the most important works where he discusses epistemology, *The Gay Science* and *Beyond Good and Evil*.<sup>1</sup> Although I cannot give a full treatment of the connection between truth, cognition, knowledge, and Nietzsche's larger project until Chapter Two, in the following discussion of the prefaces to these two works, we will already begin to get a sense for why Nietzsche would care about these topics and some of the philosophical difficulties that are in store for us.

Nietzsche begins the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil* with a provocative hypothetical question, "Supposing truth is a woman—what then?" If we do suppose that truth is a woman, Nietzsche wonders whether there are "not grounds for the suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists, have been very inexpert about women." What is Nietzsche getting at here? Why think of truth as though it were a woman? What is it that the dogmatists do or do not do that makes them inexpert at wooing and courting truth? "Speaking seriously," he goes on to tell us what characterizes dogmatism in philosophy as he understands it, remarking "how little used to be sufficient to furnish the cornerstone" of the philosophies of dogmatists:

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<sup>1</sup> Christoph Cox makes much the same point about the *The Gay Science's* importance for questions pertaining to epistemology, cognition, and Nietzsche's perspectivism. See Cox 1999: 7.

Any old popular superstition from time immemorial (like the soul superstition which, in the form of the subject and ego superstition, has not ceased to do mischief), some play on words perhaps, a seduction by grammar, or an audacious generalization of very narrow, very personal, very human, all too human facts.

Dogmatism in this sense had begun to be overcome by Nietzsche's time, but he warns his readers, not to be "ungrateful to it [dogmatism]" because it has made them strong in their fight against it. In 19<sup>th</sup> the century this fight took the form of a fight against "Platonism for 'the people,'" i.e. Christianity. The spiritual and cultural tension this fight against Christianity has created gives Nietzsche's readers the possibility to shoot at new goals, and Nietzsche ends the preface by asking if "we," his readers, have the ability to be the ones to use this tension in order to give culture new ends.

This passage shows in a very indirect way, which I will explain in greater detail in Chapter Two, the connection between Nietzsche's interest in truth and our access to it and his larger philosophical project. Put simply here, he thinks that overcoming dogmatic philosophy, i.e. philosophy created by philosophers who were inept with truth conceived of as a woman, is a necessary condition for creating the cultural conditions he sees as valuable. But again, what does it mean for truth to be thought of as a woman? First and foremost, I think that it means that for Nietzsche truth is bound up with *eros*—erotic love. The traditional conception of truth (and our ability to attain it) sees truth as wholly objective and unresponsive and indifferent to the affective states of the one pursuing it. If truth is not like this, if truth "cares about" or is sensitive to the motives, emotions, and affective states of the philosopher, just as a woman cares about these aspects of the man<sup>2</sup> who pursues her,

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<sup>2</sup> I apologize for the hetero-normativity here. This is Nietzsche's metaphor and not mine. For some particularly good overviews of Nietzsche's views on women see Oliver 1995, Irigaray 1991, Scott 1999, Oppel 2005, Thompson 1990, and Clark 1994.

then the dogmatists insofar as they saw themselves as pursuing something essentially indifferent to these things would be very bad at the pursuit.

Nietzsche's use of Plato as an example in this preface is telling. Plato's philosophy meant for Nietzsche "standing truth on her head and denying perspective, the basic condition of all life." Plato, with his resistance to the sophistical notion that man is the measure of all things, saw truth as objective and untouched by our human (i.e. affective) perspective on it.<sup>3</sup> But if we think of truth differently, if we think of truth as something completely bound up with and related to the desires of the philosopher who pursues it, then the objective, disinterested approach to attaining it, exemplified by Plato will be insufficient and misguided. As I argue in this dissertation, Nietzsche does not deny that we can think about truth in this traditional, Platonic sense. However, if we think of truth in this way, we will never attain it, and we will be misguided in how we evaluate any understanding we have attained. However, if we think of truth as a woman who needs to be pursued as one would pursue a lover, then we begin to think about what relates to our actual cognitive situation and what actually matters for us and the ends and values that we have. This opens up a whole new philosophical landscape with its own new problems and potentials. This way of putting it of course raises more questions than it even begins to answer. A bulk of the work in this dissertation consists in unpacking, making sense of, and defending these claims. However, before beginning let us turn to the preface of the other published work where Nietzsche delves into epistemological problems, *The Gay Science*.

Nietzsche begins by telling us that the term "Gay Science" "signifies...the *intoxication* of convalescence" and that the "whole book is nothing but a bit of merry-making after long

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Plato's *Theaetetus* and *Protagoras* where Plato has Socrates arguing against Protagoras, the sophist credited with the quotation, "Man is the measure of all things," about whether truth is objective.

privation and powerlessness” (GS Preface §1). This is significant because, as he tells us in the next section, the relative health and power of the philosopher is essential for understanding his or her philosophy, and he asks whether “philosophy has not been merely an interpretation of the body and a *misunderstanding of the body*” (GS Preface §2). In other words, philosophy is a “symptom,” among others, of the constitution of the body of the one who philosophizes. Nietzsche tentatively concludes (naming this conclusion a “suspicion”), “what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all ‘truth’ but something else—let us say, health, future, growth, power, life” (GS Preface §2). Consequently, we are not “thinking frogs, nor objectifying and registering mechanisms with their innards removed” (GS Preface §3), i.e., we are not the kinds of beings who reflect or represent the world objectively and as it is. Our thinking is not a pure pursuit of its object, but, as we will see later in this dissertation, rather it is directed at other aims. This is because our cognition of the world is directly dependent on our complex of drives, desires, values, and affects, which are themselves dependent on the bodily constitution of the one who cognizes. Thus, truth claims and cognition are natural bodily phenomena just like anything that medicine and biology might study. As we will see, this entails not just that we must take the constitution of the body into account when we attempt to understand human cognition; human cognition simply is not the sort of thing that is meant to register the way the world is or is something meant to attain objective knowledge.

Having learned this lesson as well as the need for a certain sort of cheerfulness in doing philosophy, and “a mocking, light, fleeting, divinely untroubled, divinely artificial art” (GS Preface §4), Nietzsche claims that those who have learned these lessons (“we knowing ones”) “learn to forget well, and to be good at *not* knowing, as artists” (GS Preface §4). It is,

he says, “bad taste” to have “truth at any price,” (GS Preface §4) comparing this unconditional desire to attain the truth to ancient Egyptian youths breaking into a temple and uncovering and defiling the sacred statues there. For this “we are too experienced, too serious, too merry, too burned, too *profound*” (GS Preface §4).

We no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn; we have lived too much to believe this. Today we consider it a matter of decency not to wish to see everything naked, or to be present at everything, or to understand and ‘know’ everything. (GS Preface §4)

Nietzsche, again referring to truth as a woman, using a similar image to the one he uses in the preface of *Beyond Good and Evil*, tells his reader that she may have reasons for hiding, for “not letting us see her reasons.” Alluding to the Greek goddess who is a personification of the female genitals (Baubo), Nietzsche is telling us that to try to get at the truth, to try to “know everything” and unconditionally pursue the ultimate fact of the matter, is as indecent and inappropriate as looking up truth’s skirt (as it were).

Truth-as-a-woman in *Beyond Good and Evil* means that we have to woo her, that we must acknowledge and be sensitive to the way in which our own psychology affects the way we conduct inquiries. Truth-as-a-woman in *The Gay Science* means that there are some things that it is inappropriate to try to see—some truths one ought not try to discover because discovering them would be an obstacle to attaining things that Nietzsche thinks are more important than discovering truth, namely overcoming nihilism and affirming life. Truth has her secrets and must be seduced with our passions and not our cold, calculating reason.<sup>4</sup>

Nietzsche’s advice in light of this—become “superficial” like the Greeks who “knew how to

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<sup>4</sup> As we will see, this oppositional binary between the passions and reason is an overly simplistic caricature of Nietzsche’s more refined position. Reason never loses a privileged status for conducting inquiries into truth. However, reason is never “pure;” it is always mixed with the passions, such that the passions are essential components of reason. GS §2 shows Nietzsche’s continued dependence on “reason” as a standard for inquiry. WP §423 provides a good summary for why Nietzsche thinks that reason is always mixed with practical, i.e. ethical or evaluative, concerns. I discuss this at greater length in Chapter Four.



live” and were “superficial—*out of profundity*” (GS Preface §4).<sup>5</sup> This superficiality Nietzsche equates with or at least likens to being an artist, presumably because the artist is concerned with surfaces and phenomena instead of the deep, unseen and unheard structures of reality and what counts as true. I think that Nietzsche’s point here is much simpler than it seems to be at first glance; his point is this: there are some things that it is better not to know, better not to try to know. Surface, fiction, deception, and art are sometimes better for us than knowing or trying to know.<sup>6</sup> It is not so much that the truth is dangerous (although it can be dangerous too, as we will see in the discussion of the will to truth in Chapter Two); it is that truth is (at least sometimes) “indecent” in the sense of violating good taste. In the next chapter I argue that not pursuing truth unconditionally is a necessary condition, according to Nietzsche, for the cultural, evaluative ends—overcoming nihilism and affirming life—that mark the primary concerns of his philosophy. In order to further those ends, we must have the good taste to know when truth’s secrets are not to be plumbed, when we should not look under her veils.

“Supposing truth is a woman—what then?” Nietzsche’s answers point to some seemingly very un-philosophical conclusions. If truth is thought of as a woman (as it seems clear Nietzsche thinks it should be), then there are some truths one, on pain of being in poor taste or even indecent, ought not pursue. And, when truth is pursued, then it is not to be

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<sup>5</sup> Havas 1995 argues that when Nietzsche says the Greeks are “superficial out of profundity” he is claiming that the Greeks understood their perspective of the world to be not merely interpretation but rather the way the world actually is. Mangiafico 1997 offers an interpretation of this passage much closer to my own, claiming that being superficial out of profundity amounts to a love of “surfaces” after one has rejected the will to truth.

<sup>6</sup> The reader may ask where the “profundity” part comes in. Since Nietzsche is not telling his readers to avoid seeking out every truth, it seems that one is being profound in one’s superficiality in how one distinguishes between when it is proper to uncover the truth and when it is proper to refrain from doing so. This too takes a certain kind of knowledge, which requires certain kinds of inquiries. My conclusion here about how to interpret this passage rests on the way I understand the will to truth and Nietzsche’s critique of it, which I discuss at length in Chapter Two.

pursued coolly and objectively but rather passionately with an eye to how emotions, values, and affects guide and influence the chase and attainment of truth. Do not be objective, and be content with surfaces and superficiality instead of truth. Are there any imperatives more at odds with the enterprise of philosophy, as it is traditionally understood? Of course breaking with what is traditionally considered philosophy fits right in with the popular image of Nietzsche as an iconoclast, but one cannot read many of his writings and not be struck by how much he engages in many of the traditional philosophical debates, most of which go back to Greek antiquity. The main task of this dissertation is to show how Nietzsche can hold such seemingly anti-philosophical positions, while at the same time be clearly engaged in doing traditional philosophy. This is of pivotal importance for understanding Nietzsche in general because any interpreter of Nietzsche must strike a balance between seeing Nietzsche as a respectable philosopher doing work that is readily recognizable as philosophy and at the same time not domesticating Nietzsche by overlooking the radical and unorthodox nature of his views and methodologies. Nietzsche's radically unorthodox positions create philosophical problems for him to be sure (and these problems should not be overlooked), but in reconstructing what he has to say about the human cognitive situation, we can see that there is a (quasi) system, that I argue is novel, important, and feasible.

#### *Themes and Terminology*

The major theme of this dissertation, as its title suggests, is Nietzsche's theory of cognition, which for the sake of convenience I call "perspectivism" following the language used in one of the most famous passages where he discusses cognition, *On the Genealogy of Morals* III §12. Why do I use the term "cognition"? Cognition is a useful term because, in the sense I am using it, it is relatively value neutral. Whereas "knowledge," at least as the term is

traditionally understood, implies a positive epistemic and alethic status (for something to count as knowledge it is both justified and true), a “cognition” is a state or event to which epistemic and alethic terms can apply, but it does not presuppose a negative or positive application of those terms (e.g. true or false, knowledge or mere opinion, justified or unjustified), and we can speak about cognition apart from which positive or negative epistemic or alethic terms would apply to it. So although Nietzsche does not use this particular term, I think it has the virtue of capturing what “perspectivism” is supposed to be a theory of.

Two of the questions that this inquiry addresses are “Do we have access to truth?” and “Do any of our cognitions count as knowledge?” Nietzsche’s answers to these questions are, as we will see in the following chapters, quite complex. They are complex and at times difficult to make out in part because Nietzsche does not use the terminology of truth and falsity and knowledge in univocal ways. At times Nietzsche uses these (and related) terms in what he takes to be their received or traditional sense, often but not always, denoting them with scare quotes. At other times he uses them in a novel sense that, while recognizably related to their traditional or received senses, have significant conceptual differences from them.<sup>7</sup> This is important because, for example, I argue that on traditional uses of the concept denoted by “knowledge,” Nietzsche thinks that none of our cognition counts as knowledge,

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<sup>7</sup> Richardson (1996: 232n31) nicely summarizes the evidence for thinking that Nietzsche uses multiple senses of “true” throughout his works. One example, which is particularly clear because two senses of truth are implied in the same passage is TL §1:

What then is truth? A moveable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions.

Here Nietzsche uses truth in a cognizer-relative sense and the negative alethic term “illusions” in a traditional or received sense (I discuss this passage further in Chapter Two).

and so he can be correctly labeled a skeptic. However, when he uses “knowledge” to refer to his novel and idiosyncratic concept of knowledge, then human beings can be said to possess knowledge in certain cases. What exactly these claims amount to will have to wait until later in the dissertation, but one can see that when I use these terms in this work or talk about Nietzsche’s use of them, it is important to note the sense in which they are being employed, and I will take care to make clear the sense in which each term is used if it is not immediately obvious to the reader.

One more brief terminological note (other terminology will be explained as we go): I frequently use the term “world.” This term can designate one of two things; it can mean reality as it is independent of any thinking being’s cognition of it, or it can mean the world as it appears to a particular cognizing being. In other words, one use is cognizer independent; the other is cognizer relative. Again, unless the context makes clear exactly to which sense of “world” I’m referring, I will make it clear by referring to the cognizer independent sense as “world in itself” and the cognizer relative sense as “world for us.”

#### *Outline of the Dissertation*

As I have said, the primary goal of this work is to explicate and deal with some of the important philosophical problems of Nietzsche’s theory of cognition, which I refer to as “perspectivism.” I have divided up this topic into what I take to be the most important questions pertaining to it, devoting one chapter to each of them. In Chapter Two, I discuss the question of how Nietzsche’s perspectivism and questions relating to truth and knowledge pertain to his larger philosophical project. Chapter Three deals with Nietzsche’s relationship to skepticism, specifically whether and to what extent he can be correctly labeled a skeptic. Chapter Four sets about explaining, in light of the generalized and radical

skepticism I attribute to Nietzsche in Chapter Three, what Nietzsche thinks is actually happening when we cognize. Chapter Five deals with and responds to the charge that Nietzsche's perspectivism commits him to an unacceptable sort of global relativism about truth and epistemic justification. And finally the concluding Chapter Six explores what room there is for Nietzsche (or a Nietzschean) to have a metaphysics and what role such a metaphysics might play in his larger philosophical project.

In Chapter Two I discuss how perspectivism relates to Nietzsche's primary concern, which I take to be overcoming nihilism and the revaluation of values. While primarily beyond the scope of this dissertation, I discuss what I take nihilism and its overcoming to be for Nietzsche and why he would be concerned with them. Next, through a detailed discussion of his early work, *On the Birth of Tragedy*, and his later work, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, I show how his concern with overcoming nihilism is related to his famous critique of the will to truth, which I take to be the linchpin in the connection between his larger philosophical project and traditional concerns in epistemology, a connection that while widely acknowledged in the literature, has not received the thorough treatment its importance for understanding Nietzsche deserves.

Through an analysis of what Nietzsche takes to be a decisive question, viz., what the value of truth (or possessing or seeking the truth) is, I develop what is my primary thesis for Chapter Two: We do not pursue truth for the reasons we may have thought we do, e.g., because we desire to understand reality or because we believe that truths are more useful to believe than fictions. Rather we pursue truth to preserve and enhance our existence, expand our power, and further our aims and goals. These reasons that Nietzsche discovers for why we do pursue truth *perhaps* undermine some of the reasons for thinking that our beliefs are

actually aimed at the truth, i.e. are epistemically justified. This, I believe, shows that Nietzsche's overarching concerns about overcoming nihilism drive his understanding of human cognition in ways unacknowledged in the scholarly literature.<sup>8</sup>

Having ended Chapter Two with a rather weighty "perhaps," Chapter Three begins by asking whether the concerns I discussed in the previous chapter actually do undermine the justification we think our beliefs have. This raises the traditional philosophical question of skepticism, and after a discussion of the skepticism of Nietzsche's early works, I ask whether it is correct to call Nietzsche a skeptic in his later period as well. Answering that question affirmatively, I analyze the reasons Nietzsche has for a skeptical position and deal with some of the philosophical problems that arise from that position. Whether and to what extent Nietzsche can rightfully be labeled a skeptic has become a central concern in the scholarly literature with the publication of Jessica Berry's recent book, *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition*. In this chapter, I offer further support for Berry's claim that Nietzsche is a skeptic, and I complicate her claim that he is a skeptic in the Ancient Greek tradition.<sup>9</sup>

Central to the debate about whether Nietzsche is a skeptic or not is how best to interpret *Beyond Good and Evil* §36. I offer a novel interpretation of this passage, which I take to be a meditation, much like the kind employed by Descartes in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, meant to provoke a generalized skepticism in the reader. I conclude the chapter by

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<sup>8</sup> Nehamas 1983, and Clark 1990, Anderson 2005, some of the most important scholars on Nietzsche's epistemology all attempt to connect what Nietzsche claims about epistemology to his larger project, but as I show, they do not do a sufficient job in showing how his views on cognition follow directly from his concerns with diagnosing the nihilism of his cultural tradition.

<sup>9</sup> In Chapter Three, I also discuss those who deny Nietzsche is a skeptic at all such as Clark 1990 and Leiter 1994, as well as those who acknowledge Nietzsche's skepticism, but who claim he ultimately rejects it such as Poellner 1995 and Richardson 1996.

attributing a position to Nietzsche that I call metaphysical agnosticism, a novel take on Nietzsche's position that holds that one ought to withhold assent to any claim about the deep structure of reality independent of any cognizer's take on it. We may still make claims about how the world seems to us from our more or less idiosyncratic perspective, but making these claims about how things seem does not entail a commitment to a position about how things "really" are. Metaphysical agnosticism is different from other skeptical readings of Nietzsche that claim that we simply have no access to any kind of truth; this is the kind of skepticism offered by Berry. It also is different from the naturalistic readings exemplified by Clark and Leiter, which claim that notions of metaphysical truth do not make sense and so cannot even count as truth claims. Metaphysical agnosticism places Nietzsche somewhere between these two poles. It acknowledges that we can and do talk about what the ultimate structure of reality is, i.e., that which is absolutely true, but we can never know if our claims are adequate to that reality. It also acknowledges that even if we cannot apprehend the nature of what is ultimately true, we need not abandon making truth claims altogether as the radical skeptical readings would have us do.

Chapter Four explicates the structure of Nietzsche's perspectivism in detail. It begins with discussions of his two favored metaphors for the human cognitive situation, optical perspective (hence the term "perspectivism") (see GM III §12) and textual interpretation (see WP §481 1883-1888). My discussion of these two metaphors includes what they teach us about Nietzsche's position, but as this has been covered in great detail in the literature, I focus my analysis on the limitations of these two metaphors for understanding perspectivism. Given these limitations, I argue that, even though the metaphors are illuminating and rhetorically attractive, we as philosophical scholars should not put nearly so

much weight on them given that Nietzsche discusses the topics of truth, knowledge, and cognition in explicit terms as well. Next I turn to how cognitive perspectives are determined by affective states and (both implicitly and explicitly held) normative commitments. Based on the fact that Nietzsche holds that thought is determined by unconscious affects and normative values (rather than by the way the world actually is), I conclude that all cognition for Nietzsche has a similar logical structure to Kant's postulates of practical reason, ideas (like God and the Soul), which we legitimately hold for practical (in Kant's technical sense of "practical") reasons but about which we in principle cannot have properly theoretical knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Because of this determination of all thought by so-called practical concerns, Nietzsche ultimately rejects the distinction between the theoretical and practical employment of our cognitive faculties completely. The rest of the chapter deals with philosophical issues and problems stemming from these positions, namely what Nietzsche's own positive truth claims could mean given that he does not think we can attain knowledge and how his position avoids the problems of being self-referentially incoherent and epistemically self-defeating.<sup>11</sup>

In Chapter Five I deal with a problem, which if not completely ignored by the literature, has not received a satisfactory or concrete answer. This is the problem that Nietzsche's perspectivism allows for an unacceptable "anything goes" global relativism regarding epistemic justification. As we will see, Nietzsche scholarship has done a remarkable job addressing the related problem that Nietzsche's position is self-referentially

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<sup>10</sup> See Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason*. 5:122-141 for more on the postulates of practical reason.

<sup>11</sup> The best overview of the various strategies for dealing with these interrelated problems is Reginster 2001. I explain my own strategy for resolving them in relation to the possibilities proposed by Reginster in Chapter Four.



contradictory,<sup>12</sup> but that is only half the problem for his position. Indeed if epistemic justification is relative to a particular cognitive perspective, a perspective which itself has no ultimate rational justification, then it seems to follow that as long as one is being consistent with one's own perspective's standards, one cannot be wrong (i.e., epistemically unjustified) in making any claim whatsoever. However, Nietzsche clearly wants, as a philosopher, to be able to challenge positions he takes stances against on epistemic grounds.

On what basis can Nietzsche assert that some claims are not justified or that some claims are (epistemically) better than others? Indeed, if we are to take Nietzsche's epistemological position seriously, how can we object to competing philosophical claims beyond stating the superficial "That's not how it seems to me from my perspective?" In Chapter Five, I show that Nietzsche has two different concepts of objectivity that are consistent with his claim that we do not (and in principle cannot) possess absolute objectivity. I go on to specify how those concepts of objectivity allow Nietzsche to deal with the relativism problem by showing how they apply to the different kinds of intersubjective disagreement that can arise. I conclude that while Nietzsche can and should be seen as advocating a certain kind of global relativism regarding epistemic justification (and perspective-dependent truth), he has clear-cut criteria available, which can be rigorously employed in actual disagreements, for showing why some positions are epistemically preferable to others.

In the final chapter I argue that despite the fact that Nietzsche endorses a metaphysical agnosticism such that he will not endorse any claims regarding the deep structure of mind-independent reality, he leaves room for what I call a metaphysics of

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<sup>12</sup> See for example Anderson 1998, Reginster 2001, and Hales and Welshon 2000 for some strategies for dealing with this problem.

appearance. Since we cannot help but conceptualize the world in which we find ourselves in metaphysical ways, Nietzsche advocates being active with respect to that conceptualizing and doing metaphysics such that it is honest about its status as perspective-relative and unable to get at the deep structure of cognizer-independent reality. Being active with respect to conceptualizing metaphysically means that instead of letting unconscious drives of which we are not in control take the lead in doing the interpretation of reality, we train ourselves to “create” a conceptual world much as an artist does with images.<sup>13</sup>

In the first section, I explore the passages where Nietzsche argues that cognition is a kind of artistic creation, taking into account Nietzsche’s criticism of artists that they are not independent enough in the values they express in their art. In the next section, I look at the passages that indicate that Nietzsche leaves room for a metaphysics of appearance and show how it is consistent with his metaphysical agnosticism. In fact a metaphysics of appearance is simply the positive side of Nietzsche’s metaphysical agnosticism. It describes the nature of the abstract truths to which we do have access in light of Nietzsche’s critique of claims to truth to which we do not have access. This reading finds the middle ground between those interpretations of Nietzsche that claim there is no room for truth or knowledge in Nietzsche’s philosophy and those readings that claim that Nietzsche is not skeptical about our access to truth at all. Next, I argue that Nietzsche developed a will to power as the metaphysics of appearance for his idiosyncratic cognitive perspective and value set. In the final section, I show how creating a metaphysics of appearance that is honest about its lack

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<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that we are able to have libertarian freedom with respect to how we conceptualize the world. Rather through training both our drives and our philosophical style we can make our conceptualizations somehow our own.

of access to the absolute truth is a necessary condition for completing Nietzsche's broader project of overcoming nihilism and affirming life, however that project is conceived.

*An Overview of the Literature*

In his essay, "Perspectivism in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*," Brian Leiter (1994) argues against what he calls the "received view" of Nietzsche's perspectivism. The received view holds that

(i) the world has no determinate nature or structure; (ii) our concepts and theories do not 'describe' or 'correspond' to the world; (iii) our concepts and theories are 'mere' interpretations or 'mere' perspectives...; (iv) no perspectives can enjoy an epistemic privilege over any other, because there is no epistemically privileged mode of access to this characterless world.<sup>14</sup>

In this work, I will defend a restricted variant of the received view. I do not defend (i) as this involves a metaphysical claim, i.e. a claim about the structure (or lack thereof) of the world. The second claim (ii), I also do not defend as it violates Nietzsche's metaphysical agnosticism. Our concepts and theories certainly are attempts to describe the world in a way that corresponds in some way with it, but I take Nietzsche to hold that we can never know whether our theories and concepts map on to the world in this way or not. I will however argue for (iii) and (iv) with some important caveats; on traditional conceptions of truth and knowledge, according to Nietzsche our cognition does not apprehend reality, i.e. it is never epistemically adequate to it, and no human perspective is better than any other at getting at it. However, Nietzsche introduces new perspective-relative notions of the concepts of truth and knowledge, and if we employ these new concepts, humans can be said to have knowledge of the world, and some perspectives can be judged to be superior to others. It will take the rest of this work to sort out what these claims mean and how they can be

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<sup>14</sup> Leiter 1994: 334.

defended, but for now allow me to present some of the most important views in the scholarship on Nietzsche's theories of cognition. I cannot cover nearly all of the relevant literature here, so what follows is a selection of what I take to be the most important and influential scholarship that is relevant to my study. Throughout the rest of this work, I will refer back to these views introduced in this chapter.

One of the most important works in the relatively recent resurgence of interest in Nietzsche's views on truth and knowledge is Maudmarie Clark's *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*. Her view is that Nietzsche held something similar to what Leiter calls the "Received View" in his early and middle works up to and including *Beyond Good and Evil*. At some point between writing *Beyond Good and Evil* and writing *On the Genealogy of Morals*, according to Clark, Nietzsche changed his view, rejecting the idea that it is coherent that there is a truth of the matter entirely beyond our epistemic grasp. Instead she argues that Nietzsche came to hold that truth is equivalent to what our best standards of inquiry could in principle discover, i.e. there is nothing more to truth than what we could ultimately discover about the world. This view makes any sort of radical skepticism an incoherent position. Because of this Clark argues that Nietzsche rejects the possibility of a thing in itself outside our cognitive grasp, she rejects the view that Nietzsche was some sort of radical skeptic about our access to the fact of the matter, and she rejects the view that Nietzsche held that all human perspectives lack ultimate rational foundations.

There are two separate aspects to Clark's view that I reject. The first is that Nietzsche's views on truth, knowledge, and cognition change radically from the middle to late periods of his career. I will not challenge this developmental view directly as I take Lanier Anderson, in his 1996 essay "Overcoming Charity: The Case of Maudmarie Clark's

*Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*,” to have adequately shown that view to be mistaken, and it is unnecessary to rehash those arguments here. However, I will, throughout the course of this work, point to passages in the later works where Nietzsche does affirm the same sorts of views on cognition that he makes in earlier works. The other aspect of Clark’s view that I reject is that Nietzsche’s view is one that is incompatible with radical skepticism. I will make arguments for this claim and engage Clark directly in Chapters Three and Four.

Perhaps my biggest debt in the contemporary literature is to Lanier Anderson; I do not so much object to his position as go beyond and expand upon it. Anderson attributes the “falsification thesis” to Nietzsche, contra Leiter and Clark. According to the falsification thesis, all of our cognition is necessarily false, which he takes to mean that it is inadequate in faithfully representing reality. In “Nietzsche on Truth, Illusion, and Redemption” he writes:

The falsification argument then seems to be this: Strictly true representation would have to capture the way the world is independently—it would represent the world after the subtraction of any perspectival content superadded in cognition; But subtraction is impossible, since perspectives are a necessary condition of cognitive representation (‘As if a world would still remain over after one had subtracted the perspective!’ (WP §567)); Thus, cognitive representation systematically falsifies (WP §584, GS §354).<sup>15</sup>

While this is the case for our cognition of reality, we can and do successfully refer to the apparent world, i.e. the way things seem to us. So while we do not have access to truth if by truth we mean the way things are independent of our cognitive grasp of them, if we mean by truth something that is somehow relative to our perspective-dependent cognitive situation, then we can and do have access to a kind of truth. This perspective-dependence of our cognition is much like Kant’s view that the passivity of perception is actively schematized according to the pure concepts of the understanding through which we cannot help but

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<sup>15</sup> Anderson 2005: 188.

conceptualize the world.<sup>16</sup> However, Anderson argues that Nietzsche rejects the transcendental deduction of these categories, i.e. that they are the *necessary* conditions of possible experience. Instead Nietzsche gives a naturalistic explanation that is both cultural and evolutionary for how we organize experience and cognize the world as we do. These aspects of Anderson's view, I too endorse. Where I go beyond Anderson is to further explicate the implications of this view, exploring exactly how our cognitive perspective arose naturalistically and showing how Nietzsche's theory of human cognition can deal with the problem that our cognitive situation seems to entail an unacceptable form of relativism and that all our cognition lacks an absolute rational foundation. As we will see, I disagree with Anderson on how to interpret certain passages, most notably *Beyond Good and Evil* §36, which I discuss in Chapter Three.

Perhaps the topic on which I diverge from the contemporary literature the most is on Nietzsche's skepticism. I develop my own position on the extent to which Nietzsche can be considered a skeptic and what kind of a skeptic he is in Chapter Three, but for the remainder of this chapter I will briefly survey the other approaches that have been adopted to Nietzsche's view on cognition in relation to his skepticism. Peter Poellner in his book *Nietzsche and Metaphysics* acknowledges the extent and force of Nietzsche's skeptical considerations by distinguishing between skeptical considerations regarding specific metaphysical concepts such as substance and scientific concepts such as atoms and force, skeptical considerations of a more general nature that stem from problems of justification, and Nietzsche's skeptical arguments from evolution. While acknowledging the importance of these skeptical considerations in Nietzsche's thought, Poellner (like Clark) argues that

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<sup>16</sup> See "On the schematism of the pure concepts of the understanding" in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, A137/B176.

Nietzsche ultimately rejects the notion of metaphysical truth altogether (not just our access to it), and that this rejection trumps any sense in which Nietzsche might be labeled a radical skeptic. Arguing that the concept of objects in themselves (rather than objects for some cognizing subject) is nonsensical<sup>17</sup> and that there can be no non-relational being,<sup>18</sup> he concludes that metaphysical realism is an unintelligible metaphysical position. This leads him to the following conclusion regarding Nietzsche's skeptical arguments:

The most fruitful way of understanding them would seem to be as instruments or tools which he employs in his struggle with the ascetic ideal... We understand them, that is, as saying that even if 'metaphysical truth' were intelligible, knowledge of it would be unattained and probably unattainable.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, Nietzsche's metaphysical anti-realism has priority in his overall "system" over his skepticism, and his skepticism is merely one internal critique among many of various specific metaphysical doctrines.

Because Poellner does not see Nietzsche's skepticism (or metaphysical agnosticism) as primary, he has a difficult time squaring Nietzsche's positive philosophy with his rejection of metaphysical claims. In other words, if Nietzsche ultimately claims that objects have no nature whatsoever apart from how they relate to some subject, then it looks as though Nietzsche cannot consistently make epistemically privileged claims at all, but of course Nietzsche does make positive claims that he believes are epistemically privileged, both in his critique of metaphysics and in support of his positive project. If Poellner had recognized that Nietzsche is able to appeal to a shared-perspective (but still metaphysically agnostic) objectivity, Poellner would have had no problem seeing both the positive and the negative

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<sup>17</sup> See Poellner 1995: 80-81.

<sup>18</sup> Poellner 1995: 109.

<sup>19</sup> Poellner 1995: 137.

strands of Nietzsche's thought as consistent and even mutually reinforcing. This would require that we understand Nietzsche's skepticism to be prior to any rejection of metaphysical truth such that we must be agnostic about the very possibility of such perspective-independent truth, a position that I argue for in Chapter Three.

Another commentator to have seen the importance that radical skepticism plays in Nietzsche's philosophy is John Richardson in his *tour de force* study *Nietzsche's System* (1996). While clearly outlining the extent and varieties of Nietzsche's skeptical considerations, Richardson ultimately concludes that Nietzsche is not a skeptic.<sup>20</sup> Rather Richardson argues that Nietzsche, after discovering the perspectival nature of the human cognitive situation, denies that this has ultimately skeptical implications in order to make the claim that reality itself, its deep metaphysical structure, is perspectival all the way down. Reality for Richardson's Nietzsche is literally composed of perspectives taken on other perspectives, i.e. objects are secondary and relations are the primary constituents of reality, i.e. they are ontologically primary. This is Richardson's understanding of Nietzsche's concept of the will to power, "will to power" naming the nexus of perspectives taken on other perspectives that constitutes reality.<sup>21</sup>

While the primary aim of my study is to determine Nietzsche's epistemology in light of his discoveries regarding the nature of human cognition and not to delve into Nietzsche's

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<sup>20</sup> Richardson (1996) and I disagree about the nature of the skepticism that Nietzsche advocates. Richardson argues that Nietzsche does not advance a Cartesian style skepticism where the reason we lack knowledge is because we lack the required degree of justification. Rather Richardson argues that Nietzsche thinks we do not possess knowledge because our beliefs simply are not true. While Nietzsche does certainly offer reasons for thinking that many of our everyday beliefs are false, in Chapter 3 I argue that Nietzsche also has Cartesian style considerations for thinking we lack the justification required for knowledge.

<sup>21</sup> Coker (2002: 13) argues that Nietzsche's perspectivism is independent of the will to power, and that any understanding of the will to power as an ontology must take perspectivism as primary and independent of that ontology. I am in agreement with this view, and I argue for the primacy of perspectivism vis-à-vis any ontology of the will to power Nietzsche may develop in Chapters Three and Four. In Chapter Six I consider the possibility that Nietzsche has an ontology of the will to power that is secondary in relation to his perspectivism.



metaphysics (if he has any), I am sympathetic to Richardson's reconstruction of a Nietzschean metaphysics that sees relations as ontologically prior to their *relata* and reality as perspectival all the way down. However, where I take issue with Richardson and where his position is in conflict with the one I take in this study is his claim that Nietzsche's metaphysics trumps the skeptical implications of his perspectivism. In this dissertation, I argue that the most important consequence of perspectivism is that human beings are epistemically cut off from what is absolutely true and therefore we have no cognitive access to the deep structure of reality. Any metaphysics Nietzsche (or anyone else) might develop can only be more or less justified (or more or less true given the perspective-relative concept of truth I explicate in Chapter 4) from within a given cognitive perspective. In other words, when it comes to claims of absolute truth, the skeptical conclusions Nietzsche draws from perspectivism trump any purported metaphysical conclusions. It is in Chapters 3 and 4 where I argue for this claim, and in Chapter 5 I show how Nietzsche can avoid charges of a pernicious "anything-goes" relativism for epistemic justification that seem to arise from this position.

Many of the positions on Nietzsche's theory of cognition with which I take issue are those that deny or downplay the skeptical nature of Nietzsche's position. A common thread among many (but not at all) of these commentators is an overreliance on Nietzsche's famous passage regarding perspectivism, GM III §12. In this passage, Nietzsche compares human knowing (in the broad sense of "cognizing") with seeing. Just as viewing an object occurs from a particular optical perspective, cognizing something occurs from a particular cognitive perspective, i.e. it is impossible according to Nietzsche, for there to be a non-perspective relative "view" of anything that is thought. While GM III §12 is certainly a critically

important passage for understanding Nietzsche's understanding of how human cognition functions and for his views regarding the possibility and conditions for human knowledge (I discuss it at length in Chapter 4), placing too much emphasis on it and not exploring how it relates to the rest of Nietzsche's writing on this topic has led many a commentator to what I believe are erroneous conclusions regarding Nietzsche's position on skepticism.<sup>22</sup>

One feature of this study is that I attempt to present Nietzsche's views from his entire body of work. To be sure, there is a focus on the later half of his philosophical career, but this stems mainly from the fact that it is in these works where Nietzsche discusses issues pertaining to truth and knowledge. It is my goal to not only give interpretations of individual passages, but to show how various disparate passages hang together conceptually, while maintaining sensitivity to the context in which they occur. Thus this dissertation is not a piece of intellectual history; it is rather an attempt to construct a philosophy out of the concepts and arguments that the mature Nietzsche left us. Of course, I could have only focused on one portion of Nietzsche's career or have chosen to draw upon only the published works. These choices would have reflected a related, but slightly different, conceptual apparatus than the one with which I engage here. My choice rests on nothing more than that I think the concepts employed in the entire Nietzschean corpus as a whole within the domains of cognition and epistemology are interesting and philosophically worthwhile.

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<sup>22</sup> Janaway 2007: chapters 11 and 12. Here Janaway argues that Nietzsche's perspectivism undermines the traditional conception of how knowing occurs, i.e., as a unitary subject's disinterested take on the objective world. While Nietzsche's account does this, it does far more. Janaway's error is that in failing to connect GM III §12 with other passages on knowledge and cognition, he neglects the way in which Nietzsche shows how our knowledge is undermined by subjective factors.

Another route commentators take to deny that Nietzsche's position on human cognition is skeptical is to argue that Nietzsche thinks the realist, "correspondence" theory of truth is incoherent. Instead of claiming, as I do, that Nietzsche thinks that on a traditional correspondence understanding of truth, we do not have access to such truths, but if we understand truth differently we perhaps do have access to it, this interpretation holds that realist, correspondence truth simply does not exist. On this reading, Nietzsche is not primarily making epistemological claims at all, but is rather offering a theory of truth, i.e. arguing that some theories of truth are incoherent, and that another theory of truth is the coherent, correct one. While this interpretation of Nietzsche's project is appealing, two considerations speak against it. First, as I have already claimed and argue for later in this dissertation, Nietzsche uses truth in multiple senses, the realist sense and his own cognizer-relative sense that I unpack in Chapter Four. When Nietzsche uses "truth" or "true" in the realist sense, he does not talk about such truths not existing *simpliciter*, he talks instead of human beings (in principle) not having access to them. The other consideration (which will take this entire dissertation to argue for sufficiently) is that Nietzsche consistently talks about our *access* (or lack thereof) to truth, i.e. he asks and deals with epistemological questions, and he nowhere offers a sustained account of what he thinks the correct concept of truth is. Given this, it seems the claim that commentators like Cox make that Nietzsche's philosophizing regarding truth is about correct and incorrect theories of truth is implausible. Nietzsche's talk about truth comes down to our *human* relationship to it, a concern that guides all his philosophizing.

One commentator who takes this line that I am arguing against is Christoph Cox. In his book *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation* he argues that Nietzsche is a sort of anti-

realist, i.e. Cox claims that Nietzsche does not think there is a world outside of the interpretations that are made about the world—things do not have a cognition independent existence or nature. One of his primary reasons for thinking this is Nietzsche’s commitment to a particular kind of naturalism that denies that there is a transcendentally metaphysical world. While this is not the place to get into what Nietzsche’s naturalism actually consists in, Cox thinks that Nietzsche’s naturalism includes the denial of the existence of anything that is transcendentally metaphysical because to affirm anything other than what is given in our limited human perspective is to deny the value of that immanent, finite perspective. To posit that there is a world beyond our epistemic grasp is to deny the value of the immanent, the value of what is given to us. Cox is correct to point out that Nietzsche denies the value of anything that might transcend possible perspectives one could take on it. However, this does not force Nietzsche to deny that such things might exist. To posit something as existing or possibly existing is not to grant that those things have value. Indeed, Nietzsche’s commitment to the conditional and limited nature of the will to truth gives him room to grant that while certain things might be true, including things about a realm beyond our cognitive grasp, a realm we must remain skeptical about, such a realm simply does not concern us because it is outside of all of our possible perspectives. For Cox simply accepting that there might be such truths violates the value of the world given in our perspectives. I will deal with another, much better and more technical argument that Cox gives for Nietzsche being an antirealist in Chapter Three when I discuss Nietzsche’s skepticism and metaphysical agnosticism.

Perhaps the most important recent study to take Nietzsche’s skeptical position as seriously as I do is Jessica Berry’s book, *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition*. There she

argues that Nietzsche should be seen as a skeptic in the Ancient Greek Pyrrhonian tradition, abstaining from holding any views whatsoever except to affirm that which is merely apparent without attaching any metaphysical significance to it. For the most part, I am in agreement with Berry, and I think her book is one of the most important recent additions to the scholarship on Nietzsche's epistemological views. The differences between her book and this dissertation are more of emphasis than of disagreement. Whereas Berry focuses on the influences of the Ancient Greek skeptics on Nietzsche's thought, I am more concerned with Nietzsche's own statements of his views and the philosophical implications and problems associated with them. Despite our broad agreement, there are some important differences between Berry's position and my own. Those differences will be discussed in Chapter Three where I complicate her view that Nietzsche is best seen as a skeptic in the Ancient Greek tradition and Chapter Five where I reject her view as to what Nietzsche's naturalism amounts to.

This is only a small sampling of the various views on Nietzsche's theory of cognition. I will deal with these in more detail throughout the rest of this study as well as engage with the positions of other scholars. The literature on Nietzsche's views regarding epistemology and truth is vast, and I have been forced by space constraints to focus on only the most important of these and the ones that pertain most directly to my own position. In the next chapter I take a look at why we should care about Nietzsche's theory of cognition by seeing how it connects with his larger project of overcoming nihilism by commencing a reevaluation of all values. I show how Nietzsche's critique and analysis of the unconditional will to truth connect his epistemology to that project as well as begin to explore how that critique motivates what I take to be his radical skepticism regarding our access to mind-independent

truth. Incidentally, it is this relationship between Nietzsche's broader philosophical and evaluative commitments and his positions on epistemology and human cognition that have been insufficiently explored in the contemporary scholarship, and I take looking at this relationship to be one of my most significant contributions to the literature on the topic. Perhaps the only commentator I have come across that does attempt to explore this relationship is Alexander Nehamas in his important book, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. However, as I show in the next chapter, I have some major disagreements with Nehamas regarding that relationship, and as I show in Chapter Four, I reject Nehamas' position regarding Nietzsche's theory of cognition itself.

As I explore these and related issues throughout the dissertation the picture of Nietzsche that emerges is of one who both embraces and rejects traditional philosophy, i.e. of someone who wants to transform philosophy. We see a Nietzsche who both searches diligently for the truth, but who also thinks the ultimate truth of the matter is hidden from view. We see a Nietzsche who thinks that humans, at least in our culture, cannot help but want to discover the true nature of things, but who also thinks that we have overvalued truth and that there are far more important ends to be sought. And most importantly for the purposes of this dissertation we see a Nietzsche who, though stylistically is very distant from most if not all in the Western philosophical tradition, has very important and interesting things to tell us about the nature of human cognition and the success and value of inquiring into the nature of things.

## CHAPTER TWO

### NIETZSCHE'S CRITIQUE OF THE WILL TO TRUTH

Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of 'world history,' but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die.

TL §1

#### *Introduction*

With this bleak yet playful narrative, Nietzsche begins his early (1873), programmatic essay, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense." Here at the beginning of the essay, which treats the issues of truth and knowing which will figure prominently in his later thought, Nietzsche proclaims the arrogance and mendaciousness of the human invention of knowing.<sup>1</sup> However, he reminds us that in the overall scheme of world history, the existence of human beings and their claims to knowledge will last only a brief moment, rhetorically reminding us, his readers, to place human knowing in a more honest and humble context. His language in this passage highlights not only the ephemeral nature of human knowledge, but also the fragile nature of the human condition itself. Put in this light, if no more can be said, it seems as though the value we place on truth and knowledge is an empty illusion when compared to the scope of endless time. Here the reader is confronted with an immediate connection between issues of truth and knowledge and the topic of nihilism so prominent in

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<sup>1</sup> By "knowing" here I take Nietzsche to mean something that includes but is not coextensive with the notion of knowledge as justified true belief. This sense of knowing corresponds with the term I use "cognition." It reflects an activity that could be true or false, but does not entail a positive epistemic or alethic status to that act.

Nietzsche's thought, a condition in which "the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer" (WP §2, 1887).<sup>2</sup> "[Man's] existence on earth contained no goal; 'why man at all?'—was a question without an answer; the *will* for man and earth was lacking" (GM III §28). These pithy statements about the nature of nihilism, at least the kinds with which Nietzsche is concerned, show that humans have a need to possess an end or *teleos* for human activity and that such an end provides one with the will to live and act. Nihilism occurs when such goals are lacking or the ones that were formerly held cease to be effective. The problem for Nietzsche is how to form values or goals that can be effective when changes in the individual or cultural conditions make the old ends untenable.

Bernard Reginster argues forcefully in his book, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* that we should regard:

the principle of organization of Nietzsche's thought not [as] a certain philosophical doctrine, but [as] a particular problem or crisis... As soon as we begin to regard Nietzsche's philosophy as a systematic response to the crisis of nihilism, we become able to account for all of his main philosophical doctrines and to explain their importance in his eyes. Most significantly, we become able to understand the nature and privileged standing of his doctrine of the affirmation of life.<sup>3</sup>

If Reginster is correct on this point, as I believe him to be, that the crisis Nietzsche identifies as nihilism is the guiding philosophical concern throughout his work, the connection between his thought on these topics and the problem of nihilism must be articulated in order to clarify what Nietzsche has to say on truth and knowledge. Furthermore, if we are to critically evaluate Nietzsche's views on truth and knowledge, then those views must be

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<sup>2</sup> Since *The Will to Power* is a collection of notes arranged in an order determined by editors and not Nietzsche, I will include the year Nietzsche wrote the note, so that the reader can situate the chronology of the passage cited with Nietzsche's published works.

<sup>3</sup> Reginster 2006: 4.



evaluated in light of Nietzsche's larger project of uncovering the conditions for the possibility of affirming life and overcoming nihilism.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter, I take on the task of illustrating the connection between the concepts of truth and knowledge and the problem of nihilism in Nietzsche's philosophy. The concept I will privilege in elucidating this connection is what Nietzsche calls "the will to truth." By positing a will to truth, Nietzsche shifts the philosophical questioning from the traditional "what is...?" (e.g. "what is truth?" or "what is knowledge?") to the questions "who wants truth [or knowledge]?" and "what is the value of truth [or knowledge]?"<sup>5</sup> This chapter will contain a brief analysis of Nietzsche's concept of nihilism, a detailed interpretation of the texts dealing with the will to truth and the questions "who wants truth?" and "what is the value of truth?", and finally an analysis of how the concept of the will to truth relates to Nietzsche's thinking on more traditional questions regarding truth and knowledge. I will argue in this chapter that by changing the privileged philosophical question from the *nature* of truth to the *value* of truth, Nietzsche's philosophical reflections on truth and knowledge must be seen as fundamentally undermining our confidence and faith in human cognition and as putting those categories of human experience in the service of overcoming nihilism instead of contributing to it.

### *What is Nihilism?*

Nihilism, with its root *nihil* meaning "nothing" in Latin, has the popular connotation of believing in nothing. This, however, cannot be Nietzsche's conception of nihilism because

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<sup>4</sup> Andreas Urs Sommer (2009: 254) shows the link Nietzsche makes in his *Nachlass* between a rather radical conception of truth/knowledge and the "most extreme form of nihilism." According to this "most extreme form of nihilism," "every belief, every considering-something-true, is necessarily false because there simply is no true world" (WP §15 1887). An analysis of what Nietzsche might mean by denying the existence of a "true world" will have to wait until Chapter Three.

<sup>5</sup> See BGE §1, where Nietzsche begins one of his most important works with the question, "What in us really wants 'truth?'" and claims that even more basic is the question of the value of truth.

he holds that many worldviews, including Christianity and post-Christian science, to be nihilistic, and it is clear that these hold many beliefs (one has metaphysical beliefs about the divine, the other has empirically verifiable beliefs about nature). It is beyond the scope of this work to delve into the complex interpretive issues involved in Nietzsche's conception of nihilism.<sup>6</sup> However, a relatively brief exploration of the texts dealing with the topic will help shed light on how the questions of truth or knowledge relate to Nietzsche's broader philosophical project.

Without presupposing too much about what nihilism is for Nietzsche before beginning our inquiry, we can provisionally say that nihilism is a judgment or attitude that life as it is, is not worth living. Nietzsche inherited a preoccupation with questions about the "untenability of existence" (WP §3, 1887), i.e. whether life is worth living or not, from his greatest philosophical influence, Arthur Schopenhauer—famous for his philosophy of pessimism. According to Reginster, Schopenhauer's pessimism consists in the view that human happiness is unattainable because of the nature of human willing and desire satisfaction. Pain, for Schopenhauer, is being in the state of having unfulfilled desires, and happiness is the absence of pain, i.e. having all of one's desires fulfilled. Schopenhauer believes that human beings, by necessity, can never have their desires fulfilled. This is because even in those rare moments when all of our ordinary sorts of desires are fulfilled, we suffer from the ennui of not having anything further to desire, or to put it paradoxically, we desire having something to desire.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For a more in-depth review of the scholarly debates concerning the nature of nihilism for Nietzsche see Pippen 2010: 52-57 and Reginster 2006. I have been particularly influenced by Deleuze's (1993) treatment of nihilism.

<sup>7</sup> See the section on Schopenhauer's pessimism in Reginster 2006: 106-123.

In order to elucidate Nietzsche's distinctive position on these questions, let us turn to Nietzsche's first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy*. While Nietzsche does not refer to nihilism by name here, this work primarily deals with how the Greeks (and in Nietzsche's early thought, Wagner) were able to overcome the apparent untenability of existence through art. It is useful to begin here because in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche is still more or less uncritical of Schopenhauer's influence, and yet we can still see how Nietzsche shifts the focus of his inquiry away from questions of happiness and desire toward those of meaning and value. The expression of nihilistic sentiment is put in the mouth of Silenus, the companion of the god Dionysus. The wisdom of Silenus—"What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best for you is—to die soon" (BT §3)—is not nihilism itself, but it expresses the ultimate result of a nihilistic outlook, the feeling or judgment that life is not worth living and that it would be better never to have been or at least to no longer be. Through the redemptive quality of creating and participating in tragic art which *The Birth of Tragedy* takes as its topic of inquiry, the Greeks were able to reverse the wisdom of Silenus and affirm that "to die soon is worst of all for them, the next worst—to die at all" (BT §3).<sup>8</sup>

What about the artistic creation of Attic tragedy (and the Olympian gods) made an otherwise unbearable life not only endurable but something taken to be valuable in its own right? What about Greek life before the invention of the gods and tragic festivals made the

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<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche also claims in this section that regarding the Greeks' Olympian gods "[i]t was in order to be able to live that the Greeks had to create these gods from a most profound need." Thus, not only did the Greeks invent the artistic form of tragedy in order to deal with the nihilistic wisdom of Silenus, but they also created their gods in order to be able to affirm existence. This is a clear example of how thought (the belief in a pantheon of gods who were glorifications of the human condition) is determined by needs and values and anticipates one of my major theses about Nietzsche's thought in general: Nietzsche thought that all belief, all thought is creation no different in kind from the artistic creation that proceeds out of a profound need or an overflowing abundance. I discuss thought (specifically metaphysical thought) as artistic creation in more detail in Chapter Six.

wisdom of Silenus so seductive? Answering these questions will go a long way to uncovering the meaning of nihilism for Nietzsche and making sense of the texts where he treats it explicitly. The answer to the latter question is relatively simple; Nietzsche, doing his best impression of his philosophical teacher and mentor, Schopenhauer, writes, “The Greek knew and felt the terror and horror of existence” (BT §3). Earthly, human existence for the Greeks (and presumably for all of us) is at bottom suffering, making the suicidal wisdom of Silenus so seductive. To answer the former question as to what it was about Greek religion (the gods and the tragic festivals) that made life endurable and worth living, Nietzsche writes that the Greeks used the Olympian world as “a transfiguring mirror [of the actual world]” (BT §3). In other words, the Greeks were able to see the actual world for what it is (terrifying and filled with suffering) but in a way that made them see that terror and suffering in a new life-affirming way.

Nietzsche claims that giving life and the suffering endemic to life justificatory meaning, as the Greeks were able to do through their gods and the tragic festival, is a condition for overcoming the wisdom of Silenus and affirming life. Why is this the case? Given what Nietzsche says in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the existence of suffering tends to make life seem to be not worth living,<sup>9</sup> and justificatory meaning is required to overcome this often debilitating condition. While *The Birth of Tragedy* is successful in describing this fundamental feature of the human condition, Nietzsche does not explore in this work why it is that suffering tends to count against life in our eyes and why certain kinds of justification

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<sup>9</sup>Notice that I am not claiming that life is in fact not worth living but only that it seems to be not worth living. Nietzsche is very clear in claiming that the overall value of life cannot be determined in principle, and an individual’s estimations of the value of life are not indications of the actual value or disvalue of existence as a whole, but rather are only interesting as symptoms of particular type of human being. Nietzsche writes, “Judgments, judgments of value, concerning life, for it or against it, can, in the end, never be true: they have value only as symptoms, they are worthy of consideration only as symptoms; in themselves such judgments are stupidities” (II II §2).

(such as the Greeks' "transfiguring mirror") are able to overcome this tendency. In the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche describes how the condition of *ressentiment*, or the weak types' rancor against the strong and noble types, is turned inward, thus causing individuals to suffer from themselves, but at the same time giving them the psychological depth and complexity necessary for creating values. This change produced by *ressentiment*, while representing a kind of weakness, according to Nietzsche, also makes human beings interesting creatures for the first time.<sup>10</sup> Here Nietzsche begins to answer the questions that *The Birth of Tragedy* left unanswered.<sup>11</sup>

After telling the by now familiar story of how the slave morality of good versus evil triumphed over the noble's evaluative mode of good versus bad in the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche begins the second essay, which deals with the concept of the "bad conscience,"<sup>12</sup> by asking how human beings became the kind of animal capable of making promises.<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche claims, contrary to common sense, that forgetfulness is the

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<sup>10</sup>Nietzsche writes of the priests who brought slave morality to power over more noble modes of evaluation:

It is only fair to add that it was on the soil of this *essentially dangerous* form of human existence, the priestly form, that man first became *an interesting animal*, that only here did the human soul acquire *depth* and become *evil*. (GM I §6).

Without the priest making the morality of good and evil the primary mode of evaluation for the human race, the human soul would not have internalized its *ressentiment*, making values like the will to truth possible.

<sup>11</sup> The extended discussion of GM that follows is not necessary for a succinct understanding of Nietzsche's concept of nihilism, but it is important to see how Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism leads directly to the will to truth. In other words, in order to understand how a critique of nihilism leads to Nietzsche's broader epistemology we need to see how the triad of nihilism diagnosis, critique of the will to truth, and Nietzsche's theory of cognition hang together. The clearest way this connection can be made is through a reading of GM (especially essays II and III).

<sup>12</sup> Owen's (2007) account of essay II focuses on the role of inwardly directed cruelty in the development of the bad conscious. Cruelty is directed inwardly when there is no legitimate external avenue through which to discharge it. This inwardly directed cruelty, which is moralized to the highest degree when one believes one owes a debt to mythologized ancestors and eventually an all powerful deity, is what gives rise to the positive valuation given to various selfless and altruistic actions. Janaway's (2007) account of this essay centers on the degree to which it is a critique of Schopenhauer's positive valuation of selflessness, a view which Nietzsche diagnoses as nihilistic.

primary active quality relative to memory and that in order for promise-making to become possible “an active desire not to rid oneself, a desire for the continuance of something desired once, a real memory of the will” (GM II §1) had to be cultivated. Nietzsche’s claim is that in forgetfulness developed in order to make sure humans were not unnecessarily overcome by the panoply of sensation they constantly encountered, and this necessary forgetfulness was a strong force that needed to be overcome in order for the memory needed to promise to be able to develop. In order to develop the responsibility necessary for promise keeping, humans had to be made calculable and predictable, both to others and to themselves. Through the creation of responsibility what Nietzsche calls the “sovereign individual”<sup>14</sup> was born, the individual with “the proud awareness of the extraordinary privilege of responsibility, the consciousness of this rare freedom, this power over oneself and over fate” (GM II §2).

It was pain, according to Nietzsche, that allowed humans to develop the memory and self-mastery required to be able to develop promise making and promise keeping. The first example of using pain to cause individuals to remember their obligations occurred in the

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<sup>13</sup>Nietzsche’s focus on promise-making/keeping at the outset of the second essay of GM may seem strange. However, it will become clear as the essay progresses that promises are the moral phenomenon *par excellence*. In the genealogy of morality that Nietzsche gives, contracts of economic exchange are the first proto-moral phenomena (see GM II §8). Contracts, while not yet moral, are proto-moral because they emphasize the individual’s fault when they are not honored, and the breach of a contract is fully the individual who entered the contract’s responsibility on whom retribution could be meted. Morality, in the familiar Kantian sense of the term as unconditional duties, evolved from an internalization of the requirement to honor one’s contractual obligations (or suffer the pain of retribution). Promise making/keeping is the most closely related moral phenomenon to those early relations of contractual exchange, in that it is a relationship between two individuals who have expectations based on custom about how the interaction will proceed. Promise keeping is fully moral rather than contractual because the cruelty one fears is self-cruelty rather than the punishment of some external debtor. This close connection between promise-keeping and contracts perhaps accounts for Nietzsche’s belief that it is the prototypical moral phenomenon.

<sup>14</sup>Janaway (2007) (see chapter 7 for his discussion) argues that we should read Nietzsche’s talk of the sovereign individual as an example of a shift away from his denial of a meaningful sense of human freedom in his middle period to a more robust sense of agency in his later works. While it is outside of the scope of this work to explore this topic more fully, I agree with others who claim that Nietzsche does not hold out the sovereign individual as an ideal, nor is it an example of human agency. See for example, Acampora 2006.

creditor-debtor relationship. If the debtor failed to repay the creditor, the creditor was entitled by societal sanction to extract an equivalent amount of pain from the debtor. This causing of pain acted both as compensation for the creditor who took pleasure in causing another person to suffer and as a mnemonic device for the debtor who would henceforth internalize the pain as a reminder to always repay his or her debts. On the basis of this analysis Nietzsche concludes that:

the feeling of guilt, of personal obligation, had its origin, as we saw, in the oldest and most primitive personal relationship, that between buyer and seller, creditor and debtor: it was here that one person first encountered another person, that one person first measured himself against another. (GM II §8)

From the absolute ubiquity of such relationships of various sorts of exchange in human societies, Nietzsche concludes that “setting prices, determining values, contriving equivalences, exchanging...constitute thinking as such” (GM II §8). Nietzsche even goes so far as to claim that “man designated himself as the creature that measures values, evaluates and measures, as ‘the valuating animal as such’” (GM II §8).

At this point in Nietzsche’s reconstructed history of human morality, the evaluation he is undertaking is only an economic sort (broadly speaking). Measuring of value for exchange defines what it is to be human for Nietzsche. However, as he points out in the first essay of GM, “all concepts of ancient man were rather at first incredibly uncouth...and altogether unsymbolical in meaning” (GM I §6). In other words, when they are first developed, concepts have a relatively superficial meaning, at least from a metaphysical perspective. It is not until such concepts (Nietzsche is talking about the concept of priestly purity in GM I §6) are internalized that they become less literal and more profound, i.e. more spiritual. Prior to the internalization of morality, the positing of evaluation as the essence of humanity only means that humans are economic through and through and are defined by

their relationships of production, consumption, and exchange. However, once the feelings of guilt associated with failing to pay one's debts are internalized and generalized across domains other than the economic (which is Nietzsche's topic for the rest of the second essay of GM), "value" takes on its broader, modern meaning that goes well beyond relationships of exchange and monetary equivalence. After this internalization and spiritualizing turn, if humans are "the valuating animal[s] as such," then what is essentially human is to create and maintain systems of value. Having values is simply what it means to be human, and I would go so far as to claim that a consequence of this is that humans have a psychological *need* or compulsion to find things valuable.<sup>15</sup>

What the second essay of the *On the Genealogy of Morals* tells us then is that human beings are unique in needing to have values that make sense of and give meaning to life in general.<sup>16</sup> Bernard Reginster argues that there are two distinct senses of nihilism in Nietzsche's writing.<sup>17</sup> The first sense of nihilism, the one most recognized in the literature on Nietzsche's nihilism, is that the highest values devalue themselves. In other words, given

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<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche makes this same point in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "No people could live without first esteeming" (Z I, "On the Thousand and One Goals").

<sup>16</sup> See also GS §1. There Nietzsche writes:

In spite of all this laughter which makes the required corrections, human nature has nevertheless been changed by the ever new appearance of these teachers of the purpose of existence: It now has one additional need—the need for the ever new appearance of such teachers and teachings of a 'purpose.' Man has become a fantastic animal that has to fulfill one more condition of existence than any other animal: man *has to* believe, to know, from time to time *why* he exists; his race cannot flourish without a periodic trust in life—without faith in *reason in life*.

Here Nietzsche emphasizes that what sets us apart from other animals is the need for a purpose in addition to the needs we share with other animals. Nietzsche is ambivalent as to whether this development in the human is a good thing or not because it is a fact that we simply cannot get around. However, Nietzsche thinks that at least the need for a purpose and value has made humankind interesting. Also see Conway 2008 (starting at p. 78). Even though it is an introductory text, it provides a good summary about human beings' need to find meaning.

<sup>17</sup> See Reginster 2004: 25-28 for a discussion of the two senses of nihilism he attributes to Nietzsche, "disorientation" and "despair," which I discuss in the following paragraphs.



various factors (one of which, Christianity's self-overcoming, I will discuss in more detail below) the most fundamental values one holds cease to seem tenable to us and are therefore rejected, i.e. the object of those values is no longer seen as valuable, and no additional values replace the devalued value. This occurs when one ceases to see what the good was in seeing some particular thing as valuable. In the most extreme case, nothing at all seems worthwhile. This results in the absence of any life justifying or motivating value at all. An example of this type of nihilism is Christianity's vision of an afterlife that ameliorates the suffering of life on earth. When this belief is no longer able to function as a highest value and no other life-justifying values coming to take its place, the individual is left without any values around which to organize a meaningful life or through which to make sense of suffering.<sup>18</sup> Reginster designates this type of nihilism evaluative "disorientation."

The second type of nihilism that Reginster identifies he labels "despair." In despair, the objects of the highest values that an individual recognizes are unattainable. Unlike disorientation where the objects at which the highest values aim are no longer seen as valuable at all, in despair the objects of values are still seen as valuable but are discovered to be in principle unattainable. For example, instead of Christianity's vision of a blissful afterlife being seen as no longer valuable as in disorientation, in despair one continues to find a blissful afterlife desirable in itself but not something that can possibly be attained. When one is in despair, an afterlife would be capable of justifying existence if it existed and could be attained, but it no longer can because the world, as we know it, is not such that there could be an afterlife.

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<sup>18</sup> In Chapter 6 I discuss nihilism and its related affective/physiological component of decadence. There I show how Nietzsche's theory of cognition and the new modes of thinking it makes way for offer avenues for replacing values that are no longer tenable with new life-affirming, activity motivating values.

By distinguishing between disorientation and despair, Reginster is able to make sense of the numerous different ways Nietzsche characterizes nihilism. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to present all, or even most, of the texts where Nietzsche discusses the problem of nihilism, so two important texts will have to suffice. “What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking; ‘why?’ finds no answer” (WP §2 1887). Here we can see that either of the kinds of nihilism that Reginster identifies can fit the criteria that Nietzsche puts forward for nihilism. The aim can be lacking because the object aimed at does not exist or is in principle unattainable, or the aim can be lacking because the thing aimed at is no longer seen as valuable and no other worthwhile aims have taken its place.

Radical nihilism is the conviction that an absolute untenability of existence when it comes to the highest values one recognizes; plus the realization that we lack the least right to posit a beyond or in-itself of things that might be ‘divine’ or morality incarnate. (WP §3 1887)

Here we see nihilism in the sense of despair being emphasized. It is existence that does not live up to the nihilist’s highest values instead of a lack of values themselves.

Related to notions of nihilism is the concept of decadence, which is the physiological component of nihilism. Decadence is not caused by nihilism but rather nihilism is what Andreas Urs Sommer calls “the logic of decadence.”<sup>19</sup> That is to say, physiological decline is not caused by a particular way of thinking or valuing but rather thinking and valuing in particular ways are symptoms of underlying physiological conditions, either of an individual or of a culture as a whole. In other words, nihilisms of various sorts are the symptoms of decadent physiological types. The importance of this lies in the fact that nihilism is rooted in an underlying organic reality, and as we shall see when I discuss Nietzsche’s perspectivism in

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<sup>19</sup>Sommer 2009: 253.

Chapter Four, Nietzsche also conceives of different ways of conceptualizing the world as reflections of different underlying organic conditions or physiological types. In Chapter Six I connect the physiology of drives to thinking and cognition in another way. I show there that while our drives determine how we conceptualize the world, changes in the way we conceptualize can also alter the makeup of our unconscious bodily drives. This makes room for new ways of thinking to be among the strategies for overcoming nihilism and creating an essentially healthy rather than essentially decadent physiology.<sup>20</sup>

Given this analysis of the two senses of nihilism, the human need for attainable values to justify existence which Nietzsche demonstrates in GM II, and passages like the two cited above, I believe we can conclude the following about Nietzsche's conception of the problem of nihilism: Nihilism is the state of an individual or society which has come to believe (either implicitly or explicitly) that no meaning or justification of human existence is given in the nature of things, is also unable or unwilling to invent or produce a sufficient human meaning or justification for existence, and for which life in general is essentially suffering and not worth living as a result.

I believe this provisional definition of nihilism is able to take into account the various nuances Nietzsche gives the term as well as Reginster's discovery of two unique types of nihilism in Nietzsche's writings. I want to argue that it is through the lens of values, needs, and the problems of meaninglessness and disintegration of values that Nietzsche's concern for problems relating to truth, knowledge, objectivity, justification, and the like makes the most sense. Comparing Nietzsche's work on issues relating to cognition to more contemporary thinkers (as is so often done in the literature) becomes problematic and

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<sup>20</sup> "Essentially healthy" is roughly equivalent to Scott's (1998) "strong decadence," and "essentially decadent" is roughly equivalent to her "weak decadence." See my discussion of decadence in Chapter Six for more on the relationship between my terminology and Scott's.

misleading when we forget that Nietzsche's concern is with the cultural and psychological phenomenon of nihilism. Nihilism and the disintegration it causes, of course, are not the same problems as those of twentieth century epistemologists. Drawing parallels between Nietzsche and thinkers like Quine, Putnam, Wittgenstein, and others can be fruitful but will be nothing other than misleading if the differences between Nietzsche's philosophical program and theirs is not kept in the forefront. The question to be answered now is how does nihilism relate to questions of truth and knowledge in Nietzsche's work? The answer to this question takes us to Nietzsche's insistence that Christianity, the nihilistic worldview *par excellence*, is responsible for our preoccupation with truth and that desiring the truth above all else is itself as nihilistic and life negating as the Christianity that gave rise to it.

*Truth and European Nihilism: The Problem of Christianity*

At this point three questions need to be answered: 1. What is it about Christianity that makes it nihilistic or life negating? 2. Why does Christianity make truth the highest value (or at least one of the higher values)? 3. How did Christianity bequeath a lust for the truth to the European tradition even after science and secularization became the dominant cultural and political forces? The question as to why the will to truth is itself life negating even when stripped of its Christian adornments will have to wait until the next section.

To answer the first question as to what it is about Christianity that makes it life negating, I will again turn first to *The Birth of Tragedy*. In BT §3 Nietzsche describes how the creation of the Olympian gods by the Ancient Greeks helped them to cope with the "terror and horror of existence" and reverse the wisdom of Silenus. While not the full integration of the Apollonian and Dionysian forces that Attic tragedy would become, the Homeric world of gods and heroes was the Apollonian solution to the problem of suffering endemic to human existence. Nietzsche, writing about this Homeric religion, implicitly contrasts the

Olympian religion with Christianity.<sup>21</sup> In the Greek gods one will not find “moral elevation,” “sanctity,” “disincarnate spirituality,” “charity,” or “benevolence.” “For there is nothing here that suggests asceticism, spirituality, or duty. We hear nothing but the accents of an exuberant, triumphant life in which all things, whether good or evil are deified.” (see also GM II on Greek gods) The Greek gods then were not deifications of the way the Greeks wished the world was but deifications of the way the world (and human society) actually is, filled with suffering, deception, tragedy, betrayal, and disappointment.

If the Greek religion is held up as, if not an ideal world-view, then at least a far better one than Christianity, it is clearly not the falsity of Christianity that serves as the foundation of Nietzsche’s critique. While Nietzsche does indeed believe Christianity is false (this will be important later), it is the nihilism inherent in Christianity’s view of the world and history that makes it worthy of condemnation. The Christian outlook, Nietzsche declares, is primarily a life-negating one both in terms of the content of the moral values it puts forward and the metaphysical conception of the world, human beings, and God that it holds as dogma.<sup>22</sup>

In the domain of values, for Christianity ascetic ideals hold sway. In the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche treats the question of the meaning of ascetic ideals, which are “in the case of priests the distinctive priestly faith, their best instrument of power” (GM III §1). When Nietzsche asks what the meaning of ascetic ideals is, he is not asking what their content is (he takes that as given), but rather why they are adopted, how they

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<sup>21</sup> While Nietzsche, in a later reappraisal, acknowledges that he was silent with regard to Christianity in *The Birth of Tragedy*, he calls it a “hostile silence” (EH “The Birth of Tragedy” §1). In his “Attempt at a Self-Criticism,” he declares that his outlook was “against morality” and “purely artistic and anti-Christian” (§5). So while Christianity is not mentioned by name in the text in question, the appearance of an implicit critique of Christianity is supported by Nietzsche’s later appraisals of the work.

<sup>22</sup> See A §7 for an example of Nietzsche’s critique of the content of Christian morality (in this passage the morality of pity). See Z Part I “On the Afterworldly” for an example of Nietzsche’s critique of the content of Christian dogma (in this passage the doctrine of eternal life).

arise, what their effects are, and what underlying conditions they betray. Ascetic ideals are those values that deny the value and inhibit the expression of desires and drives that are natural and necessary to life, hence the ascetic saint's fasting and abstention from sex and other bodily pleasures. The problem facing the genealogist of ascetic ideals is how they have flourished despite their degradation and negation of life itself.

It is beyond the scope of this inquiry to provide a detailed analysis of Nietzsche's genealogy of ascetic ideals,<sup>23</sup> but two fundamental claims Nietzsche makes must be kept in mind: 1. "[The human will] needs a goal—and it would rather will nothingness than not will" (GM III §1). This follows from the discussion in the last section of the distinctive human quality of needing to posit values and a meaning for one's existence 2. "Every animal...instinctively strives for the optimum of favorable conditions under which it can expend all its strength and achieve its maximal feeling of power" (GM III §7). This is one of Nietzsche's most basic explanatory principles for any human (or animal) action. Humans, being included among the animals, always seek that which allows them to feel most in control of their situation and achieve their ends, and any trait an individual possesses can be understood in terms of how it promotes one's "feeling of power."<sup>24</sup> What follows from these two claims is that some human beings (the Christian included) find their "optimum of

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<sup>23</sup> For more on Nietzsche's understanding of the ascetic ideal see Janaway (2007) who claims that the ascetic ideal "requires the positing of objects whose value transcends that of one's own ordinary existence or of human existence in general. It involves a kind of self-denial or self-belittlement, in which one considers oneself of low worth by comparison with the external entity whose value is supposedly absolute and unconditioned" (165-166). Reginster (2006) emphasizes the apparently self-contradictory nature of asceticism as life against life. This is because asceticism, at the same time as it denies oneself, also increases one's power, but "not through overcoming the resistance of the will of others, but, this time through overcoming the resistance of one's own will" (146).

<sup>24</sup> By "feeling of power" I understand Nietzsche to mean feeling in control of one's environment and having the ability to achieve one's ends. This does not mean that one who has a "feeling of power" is free in a metaphysical sense, but merely that one is less restricted from the outside in one's ability to act and affect things.

favorable conditions” in willing nothingness (since they must will something).<sup>25</sup> This willing nothingness is the ascetic ideal taken in its most extreme form and clearly fits the description of nihilism outlined in the last section.

After analyzing what ascetic ideals mean for other types (including the philosopher), Nietzsche proceeds to their meaning for the ascetic priest. “The ascetic priest possessed in this ideal not only his faith but also his will, his power, his interest. His right to exist stands or falls with that ideal” (GM III §11). In the priest, “the ascetic ideal springs from the protective instinct of a degenerating life” (GM III §13) and so represents *décadence* and thus nihilism.<sup>26</sup> What makes the ascetic priest so dangerous for Nietzsche is the fact that “every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering” and the priest tells the suffering herd, yes, “someone must be to blame for it: but you yourself are this someone, you alone are to blame for it—you alone are to blame for yourself!” (GM III §15).

Nietzsche raises the possibility that the priest is a sort of physician because he at least offers a partial, palliative cure and protects the strong from the weak by making the weak harmless (GM III §16). However, “[the priest] combats only the suffering itself, the

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<sup>25</sup> By “willing nothingness” Nietzsche means something other than ceasing to will. The will to nothingness simply is what is expressed in the ascetic ideal. It is the will to become less to the extreme point of willing to become nothing. (Seemingly) paradoxically, the will to become nothing prolongs life and staves off suicide because it provides certain types with the most “feeling of power” their type can have.

<sup>26</sup> It is important to note the ambivalence with which Nietzsche treats the figure of the nihilistic priest. While the ascetic priest does represent nihilism and reactive forces that say “No” to life, in the priest, “the ascetic ideal is an artifice for the preservation of life.” The priest “is among the greatest conserving and yes-creating forces of life,” and “The No he says to life brings to light, as if by magic, an abundance of tender Yeses; even when he wounds himself, this mast of destruction, of self-destruction—the very wound itself afterward compels him to live” (GM III §13). That which is ultimately damning for the priest is not that he fails to affirm but rather that which he affirms, his own sickly life. Life can never be completely against itself for Nietzsche. Even the sickliest life affirms itself even if this means affirming the continuation of the sickness. For more on the ascetic priest see Owen (2007) and Janaway (2007). Owen emphasizes that “the priest represents a figure whose investment in the ascetic ideal is a necessary condition of his mode of life,” and this is the case because “the priest is a noble, that is one who understands himself as entitled to coin values, to identify his own character traits as exemplifying the good and, secondly, that the priest is subject to bad conscience, characterized by the will to mistreat his animal self” (115). Janaway emphasizes the dual noble and slavish culture of the ascetic priest (223-229).

discomfiture of the sufferer, not its cause, not the real sickness: this must be our most fundamental objection to priestly medication” (GM III §17). What is more, the so-called cures offered by the priest actually “make the sick sicker” because the category of sin (“cruelty turned inward”) is introduced so that the individual sees the cause of all suffering “in himself, in some guilt...he must understand his suffering as punishment” (GM III §20).

While a critique of Christianity is clearly implicit in most of Essay III of GM, the critique of the ascetic priest in that section can also be applied to other institutions and religions that fit the generic structure Nietzsche describes there. Christianity receives Nietzsche’s most explicit, extended critique in the *Antichrist*. Connecting ascetic values to Christianity, Nietzsche writes, “[Christianity] has placed all the basic instincts of this type under the ban; and out of these instincts it has distilled evil and the evil one: the strong man as the typically reprehensible man, the ‘reprobate’” (A §5). This has led the Christian resolved “to find the world ugly and bad” which in turn has actually “made the world ugly and bad” (GS §130). In Christianity, the concept of God itself is thoroughly nihilistic because it posits a “God degenerated into the contradiction of life” and as “a war against life, against nature, against the will to live” (A §18). Christianity is nihilistic then for Nietzsche because it denies rather than affirms the conditions for life, e.g., its desires, the importance of the body, and the differences between types of humans (and corresponding differences in the values that best serve those types), and it devalues the strong in favor of the weak and the sick, i.e. Christianity, for Nietzsche, is marked by “hostility against life” (A §7). Christianity is ascetic through and through and is “rooted in a hatred of the natural (of reality)” (A §15).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche is careful to make a distinction between Jesus and Christianity or rather the Christianity of Christ and the institution of Christianity that was formed after his death. “The very world ‘Christianity’ is a



What does all of this have to do with truth? With Christianity (and its forerunner, Platonism), truth is given unconditional value. This is because Christianity made a moral value out of telling the truth (the unconditional imperative, do not deceive), which includes an imperative against deceiving oneself, i.e. one must always tell oneself the truth which requires discovering what the truth is. This “moral ground” of the will to truth, Nietzsche suggests is not a merely harmless “quixotism,” but rather “a principle that is hostile to life and destructive” which means that the will to truth “might be a concealed will to death” (GS §344).<sup>28</sup> Because of the will to truth’s Christian-moral foundation:

It is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests—that even we seekers after knowledge today, we godless anti-metaphysicians still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine.—But what if this should become more and more incredible, if nothing should prove to be divine any more unless it were error, blindness, the lie—if God himself should prove to be our most enduring lie? (GS §344)

The Christian creation of an unconditional moral will to truth ended up being Christianity’s own downfall. Nietzsche notes that

the end of Christianity [is] at the hands of its own morality..., which turns against the Christian God (the sense of truthfulness, developed highly by Christianity, is nauseated by the falseness and mendaciousness of all Christian interpretations of the world and of history). (WP §1 1885-1886)

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misunderstanding: in truth, there was only one Christian, and he died on the cross” (A §39). Nietzsche clearly thought highly of Jesus himself, if not the religion that bears his name, declaring that “he died too early; he himself would have recanted his teaching, had he reached my age. Noble enough was he to recant” (Z I “On Free Death”). It is also worth noting that Christianity is not unique in either its life-denying aspects or its relation to truth. Platonism is seen as a forerunner of Christianity in these essential respects, as “Christianity is Platonism for ‘the people’” (BGE Preface). Therefore, to call the will to truth a Christian creation is not quite accurate; it is really a platonic creation. However, given that Christianity popularized this platonic value, while Christianity did not invent the will to truth, it was the vehicle by which it has spread. For more on Nietzsche’s views on Christianity see Kaufmann’s (1974) classic treatment and Young’s (2006) book which deals with Nietzsche’s views on Christianity in light of his general, more ambivalent attitude toward religion.

<sup>28</sup> I return to this claim that the will to truth is hostile toward life and present Nietzsche’s arguments for it in the next section on the value of truth.

Returning to GS, Nietzsche while discussing the “triumph of scientific atheism” and “the decline of the faith in the Christian god,”<sup>29</sup> writes that “unconditional and honest atheism... [is] the most fateful act of two thousand years of discipline for truth that in the end forbids itself to lie in faith in God” (GS §357). It was “Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness” which was refined and “sublimated” into “scientific conscience” that “really triumphed over the Christian god.” In other words, the institution that is responsible for truth being valued unconditionally (i.e. Christianity) is shown, through the rigorous truth seeking it engendered, to not live up to the most rigorous standards of what counts as true. Thus the will to truth whose origins were in Christianity gives rise to an “unconditional honest atheism” which is “*not* the antithesis of [the will to truth],” but is rather: “one of its terminal forms and inner consequences—it is the awe-inspiring *catastrophe* of two thousand years of training in truthfulness that finally forbids itself the lie involved in the belief in God” (GM III §27). In other words, Christianity caused the development of an increasingly high value to be placed on truth in European culture. This unprecedentedly high value given to truth meant that more and more effort was made to develop methods to attain the truth. These methods, including science, eventually led to atheism because in the search for truth, Christianity was found to be false.

It is beyond the scope of this work to debate the actual truth or falsity of Christianity, but it is clear that Nietzsche views that, in addition to being life-negating and nihilistic, Christianity is indeed false by scientific standards. He goes to great lengths in the *Antichrist* to show (or at least emphatically claim) that Christianity is indeed false. Some

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<sup>29</sup> It is worth remembering that despite Nietzsche’s critique of the will to truth both in its Christian and atheistic forms, this triumph of science over faith in god nevertheless represents progress over religious interpretations of existence, especially insofar as it removes unwarranted concepts of teleology (see WP §650) and places our understanding of the human back into nature (see BGE §230). Nietzsche writes that science’s triumph over Christianity is an “event in which all races had their share and for which all deserve credit and honor” and is “Europe’s longest and most courageous self-overcoming” (GS §357).

examples: “In Christianity neither morality nor religion has even a single point of contact with reality” (A §15). He claims that Christianity posits imaginary causes, effects and beings, as well as an imaginary science (which is “anthropocentric” and has no “concept of natural causes) and an imaginary psychology (A §15).<sup>30</sup> It is worth noting that Nietzsche’s main point does not depend on actually establishing the falsity of Christianity. Of course Nietzsche explicitly claims that Christianity is false, but more important than his evaluation of Christianity’s truth claims is that Nietzsche thinks that the inheritor of Christianity’s will to truth, viz., science, is able to function without a theistic framework. Science is able to maintain Christianity’s will to truth while shedding that which is untrue in Christianity.

Before continuing, a small textual issue needs to be addressed. As we saw in both the fifth book of GS and a late *Nachlass* fragment, Nietzsche argues that science is the inheritor of Christianity’s will to truth and that Christianity dies (a perhaps slow death) at its hands. In GS §344, Nietzsche goes so far as to claim that science has the same metaphysical faith with regard to the morality of truth that Christianity does.<sup>31</sup> In contrast in the *Antichrist*, Nietzsche claims that “‘faith’ as an imperative is a veto against science—in practice, the lie at any price” (A §47). So is science a faith on par with Christian faith or is it not? This question, I believe,

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<sup>30</sup>Two parallel (and interrelated) critiques of Christianity are made in the *Antichrist*. One is that Christianity is anti-life and is the expression of a declining, weak life. The other is that it is false and makes false claims in the realms of morality and metaphysics. Notice that the first critique is strengthened by the second because if Christianity is in a sense lying to itself by suppressing the truth, it is another example of its inability to affirm reality. Certainly the critique of the truth of Christian claims, if it is a good one, stands on its own, but as Nietzsche reminds us in *Nachlass*:

The question of the mere ‘truth’ of Christianity—whether in regard to the existence of God or the historicity of the legend of its origin, not to speak of Christian astronomy and natural science—is a matter of secondary importance as long as the question of the value of Christian morality is not considered. (WP §251 1888)

I.e., the most important critique of Christianity, from Nietzsche’s perspective, is the critique of the life that it prescribes, i.e. its morality, which is anti-life and nihilistic. Many commentators have a relatively low opinion of Nietzsche’s *Antichrist*. See for example, Kaufmann (1974). For a more positive take on this work see Shapiro (1981) who attempts to redeem the *Antichrist* from its detractors.

<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche quotes this section of *The Gay Science* in GM III §24.

takes us to the heart of the difficulties in unraveling what Nietzsche has to say about truth and knowledge. For now, suffice it to say that it is with respect to their mutual moral commitments that science and Christianity are both expressions of faith. In relation to truth however, it is Christianity that is faith (despite its avowed commitment and unconditional valuing of truth), and it is science that is the legitimate heir to the full-fledged will to truth both in its effectiveness in discovering truth and its nihilism. It will take the rest of this work to make sense of these two claims.

### *The Value of Truth*

Two questions need to be answered: 1. Why is it that the will to truth is based on a metaphysical faith? And 2. Why is it that the morality that prescribes an unconditional will to truth is nihilistic or anti-life?<sup>32</sup> Simply noting that the *origin* of the will to truth is Christianity, which is both undeniably metaphysical and in Nietzsche's estimation nihilistic, cannot establish that the will to truth is itself metaphysical or anti-life. To claim otherwise would commit one to succumbing to the genetic fallacy. Now certainly if the only reason one had for believing in the unconditional value of truth was that Christianity prescribed it, the will to truth may well be established as both nihilistic and metaphysical, but presumably there are many individuals (including the "godless anti-metaphysicians" Nietzsche describes) who have a will to truth that is grounded in reasons independent of the will to truth's origins in Christianity. Nietzsche was not unaware of the distinction between the origin of the will to truth and its value; he writes, "From the moment faith in the God of the ascetic ideal is denied, a new problem arises: that of the value of truth" (GM III §24). In that case, the will

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<sup>32</sup> The literature on this topic is vast. Every commentary and reading of GM delves into this issue of the relationship between the ascetic ideal and truth. In addition to the interpretations I discuss in this section see also Owen (2007), Janaway (2007), Havas (1995), and Conway (2008) for some of the more recent takes on this topic.

to truth itself, independent of its origins in Christian morality needs to be shown to be nihilistic. In showing how the will to truth is nihilistic, we will begin to answer the more basic of the two questions Nietzsche poses at the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil*:

What in us really wants ‘truth’? Indeed we came to a long halt at the question about the cause of this will—until we finally came to a complete stop before a still more basic question. We asked the value of this will. Suppose we want truth: why not rather untruth? And uncertainty? even ignorance? (BGE §1)

The first question, “why is the will to truth based on a metaphysical faith?” is primarily a claim about the metaphysics of the moral injunction against deception rather than the metaphysics of truth itself. This point is made clear by Nietzsche’s discussion in GS §344 (see also Nietzsche’s quotation of this passage in GM III §24). In this section, Nietzsche claims that those who have faith in science (and therefore have faith in truth) are affirming “*another world* than the world of life, nature, and history” (GS §344).<sup>33</sup> It is tempting to read this passage as claiming that science and the will to truth affirm another world in the same way that Christianity does when it posits an ideal afterlife in contrast to the world of earthly life. If this were the case, then Nietzsche would be claiming that the *concept* of truth itself is metaphysical in the prerogative sense Nietzsche is employing.

However, this is not the sense of Nietzsche’s claim that the will to truth affirms another world than this one. The unconditional will to truth affirms another world than the real one because, whereas the moral injunction of the will truth demands that the truth of the matter be obtained in all possible cases and at any cost, it might well be case that “the greater advantage is on the side of the unconditionally mistrustful or the unconditionally

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<sup>33</sup> It would be easy to come to the mistaken conclusion based on this quotation that Nietzsche is anti-science, but notice he does not condemn science *per se*, but only *faith* in science. Without clarification this is ambiguous. It could mean faith that science is good at attaining truths in which case this would be a critique of science itself. But as I will later argue, Nietzsche is using “faith” (the German is *Glauben*, which can mean belief, faith, or trust) to mean trust in this context. So in this passage he is critiquing as ascetic the trust that the truths of science are the most important thing and should be pursued unconditionally or be seen as having ultimate importance.

trusting” (GS §344). In other words, not seeking the truth or believing something false might turn out to be a condition of our survival and flourishing in many cases. If this is the case, then the unconditional search for truth is a denigration of the actual conditions for this life and consequently the affirmation of some other (imaginary) life where possessing the truth is of the greatest value for life.

What is it that makes this denial of the conditions of our life a metaphysical faith? It is “no more than a moral prejudice that truth is worth more than mere appearance” (BGE §34), which Nietzsche thinks can only be justified by reference to a metaphysical faith such as Platonism or Christianity, the faith “that God is the truth, that truth is divine” (GS §344). If the will to truth were a manifestation of the will not to let oneself be deceived, then it would rest not on a moral foundation, but rather on a utilitarian one. But as it is clear to Nietzsche that neither the justification nor the origin of the will to truth could be in its utility, it must be justified by reference to a metaphysical realm. The search for truth, Nietzsche thinks, leads to the revelation that its origins and moral foundations are themselves not true, and so, as we have seen, the search for truth undermines itself as an unconditional value.<sup>34</sup>

As for the second question, why is it that the morality that prescribes an unconditional will to truth is nihilistic or anti-life? Nietzsche describes the question as to the value of the will to truth as “a lacuna in every philosophy” (GM III §24). We have seen in our discussion so far why Nietzsche thinks that the unconditional will to truth is a

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<sup>34</sup>James Mangiafico draws the same conclusion about what GS §344 has to say about what makes the moral content of the will to truth a “faith in metaphysics.” “Any moral judgment, then, that would praise truth above the natural benefits of deception must have a standard that belongs to a realm other than that of this world. This is why Nietzsche can say that the reasons to avoid deceiving ‘belong to an altogether different realm.’ And because its imperative must have an other-worldly source, Nietzsche will say that morality is grounded in a faith in metaphysics, as metaphysics always signifies for him an explanation of this world by reference to another.” See Mangiafico 1997: 176.

metaphysical faith, but so far I have only treated the idea that it is anti-life or nihilistic as a mere possibility. In GS §344 Nietzsche asks the following rhetorical questions:

Is wanting not to allow oneself to be deceived really less harmful, less dangerous, less calamitous? What do you know in advance of the character of existence to be able to decide whether the greater advantage is on the side of the unconditionally mistrustful or the unconditionally trusting? (GS §344)

By asking these rhetorical questions, Nietzsche is pointing out that we should not decide in advance whether or not truth and not being deceived is better than being deceived and trusting appearances. Nietzsche is asking whether the mistrustfulness of the will to truth might actually place those who possess it at a disadvantage rather than provide some kind of benefit as is usually thought. This question is meant to put the reader in a state of doubt or suspension of judgment as to the value of truth for life. However, both in this section and in other passages Nietzsche is not nearly so tentative as to the necessity of untruth or deception as a condition for life. In fact, Nietzsche claims that “the disutility and dangerousness of ‘the will to truth,’ of ‘truth at any price’ is proved constantly” (GS §344). But why should we think this?

That Nietzsche thinks it obvious that believing errors and untruths were among the conditions for the survival and flourishing of mankind is clear, but what are his reasons? Nietzsche, I believe, infers from the ubiquity of belief in things like “that there are equal things; that there are things, substances, bodies; that a thing is what it appears to be; that our will is free; that what is good for me is also good in itself” was indicative of the fact that they were “useful and helped to preserve the species: those who hit upon or inherited these had better luck in their struggle for themselves and their progeny” (GS §110). Nietzsche also thinks that these, and other beliefs like them, are demonstrably false. Thus he concludes that “the strength of knowledge does not depend on its degree of truth but on its age, on the

degree to which it has been incorporated, on its character as a condition of life” (GS §110).

What Nietzsche means here is that we usually think of the “strength of knowledge,” i.e., how entrenched a belief is in the history of a culture, is a result of its being likely to be true. His claim in GS §110 is that this is not the case. Rather, the strength of a bit of knowledge depends on the length of time it been incorporated in the culture and the degree to which believing it fosters the flourishing of a particular type. In other words, in order to explain the staying power of an idea, we should look not to its likelihood of being true, but to the function the idea plays in a culture and the lives of individuals within that culture.

A consequence of this point of Nietzsche’s is that the human being as a cognizer is sensitive, not only to truth, but also to what beliefs prove to be advantageous for the survival of the human species (or perhaps a particular social group or even a particular individual). In order for philosophy as the search for truth to exist (Nietzsche’s example is the earliest Greek philosophers, the Eleatics), it must “deny the role of the impulses in knowledge” and “conceive of reason as completely free and spontaneous activity” (GS §110). In other words, philosophy must misapprehend the knower as disinterested and rational (i.e., truth oriented) in order to maintain the belief that it correctly apprehends other truths.

There is a danger here for the Nietzschean fighting against nihilism. There is the possibility that “the realization that delusion and error are conditions of human knowledge and sensation—would be utterly unbearable. Honesty would lead to nausea and suicide” (GS §107). So not only is the unconditional will to truth anti-life but one of the conditions for discovering that it is anti-life, the discovery that lies and untruths are necessary for life is also possibly nihilistic. However, just as art could make suffering bearable, as Nietzsche showed in *The Birth of Tragedy*, likewise, “there is a counterforce against our honesty that helps us to avoid such consequences: art as the good will to appearance” (GS §107). Here instead of art



in the usual sense of the fine arts, Nietzsche proposes another kind of art, which he calls the “good will to appearance,” which could overcome the threat of nihilism that the discovery of the necessity “delusion and error” brings. My explication of the form that this new kind of art takes first requires a full discussion of Nietzsche’s theory of cognition, and so I return to this topic in Chapter Six.

Is Nietzsche wholly against seeking the truth, i.e. does he fully repudiate the will to truth? So far I have only argued that for Nietzsche it is the *unconditional* will to truth that is ascetic and therefore life negating and nihilistic. As we have seen, Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity is that it is false, and he seems perfectly happy to state and argue that it is. In GM essay I, Nietzsche takes the “English psychologists” to task for having been wrong about the origin of the concept “good,” not to mention numerous other places where Nietzsche thinks other philosophers or theorists are wrong, and he, Nietzsche, is right. This speaks to some care about and sensitivity to the truth of the matter on Nietzsche’s part.<sup>35</sup>

It seems that Nietzsche, even in his quest to overcome nihilism and affirm life, consciously seeks the truth of the matter (at least with respect to some things). Furthermore, in describing what he calls “preparatory human beings,” he hopes that “at long last the search for knowledge will reach out for its due; it will want to *rule* and *possess*” (GS §283). Here I think we get a clue to the answer. Nietzsche thinks there is space for the search for knowledge, i.e. the will to truth, as long as it is subordinated to some other aim, something which can be affirmed unconditionally and can limit the will to truth as needed.<sup>36</sup> Nietzsche

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<sup>35</sup> The reader with some familiarity with Nietzsche’s writings may wonder what sense of truth Nietzsche thinks he has attained when he displays a concern for truth given that he criticizes traditional notions of truth as correspondence with the way the world really is. It will be the task of the next two chapters to explain Nietzsche’s critique of traditional notions of truth and the sense of truth he opposes to this traditional notion.

does not argue that error is always a condition for life; rather he argues that both truth and error are at times conditions for life. Furthermore, while Nietzsche likens the unconditional will to truth to the ascetic ideal via Platonism and Christianity, it would be absurd to think that the search for truth (and therefore at least a qualified or conditional will to truth) is limited to systems of thought and value such as these.<sup>37</sup>

One passage, which I have not yet discussed, might lead one to conclude that truth seeking and truth claiming in general are inherently ascetic. When discussing some self-proclaimed ‘free spirits’ Nietzsche writes, “They are far from being free spirits: for they still have faith in truth” (GM III, §24). This passage has been used to show both that Nietzsche thinks all truth seeking is ascetic and that there is no such thing as truth. However, it is clear that the problem that these so-called free spirits manifest is not the belief that there is truth or the search for truth, but rather the problem is an “unconditional will to truth” which is “faith in the ascetic ideal itself, even if as an unconscious imperative” (GM III §24). The “faith” in “faith in truth” may be read as “trust” rather than as “belief.”<sup>38</sup> What is ascetic and contrary to being a “free spirit” is not the belief in or search for truth, but rather a faith that truth is the most important thing in all cases. This is because, as we just discussed, surviving and flourishing often require that we be deceived. Let us turn now to some of the main

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<sup>36</sup> It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore what other values could limit the scope of the will to truth such that it is no longer anti-life. I will deal with the problems surrounding Nietzsche’s evaluative criteria in Chapter Five.

<sup>37</sup> Lending credence to the thesis that Nietzsche is against unconditional truth seeking and not truth seeking *per se* is a passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* where Nietzsche equates the “will to truth” with “a will to the thinkability of *all* things” (Z II “On Self-Overcoming (emphasis mine)). It is important here that Nietzsche does not equate the will to truth (which he is critiquing in GM) with a will to the thinkability of *some* things.

<sup>38</sup> The German word translated as faith is *Glauben* and can mean faith in either sense that I mention, i.e., it has the same ambiguity as the English word “faith.” The choice for which interpretation to give this passage is based on Nietzsche’s having placed his emphasis on the *value* of truth.

interpretations of the connection between the will to truth and the ascetic ideal in the secondary literature.<sup>39</sup>

At the end of the third essay of GM, Nietzsche considers whether science could be a candidate to oppose the ascetic ideal. His negative answer might lead the careless reader to characterize Nietzsche as anti-science and anti-truth. However, Nietzsche's reasons for rejecting science as sufficient to counteract the ascetic ideal do not indicate an anti-scientific or anti-truth attitude. He does not reject science wholesale, but rather he "approve[s] of [scientists'] work" (GM III §23) presumably their work in discovering truth. However, this "does not prove that science as a whole possesses a goal, a will, an ideal, or the passion of a great faith" (GM III §23) that would be able to replace the will to nothingness of the ascetic ideal. If Nietzsche were anti-truth in general he would oppose science as the answer to asceticism because it represents a search for truth. However, Nietzsche rejects science because it "is not nearly self-reliant enough to be that; it first requires in every respect an ideal of value, value-creating power, in the service of which it could believe in itself" (GM III §25). In other words, science does not give aims or goals and so it (and the truth it discovers) can be put in the service of other values, including the ascetic ideal.

This topic has generated significant disagreement among scholars. Walter Kaufmann, for example, argues that Nietzsche is "a devotee of truth,"<sup>40</sup> and this is not because Kaufmann thinks that the search for truth could be non-ascetic. Rather, Kaufmann thinks this because he fails to see that Nietzsche desires to overcome the ascetic ideal. Kaufmann

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<sup>39</sup> Cox (1999: 24) agrees that Nietzsche's critique of the will to truth amounts to the claim that the unconditional will to truth is nihilistic, not all truth seeking is. Cox does a nice job of showing how Nietzsche's critique can be divided into a pragmatic one (error can aid in survival and flourishing) and a metaphysical/moral one (the unconditional esteeming of truth is based in a moral commitment not to deceive).

<sup>40</sup> Kaufmann 1974: 361.

even seems to be claiming that Nietzsche was actually a proponent of the ascetic ideal.<sup>41</sup> It is beyond the scope of this work to refute Kaufman's implication that Nietzsche was a proponent of the ascetic ideal, and indeed I am taking for granted Reginster's claim that we have already discussed that Nietzsche's primary project is the overcoming of nihilism and ascetic ideals. I believe any sensitive reader of Nietzsche should be able to see that Kaufmann's justification for Nietzsche being a devotee of truth cannot stand. What I believe led Kaufmann to this misreading is that he fails to distinguish between an unconditional will to truth (which represents ascetic ideals) and the search for truth that is subordinated (and hence limited) by some other ideal or set of ideals.

James Mangiafico takes exactly the opposite position of Kaufmann's and argues that Nietzsche repudiates the will to truth because "[it] can have only one ground: a metaphysics that would privilege another realm at the expense of this world,"<sup>42</sup> i.e. an *ascetic* metaphysics. However, Mangiafico's description of Nietzsche's position is ambiguous at times. While he argues that the will to truth is grounded in an ascetic metaphysically grounded morality, he also claims that Nietzsche's revaluation of truth entails that truth will have something "less than an unconditional value."<sup>43</sup> Does he mean that truth should have no value or that truth should have some value greater than zero on the condition that it is subordinated to some other value? Mangiafico does not distinguish between these two possibilities. One would be tempted to answer that he means the latter given that, as I have shown, Nietzsche only holds that the *unconditional* will to truth is ascetic. However, Mangiafico must mean the former, that Nietzsche's ideal is for truth to have no value. This is clear from the fact that Mangiafico

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<sup>41</sup> See Kaufmann 1974: 359-361.

<sup>42</sup> Mangiafico 1997: 178.

<sup>43</sup> Mangiafico 1997: 178.

thinks Nietzsche holds up the artist as an example of one who gives truth less than an unconditional value because the artist is “an example of one *without* reverence for the truth.”<sup>44</sup> Mangiafico thinks that Nietzsche’s ideal must be a repudiation of the will to truth because he thinks that it is the will to truth in general, rather than the unconditional will to truth (“truth at any price”), which is ascetic. Once one takes into account that Nietzsche’s target is the unconditional will to truth, there is no reason to think that a certain “reverence” for truth is incompatible with rejecting ascetic ideals.

Alexander Nehamas, in his book *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, argues that Nietzsche himself is “perpetuating” the ascetic ideal while fighting it because he is trying to get at the truth of the matter about Christianity.<sup>45</sup> Thus for Nehamas’ Nietzsche, any search for the truth is ascetic. Nehamas thinks that when Nietzsche says that the “faith in truth” is ascetic, he means that any assertion or any search for the truth is ascetic. This is a strange conclusion given that Nehamas recognizes that Nietzsche is talking about an “unconditional pursuit of truth” and objects to its moral foundation.<sup>46</sup> What allows Nehamas to jump from Nietzsche’s repudiation of an unconditional will to truth to the more radical conclusion that all truth seeking is ascetic is the nature of making truth claims. According to Nehamas, any claim about the world is an interpretation made from a perspective. For any claim, other interpretations based on other perspectives are possible. However, when one puts forward an interpretation (unless one is explicit about its interpretive and non-universal character), it must be put forward as an absolute truth claim that demands universal acceptance. This, Nehamas thinks, establishes that all truth claims are ascetic.

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<sup>44</sup> Mangiafico 1997: 178. Emphasis mine.

<sup>45</sup> See Nehamas 1985: 129-130.

<sup>46</sup> Nehamas 1985: 130.

This is a difficult argument that is worth looking at more closely. If Nehamas is correct here, then my contention that it is only an unconditional will to truth that is ascetic is wrong. Here is my reconstruction of Nehamas' argument:<sup>47</sup>

1. Interpretations are always put forward with a conviction that they are true.
2. Interpretations demand that they receive universal attention.
3. It follows that even despite one's best efforts all interpretations are dogmatic.
4. Asceticism is a dogmatism that tries to conceal that it is merely an interpretation.
5. Any attempt to expose asceticism for what it is will be done "in the name of truth."
6. But this attack on asceticism is merely an interpretation and cannot actually be true.
7. It follows that both asceticism and truth seeking rest on dogmatic assumptions and conceal their own nature.

Therefore 8. The search for truth is itself ascetic.

This argument fails to establish the conclusion that all truth seeking is ascetic. Even if we grant that making truth claims and asceticism share certain traits and that the critique of the ascetic ideal must be done "in the name of truth," it does not follow that the search for truth is ascetic. What makes asceticism ascetic is that it is anti-life in some way. That asceticism shares *other* traits (which have not themselves been shown to be anti-life) with the search for truth does not establish that the search for truth is itself ascetic. Given this and Nehamas' admission that Nietzsche does not actually make this argument, it is safe to conclude that Nehamas has not successfully shown that all truth seeking is ascetic for Nietzsche.

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<sup>47</sup> This discussion occurs in Nehamas 1985: 131. However, it presupposes his more general thesis about Nietzsche's view on truth, a discussion and critique of which will have to wait for Chapter Four.

Maudemarie Clark offers what I think is a far better interpretation on Nietzsche's critique of the will to truth. Despite the many differences between Clark's view and my own on Nietzsche's understanding of truth and knowledge (which will become apparent in later chapters), I believe that she is essentially correct in her interpretation of the connection between the will to truth and the ascetic ideal. She correctly points out that "the faith in truth [which Nietzsche repudiates] is an unquestioning commitment to truth, an unquestioning acceptance that truth is more important than anything else, for example, happiness, life, love, power."<sup>48</sup> And regarding science, Clark thinks that it is not science itself which is ascetic, but rather the faith in science, which is "a faith or unquestioning acceptance of the overriding importance of being scientific in the formation of one's beliefs."<sup>49</sup> Clark gets this right because she recognizes that "the will to truth [what I call for clarity's sake "the unconditional will to truth] is...a moral commitment to truthfulness regardless of its long-term utility."<sup>50</sup>

Before moving on to further questions and topics regarding the value of truth, there is a possible objection to Nietzsche's position that the unconditional will to truth is nihilistic that needs to be considered. As we saw in GS §344, Nietzsche thinks that the will to not deceive (even oneself) has its origin in morality rather than utility and this is demonstrated by the fact that untruth and deception are in many cases required for human life to flourish and survive. However, contra Nietzsche it is possible that the will to seek truth is compatible

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<sup>48</sup> Clark 1990: 184.

<sup>49</sup> Clark 1990: 189. Richardson (1996) agrees but goes further arguing that Nietzsche does not only allow room for truth seeking but also sees as the dominate drive in the Nietzschean good life. In GM, Richardson argues, Nietzsche is not attempting to devalue the will to truth but rather to reform it so that it is fitting to be the dominant drive. I think this position fails to see the extent to which nihilism and life-negation are the dominate concerns of Nietzsche's philosophy and the extent to which truth seeking and truth-attaining can be detrimental to overcoming them. This second point I discuss in what follows.

<sup>50</sup> Clark 1990: 187.

with a certain amount of untruth, error and self-deception being necessary for the flourishing and survival of human life. It may be that truth telling and truth seeking have utility even when unconditionally pursued on the condition that humans get the wrong answer with respect to those things about which it is better we are deceived. In other words, simply because one always *seeks* the truth does not mean that one will always attain the truth.

Consider the following hypothetical example: Suppose that it is better (for our survival) that human beings believe that some sort of transcendently metaphysical religion is true because it provides better conditions for cohesive social formations, and suppose that any transcendently metaphysical religion is false. If human beings are not equipped to discover the falsity or at least the uncertainty of such religious claims, the unconditional will to truth is completely compatible with holding the false beliefs, which in our example are a condition of our survival and flourishing. Given this possibility, it appears that Nietzsche was wrong to suppose that the unconditional will to truth *necessarily* negates life.

Even though Nietzsche is wrong on this point, his larger point regarding the nihilism of an unconditional faith in science may still be tenable. Science not only represents, for Nietzsche, an unchecked faith in and will to the discovery of all truth; it also represents a refinement of the human ability to attain the truth, meaning that science perhaps has the ability to discover truths regarding which it would be better from the standpoint of utility that we did not know. What ends up being problematic and nihilistic then would be the unconditional will to truth *plus* the capacity for discovering the fact of the matter about things which it would be better that we did not know. Thus to overcome nihilism in this regard one would either need to temper the will to truth *or* the tools that advance our knowledge. In any case, for our purposes the important thing to take from this section is that our best methods for discovering the truth are to be pursued only when the search for



truth is subordinated to the end of overcoming nihilism and having a flourishing, affirming life.<sup>51</sup>

### *Who Wants Truth?*

If being deceived has been as much a condition for life as believing the actual truth has been, then it seems as though we can learn something about ourselves, something about our needs and the conditions of our existence, by the types of beliefs we hold. If Nietzsche is correct that different types of people have different optimal conditions for their survival and flourishing, then differing beliefs can be clues to underlying differences. Our ‘truths’ or the things that appear to us to be true can be treated as symptoms for aspects of our underlying constitution. Nietzsche writes, “Even apart from the value of such claims as ‘there is a categorical imperative in us,’ one can still always ask: what does such a claim tell us about the man who makes it” (BGE §187)? Looking at problems from this perspective shifts the philosophical question from “What is true?” to “Who wants (this) truth?”

This aspect of Nietzsche’s thought, this shifting the question from “What?” to “Who?” was deeply influential to, among others, two French thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault. Deleuze, in his *Nietzsche* monograph, writes, “Truth expresses a will: who wills truth?”<sup>52</sup> Deleuze credits Nietzsche with reversing a trend in philosophy that went all the way back to Plato and Socrates of taking the “What is...?” question to be the properly philosophical question, “Who?” “[*Qui?*]” means this: what are the

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<sup>51</sup> Janaway (2007: 232-235) distinguishes between three different implications of Nietzsche’s critique of the will to truth. First, our holding particular beliefs may be assessed for its value in enabling and enhancing other aspects of life, a value that can a belief can possess despite its falsity. Second, it might at times be better, or at least as good, for human beings to entertain false representations of themselves and the world rather than have true beliefs about them (see GS §121 and BGE §4). And third, other human activities may be more valuable than, or at least of comparable value with the pursuit of truths. I think that Janaway is correct to point out that Nietzsche means to affirm all three of these things.

<sup>52</sup> Deleuze 1983: 73.

forces which take hold of a given thing, what is the will that possesses it?”<sup>53</sup> This leads Deleuze to consider “all of philosophy a symptomatology.”<sup>54</sup> For Foucault, the Nietzschean turn of asking the question “Who wants truth?” was foundational for his own genealogical project. Speaking on how the family becomes the principle locus of curing the mad in his College de France lectures, Foucault says, “So, why did it take place then? What happened in this period? What is the basis for all this?...We could be put on the track by simply asking the Nietzschean question: ‘Who is speaking?’ Who actually formulates this idea? Where do we find it?”<sup>55</sup>

These two French thinkers saw Nietzsche’s question, “Who wants truth?” as a ground-shaking event in the history of philosophy. What is it that makes the introduction of this question so important and revolutionary? In the preface to *GS* Nietzsche considers that philosophy (i.e., the history of philosophy) could be “an interpretation of the body.”

Behind the highest value judgments that have hitherto guided the history of thought, there are concealed misunderstandings of the physical constitution of individuals or classes or even whole races. All those bold insanities of metaphysics, especially answers to the questions about the value of existence, may always be considered first of all as the symptoms of certain bodies. (*GS* Preface §2)

What matters then for the philosopher engaged in what Deleuze calls symptomatology is not the truth or falsity of the philosophical position in question but the underlying state of the person who puts forward the position and how such beliefs and doctrines affect the individuals and social groups who hold them.<sup>56</sup> The symptomatologist probes the one who holds something to be true for the hidden, underlying reasons why she holds it to be true

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<sup>53</sup> Deleuze 1983: 77.

<sup>54</sup> Deleuze 1983: 3.

<sup>55</sup> Foucault 2003: 109.

<sup>56</sup> For critical appraisal of Nietzsche’s “symptomatology” approach see Conway 1997.

just as the physician probes the patient for the hidden underlying reasons for the outwardly manifested symptoms. Ultimately for Nietzsche, when we set aside the question of the truth of a position, we see that philosophizing itself is less about truth than “health, future, growth, power, life” (GS Preface §2), i.e. philosophy and the search for truth is first and foremost a strategy or set of strategies for living one type of life or other. If we keep in mind the centrality of overcoming nihilism for Nietzsche’s project, then we can see a conception of philosophy as Marx conceived of it in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, where the point of philosophy is to change the world rather than simply describe and interpret it.<sup>57</sup> Philosophy, as Nietzsche conceives of it, is meant to have an effect on the philosopher and those whom he or she influences. In order to do this in a purposeful way, the philosopher must understand what philosophical doctrines are symptoms of and what effect they have on the ones who hold them. We can see then that it is not that the Nietzschean philosopher ceases to care about truth all together. He or she certainly is interested in truths such as what affects holding a particular position have on a person or culture, but truth is not pursued unconditionally or for its own sake. Truth is put in the service of other goals.<sup>58</sup>

What does Nietzsche think a truth claim is a symptom of? Ultimately, “every art, every philosophy may be viewed as a remedy and an aid in the service of growing and struggling life” (GS §370). Nietzsche’s claim is that where truth is posited, someone is attempting to ameliorate or prevent some sort of suffering or enhance life in some way. However, not all suffering and not all types of life are of one kind, and so Nietzsche claims some suffer from “over-fullness of life” (GS §370) and some suffer from “impoverishment

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<sup>57</sup> Marx 1972: 145 (§11).

<sup>58</sup> For a discussion of the relation between the affects and the search for truth see Janaway 2007: 205-222. In Chapters Five and Six I will discuss the way Nietzsche thinks our conceptualization of the world affects the way an individual lives and the values that he or she holds.

from life.”<sup>59</sup> This means that while suffering occurs in any life, how that suffering is experienced and the overall effects that it has on an individual depend on the strength of the individual in question. We will see in Chapter Five precisely what this means for Nietzsche, but for now it is important that there are those who are strong enough to overflow and create something positive out of their suffering and those who are so weak and “impoverished” that it is all they can do to survive their suffering. Each type makes truth claims that arise out of their suffering, but in different ways. The Nietzschean symptomatologist will ask when evaluating a philosophy, “is it hunger or superabundance that has here become creative?” (GS §370). So not only does Nietzsche regard the will to truth as nihilistic when it is not tempered by other dominant, non-nihilistic drives, but individual truths can also be evaluated as to whether they are in service of an over-full life or an impoverished life. What individuals and cultures take to be true (regardless if they represent an unconditional will to truth or not) is a symptom of their underlying psychological and physiological condition.

This is perhaps an interesting take on the goal of doing philosophy, but it does not seem to radically undermine or affect other philosophical stances. If this is all Nietzsche has to say about the will to truth, we simply have two competing conceptions of what the goal of philosophy is (traditional approaches hold that truth should be its ultimate end, and Nietzsche holds that it should have some other goal). However, Nietzsche’s insight has more radical consequences if we consider the possibility (as Nietzsche does) that the causes of the truth claim (treated as a symptom) are unconscious and are not responsive to the claim’s actually being true. Thus, what seem to be good reasons for holding a position are ultimately

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<sup>59</sup> The German here is *Ueberfülle* (for “over-fullness”) and *Verarmung* (for “impoverishment”). *Ueberfülle* signifies something close to superabundance implying a kind of overflowing in this passage. *Verarmung* implies a kind of poverty or depletion.

merely *apparent* good reasons for holding the position. In this case the underlying cause of the truth claim is stronger than any reasons for or against assenting to the claim that *are* responsive to the truth.<sup>60</sup>

Just after Nietzsche has told his readers that he is questioning “What in us really wants truth?” (BGE §1), he tells us that “most of the conscious thinking of a philosopher is secretly guided and forced into certain channels by his instincts,” and “behind all logic...there stand valuations or...physiological demands for the preservation of a certain type” (BGE §3). More often than not, Nietzsche claims, philosophers defend their doctrines “with reasons they have sought after the fact” (BGE §5). This is not necessarily an attack on the good will of the philosopher because, as we just saw, Nietzsche argues that many of the instincts that guide conscious, apparently logical thought are unconscious. What is actually going on behind the scenes of consciousness is that “another drive [other than the ‘drive to knowledge’] has, here as elsewhere, employed understanding (and misunderstanding) as a mere instrument” (BGE §6), leading Nietzsche to conclude that:

Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir; also that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constituted the real germ of life from which the whole plant had grown. (BGE §6)

Nietzsche is claiming that we come to the conclusions we do about what is true, not based upon reasons that actually speak in favor the position put forward, but because of

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<sup>60</sup> What is it for a reason to be responsive to the truth? If I seem to see a lighted candle in front of me, form the belief that there is a lighted candle in front of me on the basis of this, and my optical faculties are working properly, then my reason for believing there is a lighted candle in front of me is responsive to the truth, i.e. I will seem to see a candle (in these conditions) only if there actually is a candle in front of me. However, if I seem to see a lighted candle in front of me, form the belief that there is a lighted candle in front of me, but my optical faculties are not working properly (e.g. I am hallucinating), then my reason for believing there is a lighted candle in front of me is not responsive to the truth, i.e. I will seem to see a lighted candle whether or not there is actually a lighted candle in front of me. The language I am using here is not Nietzsche’s own, but is nevertheless useful in explicating his thought. This will become clearer in the rest of this section.

other, often unconscious, drives and desires.<sup>61</sup> This unconscious activity of the mind produces the effect on the particular position in question of seeming to the cognizer to be true. It is important to remember that even if there is some unconscious desire provoking the cognizer into thinking that the position in question is true, it does not entail that the position is false. However, our reasons for thinking that a particular claim is true, our epistemic connection to the fact of the matter, are potentially undermined. So with regard to every position that seems to us to be true, we can inquire not just about the reasons that seem to favor the claim's truth, but also about what motivations we might have for adopting that position despite a lack of good reasons. Notice that Nietzsche is claiming that our unconscious instincts and drives can produce in us the appearance of possessing good reasons when we do not in fact have them. And these unconscious instincts can serve the interests of us individually or our society, class, culture, or even species.

The Stoics, for example, “pretend[ed] rapturously to read the canon of [their] law in nature” (BGE §9), i.e. their explicit objective was to tailor their morality to the way the world actually is. However, Nietzsche claims that in reality the Stoics’ “pride want[ed] to impose [their] morality, [their] ideal, on nature” (BGE §9). In other words, instead of rigorously pursuing the truth about the nature of the world, the Stoics actually imposed their own values that they already held onto their conception of the world. This would not have any far-reaching epistemic consequences and would be a simple case of intellectual dishonesty if it were not for the fact that the Stoics (at least according to Nietzsche) were “self-deceivers” in this regard. The Stoics thought they had good reasons for believing that nature was a

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<sup>61</sup> See Conway 1997. In Chapter Two, Conway explores the Nietzschean notion of decadence, connecting it to how we value. He claims that decadence for Nietzsche is “a corruption or clash of the instincts, on which individuals and peoples customarily (and unreflectively) rely to guide their everyday behavior” (Conway 1997: 24). These instincts thus give rise to both explicit values and unconscious affects, so if cognitive judgments are grounded in values and affects, then such judgments are ultimately symptoms of the body, and in the case of those of Western culture, symptoms of a decadent set of instincts.

particular way and developed their doctrines accordingly, but in reality the Stoics were creating an image of the world that accorded with their own drives and ideals. Nietzsche thinks that what happened with the Stoics can be generalized:

This is an ancient, eternal story: what formerly happened with the Stoics still happens today, too, as soon as any philosophy begins to believe in itself. It always creates a world in its own image; it cannot do otherwise. Philosophy is this tyrannical drive itself, the most spiritual will to power, to the ‘creation of the world,’ to the *causa prima*. (BGE §9)

The very nature of doing philosophy necessarily for Nietzsche involves creating values. It is a “spiritual” form of the will to power because instead of acting on the world directly, it recommends and argues for a certain way of evaluating, which allows the philosopher to influence via the mind (*Geist*) instead of by direct physical means. In creating values that the philosopher recommends to his or her followers and to society through which he or she hopes to have influence and power, the philosopher also begins to theorize about the world in a way that reflects those values. This, Nietzsche thinks, is inevitable; “it cannot do otherwise.” This is because, as I show in the next two chapters, the way we theorize about things is always reflective of both our unconscious and explicit values.

What Nietzsche claims about philosophers can be generalized to other sorts of truth claims. Recall my discussion of GS §110. Certain beliefs were held to be true in virtue of the fact that they helped the species survive. These became so ingrained that it took millennia of pursuing the truth before human beings could question these beliefs. Some examples of such beliefs are “that there are things, substances, bodies; that a thing is what it appears to be; that our will is free; that what is good for me is also good in itself” (GS §110). Nietzsche concludes from this that:

the strength of knowledge does not depend on its degree of truth but on its age, on the degree to which it has been incorporated, on its character as a condition of life. Where life and knowledge seemed to be at odds there was

never any real fight, but denial and doubt were simply considered madness (GS §110).

Reasons which are responsive to the truth of a given belief are not what accounts then for our subjective certainty (“strength of knowledge”); rather it is the degree to which the belief has served life, whether this is the life of the species as a whole, one’s society, or an individual, that accounts for this certainty.

Notice though that Nietzsche does not think this situation is intractable (at least in this section of GS). He claims that as the will to truth gained ascendancy and “became a piece of life itself, and hence a continually growing power” (GS §110) it was able to overcome the errors that were originally believed because they promoted life. This makes the thinker one “in whom the impulse for truth and those life-preserving errors clash for their first fight” (GS §110). Ultimately then, in those who seek the truth and do not simply accept what initially appears to be true, there is a clash between different elements that serve life, between the oldest and most ingrained of our beliefs that helped human beings survive from the beginning of our time on earth and our rather late acquisition, the will to truth.

There are two seemingly contradictory lessons to be learned from this section. First, the degree of certainty we have about a particular belief is not based on good reasons that indicate its truth but rather the degree to which it has served life in some manner. Second, there is progress that can be made in this regard; we can expose our false beliefs and replace them with true ones through rigorous questioning, improved methodologies, and recognizing our own unconscious needs and desires that cause us to seem to be certain about things. Can both of these be correct? Can we expose our false beliefs and replace them with true ones if our faith in reason’s access to truth has been so completely undermined? I think that we can have both and that the contradiction here is merely



apparent. However, an explanation of why this is the case will have to wait for my discussion of objectivity in Chapter Five.

Not only does the question “Who wants truth?” give us reason to think that many of our most strongly held beliefs have no reasonable merit, but it also is going to determine, to some degree, the doctrines that Nietzsche himself will endorse. Given that Nietzsche rejects the unconditional pursuit of truth as nihilistic and that individual beliefs can benefit and promote some types and not others, it follows that Nietzsche should endorse or reject certain philosophical doctrines based on the kind of life it promotes and the kind of life he wants to flourish. For example, Nietzsche rejects “Any distinction between a ‘true’ and an ‘apparent’ world—whether in the Christian manner or in the manner of Kant” (TI “Reason” §6). This is because the various manifestations of this distinction are “only a suggestion of decadence, a symptom of the decline of life” (TI “Reason” §6).<sup>62</sup> The artist who glorifies appearance is held up as an ideal here because he or she says “Yes” to life and thus exemplifies the Dionysian spirit.

#### *Truth and Knowledge and the Will to Truth*

What are the consequences of the will to truth for our understanding of truth and knowledge and our access to truth and knowledge? Nietzsche’s critique of the will to truth (and his suggestion that there may be value in lies and deception) entails the normative prescription that the truth should not be pursued unconditionally and that the philosopher may be justified in making false and deceptive claims. In other words, it is permissible and perhaps obligatory for the philosopher to have other ends than truth. The love of wisdom, for Nietzsche, is not identical to the love of truth. However, this insight need not affect our

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<sup>62</sup> A full treatment of Nietzsche’s concept of decadence is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, I discuss decadence at greater length in Chapter Six.

understanding of what truth is; it only affects how we judge when it is appropriate to seek and speak the truth.

As radical as Nietzsche's claim is that the lover of wisdom need not always seek and tell the truth, the consequences of his insight that people are motivated by (often unconscious) needs, desires, and values when they are ostensibly seeking the truth has even more radical consequences. If Nietzsche is right about this, then even with the most rigorous self-reflection we cannot eliminate the possibility that we are being compelled to posit something as true by some other desire. In this case, it is possible that what look like good reasons for a claim's truth are in reality unconscious self-deceptions, and the evidence or reasons in question do not really provide epistemic justification. In other words, aspects of the situation and cognizer, which are completely unresponsive to the claims of truth or falsity, cause the phenomenon of "seeming (perhaps indubitably) true." If our best evidence and reasons for holding things to be true might be completely unresponsive to the truth, then we must have a way to tell if they are responsive to the truth or not or face a complete lack of legitimate justification for any of our beliefs. This possibility would, it seems, lead Nietzsche to an all-pervasive skepticism, under everyday sorts of understandings of "truth" and "knowledge."

To put it a different way, given Nietzsche's claim that truth seeking can be animated by non-truth-seeking drives, we are faced with the following trilemma:

1. There are methods available to distinguish between good reasons for thinking something is true and reasons for thinking something is true that are not responsive to its truth, leaving us with no radical consequences for the nature of truth or our access to it.
2. There is no way we can eliminate the possibility that our reasons are really not responsive to the truth of the claim in question, thus leaving us with a radical skepticism regarding human access to truth.

Or 3. There is no way we can eliminate the possibility that our reasons are really not responsive to the truth (in one sense of “true”) of the claim in question, but we do have access to the truth in a different sense.

Nietzsche’s analysis of the will to truth is far from his last word on the topic of truth, but with that analysis he has opened up new, unexplored questions for philosophy:

[Philosophers] are all oblivious of how much the will to truth itself first requires justification; here there is a lacuna in every philosophy—how did this come about? Because the ascetic ideal has hitherto dominated all philosophy, because truth was posited as being, as God, as the highest court of appeal—because truth was not permitted to be a problem at all. (GM III §24)

With Nietzsche’s analysis and critique of the will to truth, truth and human beings’ relation to it are finally permitted as problems for philosophy. Truth is a moral problem because it may be the case, as Nietzsche claims, that there are other things that are more important than determining the truth. Human cognition’s access to truth is now a problem because Nietzsche has shown that when we think we have good reasons to think something is true, we may be unconsciously determined to believe something in a way that is entirely unresponsive to the actual truth or falsity of the claim in question.

It will be the task of the rest of this dissertation to explore and evaluate Nietzsche’s response to these problems. We will see what Nietzsche thinks of truth, objectivity, knowledge, and human cognizers’ access to truth. In the next chapter, I will deal with the skepticism implied by the second possibility of the above trilemma. There I consider Nietzsche’s understanding and appraisal of various sorts of skepticism. I believe that knowing whether Nietzsche is a skeptic or not, and if he is, what kind of skeptic he is, are essential for understanding Nietzsche’s position on broader epistemic and alethic issues.

## CHAPTER THREE

### NIETZSCHE'S SKEPTICISM

*To the realists.*—You sober people who feel well armed against passion and fantasies and would like to turn your emptiness into a matter of pride and ornament: you call yourselves realists and hint that the world really is the way it appears to you. As if reality stood unveiled before you only, and you yourselves were perhaps the best part of it—O you beloved images of Sais! But in your unveiled state are not even you still very passionate and dark creatures compared to fish, and still far too similar to an artist in love?... That mountain there! That cloud there! What is ‘real’ in that? Subtract the phantasm and every human contribution from it, my sober friends! If you can! If you can forget your decent, your past, your training—all your humanity and animality. There is no ‘reality’ for us—not for you either, my sober friends. We are not nearly as different as you think, and perhaps our good will to transcend intoxication is as respectable as your faith that you are altogether incapable of intoxication.

GS §57

#### *Introduction*

In the last chapter, I gestured toward the possible skeptical implications of Nietzsche’s inquiry into the origins and value of the will to truth. Nietzsche claims that the truth seeker’s reasons for positing something as true are often really the symptoms of unconscious affects that are not truth sensitive. In other words, what accounts for the phenomenon of a doctrine or belief’s “seeming to be true” is often a set of unconscious needs, desires, and affects rather than good truth-indicative reasons. The important epistemic question becomes whether or not there is a method to distinguish between truth-responsive reasons and those factors that determine cognition that are not truth sensitive. If there is a method available to distinguish between truth-indicative reasons and unconscious self-deceptions, then the search for knowledge is not radically altered even if it is rendered

more difficult and complicated. If there were such a method, then the only thing that would change in the quest for truth is that there would be another variable (the psychological state of the truth-seeker) for which one would need to account. However, if there are at least some unconscious affects that we could never, in principle, distinguish from good truth-sensitive reasons, then it seems as though we have good reason to doubt whether we can ever have enough epistemic justification to possess knowledge. If this is the case, then the thinker is not in a good position to grab hold of the truth, and the thinker should adopt some sort of radical skepticism about human access to truth.

In this chapter, I argue for the following position: If Nietzsche is correct in saying that we have unconscious desires posing as reasons that are not actually responsive to the truth about reality, then what follows is that a strong form of skepticism is the best epistemic position to adopt. This is because, in principle, there is no method that could distinguish between good, truth-indicative reasons and unconscious self-deceptions that are not responsive to truth. Imagine a method that purports to distinguish between the two. Presumably, one using such a method would possess what seem to be good reasons for accepting the results of the method's inquiry as true. The results of any inquiry distinguishing between good reasons and unconscious self-deception would (if they are to have epistemic justification) have to have reasons that are indicative of the result's truth. However, given Nietzsche's insight, it is possible that the reasons for believing the results of this inquiry are themselves unconscious self-deceptions necessitating a further inquiry about the status of the reasons for accepting the results of the first inquiry. And again, the results of this next inquiry could be treated with the same suspicion, thus necessitating a further inquiry. This process would have to go on *ad infinitum* in order to establish that the reasons for the initial

truth claim were indeed good, truth-responsive ones. Therefore, if Nietzsche is correct that many seemingly good, truth-responsive reasons are in fact symptoms of unconscious affects, then we can never be certain that any of our reasons are not such self-deceptions, making radical skepticism the most appropriate epistemic position.<sup>1</sup>

Given this possible skeptical implication of Nietzsche's insight into the will to truth, it is important to understand Nietzsche's own relationship to skepticism before assessing Nietzsche's positions on truth and knowledge. In this chapter, I examine the texts in which Nietzsche explicitly discusses skepticism and those texts that seem to have skeptical implications. I will also discuss those passages where Nietzsche seems to reject the possibility of truth, e.g. GS §107 where Nietzsche speaks of "the general untruth and mendaciousness that now comes to us through science" and TL §1 (84)<sup>2</sup> where Nietzsche writes, "Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions." I will show that these and other sections that seem to (paradoxically) deny the existence of truth are really expressions of Nietzsche's radical skepticism. While this chapter is not meant to be an exhaustive account of Nietzsche's relationship to the various forms of skepticism in the history of philosophy, given that he was certainly aware of ancient skepticism because of his training in classical philology, it will be necessary to look at how Greek skepticism influenced his thought.

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<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche does not explicitly make this argument in this way, but I think such an argument is available to him given his claim that many seemingly good reasons are merely unconscious self-deceptions. I will show that this argument is not only available to Nietzsche but is one he would endorse later in the chapter. Of course this argument is subject to the objection that such skepticism is epistemically self-defeating. I will deal with this charge later in Chapter Four. Jessica N. Berry (2011) attributes a similar argument for skepticism with the same infinitely regressive structure to Nietzsche.

<sup>2</sup> Because the first section (which comprises a bulk of the essay) of "On Truth and Lies" is so long, in addition to the section number, I will cite the page number of the edition of the essay in Nietzsche 1979: 79-97.

*Human, All Too Human's Pyrrhonian Skepticism*

In this section, I want to briefly discuss one scholar's attribution of skepticism (influenced by the ancient Greeks) to Nietzsche during his so-called middle period. The purpose of this brief digression is to see to what extent this kind of skepticism can be found in the later works.<sup>3</sup> Jessica Berry, in her article "The Pyrrhonian Revival in Montaigne and Nietzsche," argues that under the influence of his reading of Michel de Montaigne, Nietzsche advocates a species of naturalism coupled with Pyrrhonian skepticism in the first volume of *Human, All Too Human*.<sup>4</sup> Widely recognized as representing a shift in Nietzsche's thought regarding science, HAH calls into question the results of metaphysical philosophical speculation. Berry identifies two argumentative strategies Nietzsche employs in HAH to undercut the reader's faith in and acceptance of "the consolations of metaphysics, religion, and art" (HAH §251). The first argumentative strategy Nietzsche employs is a practical epistemic objection.<sup>5</sup> "It is true, there could be a metaphysical world; the absolute possibility of it is hardly to be disputed... Even if the existence of such a world were never so well demonstrated, it is certain that knowledge of it would be the most useless of all knowledge" (HAH §10). In other words, even if we could (*per impossibile*) have determinate knowledge of metaphysically transcendent reality, such knowledge would have no practical effects for beings such as ourselves. The second argumentative strategy Berry identifies is a

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<sup>3</sup> Berry (2011) herself does just this in her book, *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition*. However, her aims and my own, while potentially allied, are different. Her focus in that work is to show how Nietzsche (including the later Nietzsche) is influenced by the ancient Pyrrhonian skeptical tradition, while my aim is to show the reasons Nietzsche offers in favor of adopting skepticism. This difference in aim notwithstanding, I find Berry's treatment of her question to be convincing, if not decisive, that Nietzsche's later thought is heavily influenced by and consistent with the practices of the ancient skeptical tradition.

<sup>4</sup> Berry 2004: 497-514.

<sup>5</sup> Berry collectively calls these two argumentative strategies Nietzsche's "pragmatic argument" against metaphysical philosophy (2004: 499).

psychological worry about the source of our metaphysical beliefs. As we saw in Chapter Two, Nietzsche thinks that humans have a need to give life justificatory meaning, and this meaning is often derived from a supposed metaphysically transcendent realm. Nietzsche takes this need for beliefs in such a realm to be “symptomatic of psychological weakness and ill-health.”<sup>6</sup> This objection should already be familiar from the last chapter, where we saw him making similar claims in the very early work BT and the later work BGE. It is clear that this is a position that Nietzsche consistently held throughout his philosophical career.

With the reader’s faith in the metaphysically transcendent sufficiently undermined, Nietzsche begins a project he will later describe as “translating man back into nature” (BGE §230). Nietzsche claims that “the animal has...been placed too far below man” (HAH §101). We should understand the human animal as part of nature in the sense described by the natural sciences without unnecessary metaphysical assumptions. According to Berry, because of Nietzsche’s rejection of metaphysical claims and *a priori* methodology, as well as his endorsement of the natural sciences and their methodology of empirical observation, “we ought not to engage in discourses that would place facts or statements about the structure of reality beyond our capacity to verify them.”<sup>7</sup> This naturalism, Berry points out, does not commit Nietzsche to any sort of positive ontological thesis. As we saw in HAH §109 Nietzsche does not deny that there could possibly be a metaphysically transcendent world; humans just could not have cognitive access to such world if there was one. Nietzsche makes this point humorously. “We behold all things through the human head and cannot cut off this head; while the question remains what of the world would still be there if one had cut it off” (HAH §109). Since we cannot escape the limitations of our human cognitive

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<sup>6</sup> Berry 2004: 499.

<sup>7</sup> Berry 2004: 500.



faculties, speculation about what the world is like apart from how it appears to us is idle, and any claims we make about such a world entirely lack epistemic justification.

According to Berry, the methodological naturalism and skepticism regarding the metaphysically transcendent described above was influenced by Nietzsche's reading of Montaigne's essay "An Apology for Raymond Sebond." This defense of the little known Spanish theologian is interesting because in it "Montaigne adopts a skeptical posture...by refusing either to give assent to or deny hypotheses that take us beyond the level of straightforward empirical observation."<sup>8</sup> This is important because it is a uniquely Pyrrhonian skeptical position, which is the disavowal of beliefs and assertions of any kind except reports regarding the way things appear to us. Empirical observation need not run afoul of Pyrrhonian skepticism because one can report that things appear in a certain way without making a positive claim that things are (or are not) actually the way they appear. Another distinctively Pyrrhonian aspect of Montaigne's "Apology" is the use of pairs of arguments both for and against a position in order to undermine our confidence that we can know the truth of the matter rather than to advance a positive position.

Berry thinks there are clear indications of the influence of Montaigne's naturalism and Pyrrhonian skepticism evident in his "Apology" in the structure of argumentation in HAH. In part I of HAH, Nietzsche's main point is to show that metaphysical assumptions are "the worst of all methods of acquiring knowledge" (HAH §9) and to show that scientific methodologies are the only ones suited to the human cognitive situation. In Part II of HAH, Nietzsche moves from a critique of philosophy to an engagement with the science of moral psychology through which one can accurately evaluate the human as part of nature and not as belonging to a different order of being than other animals. Nietzsche writes that

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<sup>8</sup> Berry 2004: 508.

“gradually the scientific spirit in men has to bring to maturity that virtue of cautious reserve, that wise moderation which is more familiar in the domain of practical life than in the domain of theoretical life” (HAH §631), which Berry rightfully observes “resonates deeply with the Pyrrhonists’ adherence to *epoché*, or holding back from judgment.”<sup>9</sup>

If Berry is right, then this Pyrrhonian *epoché* radically modifies what we should take the status of Nietzsche’s naturalistic claims in HAH to be. All metaphysical speculation falls under the skeptical commitment to avoid assent or denial. The only claims that should be affirmed are those that report on empirical observation. Even here we must be careful; empirical methodology is advocated precisely because it does not go beyond what appears to us and is simply an honest appraisal of that appearance. Nietzsche’s naturalistic outlook, his “translating man back into nature” (see BGE §230), need not conflict with a commitment to skeptically refrain from judgment as long as his assertions are taken to be about what appears and are not understood as describing something with metaphysical depth, e.g. that all that *exists* is nature as understood by the empirical sciences.

The purpose of this diversion into Nietzsche’s skepticism in HAH is twofold: 1. To demonstrate that there is precedent in his earlier writings for seeing Nietzsche as a radically skeptical thinker. 2. To show that one can be skeptical and at the same time make positive claims without thereby committing oneself to a performative contradiction, always a worry for any advocate of skepticism. My goal for the rest of this chapter is to determine if Nietzsche maintains a commitment to skepticism in the writings that follow HAH. If Nietzsche remains a skeptic, it remains for us to determine what status his positive truth claims have, just as Berry did for Nietzsche’s naturalistic claims in HAH. Given that Nietzsche’s views on science change later in his career and are never so unqualifiedly positive

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<sup>9</sup> Berry 2004: 513.

as they were in HAH, some modification of the rather straightforward naturalism Berry identifies will be necessary. However, Nietzsche never abandons granting that science has certain epistemic advantages over other methodologies, and we have already seen that in BGE he views his philosophical task as including “translating man back into nature,” so we cannot simply infer that he completely rejects the position he stakes out in HAH.

*Healthy and Unhealthy Skepticism*

As we saw in Chapter Two, Nietzsche thinks an unconditional will to truth is life-negating and ascetic. From this we can conclude that Nietzsche would have additional criteria besides epistemic justification for endorsing or rejecting radical skepticism. As I argued in the last chapter, overcoming life-negating nihilism and affirming life are the tasks around which Nietzsche organizes his philosophy. We also saw how nihilism and life affirmation are as much about cultivating a particular kind of physiology as they are about the explicit beliefs and values a person holds because nihilism is a result of *décadence*. Given this, it makes sense that Nietzsche would consider skeptical positions in terms of their relative healthiness and unhealthiness. We can take the healthiness of skepticism to mean either that skepticism is symptomatic of a certain degree of health or sickness or to mean that it causes or results in a certain degree of health or sickness.<sup>10</sup> At this point, I will remain neutral on the question of which of these two interpretations is better (although I am inclined to think that this causation goes both ways for Nietzsche depending on the particular circumstances, i.e. skepticism can cause health or sickness and skepticism can be a symptom of health or sickness).

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<sup>10</sup> See my discussions in Chapter Five and especially Chapter Six regarding Nietzsche’s notions of the healthy and unhealthy and their relationship to decadence and nihilism.

In part six of *Beyond Good and Evil* entitled “We Scholars,” Nietzsche, in successive sections, describes two types of skepticism. The first type of skepticism, described in BGE §208, is an unhealthy sort of skepticism because it is “the most spiritual expression of a certain complex physiological condition that in ordinary language is called nervous exhaustion and sickliness.” Being this kind of skeptic, Nietzsche thinks, is almost a requirement for intellectual respectability in his time and represents a “sedative” and “lulling poppy” toward the “dangerous” pessimism of the day. What is characteristic of this unhealthy kind of skepticism? This kind of skeptic “being a delicate creature...is trained to quiver at every No, indeed even at a Yes that is decisive and hard...Yes and No—that goes against his morality; conversely he likes to treat his virtue to a feast of noble abstinence.” Is this not the Pyrrhonian skepticism of *epoché* that Berry attributed to the Nietzsche of *Human, All Too Human*? In fact, in addition to pointing toward Socrates’ “I know that I know nothing” as exemplifying this form of skepticism, Nietzsche also cites Montaigne’s “What do I know?” (Remember that Berry claimed that the Pyrrhonian skepticism of HAH was directly influenced by Montaigne). So, unless Nietzsche is going to embrace what he explicitly calls a sickly form of skepticism, if Nietzsche ultimately advocates some kind of skeptical stance, it will have to be more nuanced than the Pyrrhonian abstention from holding positions that he embraced in the earlier HAH.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> It is on this point where I depart from Berry’s (2011) position that Nietzsche maintained a Pyrrhonian form of skepticism throughout his career. However, this departure from Berry is small because I do not think Nietzsche abandoned Pyrrhonian skepticism so much as modified it for his own purposes. Bett (2000) argues that while Nietzsche does claim some affinity with the ancient skeptics, he ultimately rejects ancient skepticism in that he denies the truth of certain doctrines (e.g., metaphysics and Christianity) whereas the ancient skeptic would merely suspend judgment. This position ignores the distinction Nietzsche makes between truth about things as they are in themselves (about which I claim Nietzsche is a skeptic) and truth of how things appear in a given perspective (about which I claim Nietzsche thinks we can have knowledge). Bett however is not responding to Berry’s arguments as Berry’s book came out in 2011, and at the time of writing this dissertation there have been no peer-reviewed appraisals of her claim that Nietzsche is a Pyrrhonian skeptic.

What is it about this form of skepticism that Nietzsche thinks is unhealthy and sickly? This kind of skepticism occurs in “the new generation” that “has inherited in its blood diverse standards and values, everything is unrest, disturbance, doubt, attempt.” This has “an inhibiting effect, the very virtues do not allow each other to grow and become strong.” All of this leads to a sick and degenerate will. Skeptics of this kind “doubt the ‘freedom of the will’ even in their dreams.” Nietzsche is claiming that when radically different value systems mix in individuals, the individual will is paralyzed because it is pulled in different directions, and no guiding over-will has come to master this chaos. Without the direction of a consistent set of valuations, the individual who has inherited these “diverse standards and values” is pulled in multiple directions and so is unable to act decisively; a “paralysis of the will” is the result. Nietzsche thinks this has occurred because of “an absurdly sudden attempt at a radical mixture of classes,” classes which presumably have very different value standards, thus producing individuals who are so conflicted about what is important and worthwhile that they cannot act at all.

There are other symptoms of this mixture of classes (and hence value systems), among them are “objectivity,” “*l’art pour l’art*,” and “pure knowledge, free of will.” These, says Nietzsche, are all “merely dressed-up skepticism and paralysis of the will.” It should be clear now (if it was not before) that Nietzsche could not be an advocate of skepticism of this kind. If “pure knowledge, free of will” is this skepticism in another form, then Nietzsche must reject it, as someone who denies that there could possibly be knowledge free of will. As we have seen, even the seemingly pure “will to truth” is an expression of a certain type of life, and therefore of a kind of will.

Before turning to the other kind of skepticism Nietzsche discusses in the next section, it is worth noting that a mixture of opposing value systems does not necessarily lead

to a sickly skepticism and paralyzed will. In the work Nietzsche writes just after BGE, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche describes the conflict between the noble values of “Good versus Bad” and the slavish values of “Good versus Evil.” He concludes that:

There are still places where the struggle [between these two value systems] is as yet undecided. One might even say that it has risen ever higher and thus become more and more profound and spiritual: so that today there is perhaps no more decisive mark of a ‘higher nature,’ a more spiritual nature, than that of being divided in this sense and a genuine battleground of these opposed values. (GM I §16)<sup>12</sup>

Presumably these “higher natures” that Nietzsche speaks of in GM respond differently to having a conflicted set of values than the sickly skeptics of BGE §208. Instead of causing an inability to will, the values conflicts described in GM are an enticement to actively will and produce a revaluation of values. This is important because it shows that even though Nietzsche thinks that various socio-cultural conditions (like inheriting a conflicted set of value commitments) produce symptoms (such as, in this case, unhealthy skepticism and a sickly will), such conditions do not necessitate any particular set of effects by themselves. Nietzsche certainly wants to undermine our faith that we have direct, uncomplicated control over our beliefs and values, but this does not mean that we are strictly determined by the conditions of which conscious beliefs are merely symptoms. It is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this present work to explore the kind of relation that obtains between such conditions and their symptomatic effects.<sup>13</sup>

Moving to the next section of BGE, Nietzsche considers the possibility that there could be a different, “stronger” type of skepticism than the one he described in §208. Instead of a “spider of skepticism” that is characterized by the “misery of a heart that is no

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<sup>12</sup> See also BGE §260

<sup>13</sup> For more on beliefs and values as symptomatic effects of cultural conditions in Nietzsche see Deleuze 1983 and Blondel 1991.

longer hard enough for evil or good” with “a broken will that no longer commands” or “is capable of commanding,” Nietzsche envisions a “more dangerous and harder new type of skepticism.” It is still skepticism, for “it does not believe” (and so from a purely epistemological perspective it may be no different than the skepticism Nietzsche rejects). However, “it does not lose itself in the process [of not believing]; it gives the spirit dangerous freedom.”<sup>14</sup> Even though holding beliefs is excluded in any given case, one can still have other responses to positions and propositions; one can still act in accordance with or against them.

This kind of skepticism then is characterized, in part, by a refusal to hold beliefs out of intellectual honesty. If that were the last word, there would be nothing to distinguish this kind of skepticism from the unhealthy kind. However, what separates this stronger skepticism from the unhealthy variety is what one does with that refusal to believe. The unhealthy skeptic of §208 refuses not only to believe but also refuses to will. The skeptic of §209, on the other hand, does not stop with the refusal of belief; he or she still acts on the basis of considerations other than epistemic ones taken in relation to the position in question. This activity can include things normally associated with activity, but it can also include asserting claims.

Even if the (healthy) skeptic does not have epistemic reasons for believing a claim, and so, as a skeptic, refrains from making a judgment as to the absolute truth of the matter one way or another, he or she may have other reasons for making an assertion, e.g. one may assert something in order to get other people to believe it or because one wants others to

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<sup>14</sup> I would be remiss to not mention the political ramifications that Nietzsche thinks result from the two types of skepticism described here. The unhealthy skepticism of §208 is associated with the French, and the healthy skepticism of §209 is associated with the Germans, especially King Frederick William I of Prussia. For an excellent discussion of the political context see Douglas Burnham’s commentary of these two sections in Burnham 2007: 141-144.

think that he or she holds the belief (even if one does not actually hold the belief). §209 itself does not directly support this more expansive conclusion that the healthy skeptic will make assertions even if they withhold belief on skeptical grounds. However, this idea that a person can assert claims for other reasons than the claim's truth value (or evidence for its truth value) is completely consistent with Nietzsche's position that certain beliefs and doctrines benefit certain types (with some beliefs being necessary for the survival of the species itself). I will discuss what criteria Nietzsche's healthy skeptic would use in determining what to assent to in Chapter Five.<sup>15</sup>

We have seen that Nietzsche distinguishes between healthy and unhealthy varieties of skepticism. He clearly rejects unhealthy, sickly skepticism, but does he embrace the healthier, strong kind? In BGE §210 he says that if his "philosophers of the future" can be described as skeptics in this sense, then "this would still designate only one feature and *not* them as a whole." In addition to being skeptics they will also be critics and "men of experiments (*Experimente*)." According to Burnham, "critic" here refers to a critic in the Kantian sense; "it is the task of dividing according to principles; for example, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, dividing the proper sphere of rational activity from its speculative, dialectical activity."<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche's point here is that one's skepticism should not prevent one from thinking, from doing philosophy, and from having "the certainty of value standards, the

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<sup>15</sup> At the end of §209, Nietzsche says that a healthy skeptic has "awakened Europe from her dogmatic slumber," a clear allusion to Kant who was awakened from his dogmatic slumber by the skeptic, Hume. Burnham (2007) thinks that Hume is a skeptic "presumably in the older, weaker sense" (143). He thinks this suggests that Kant might be a skeptic of the stronger, healthier kind. This is an interesting suggestion that makes a certain amount of sense. For example, Kant argued that we cannot have theoretical knowledge of God or whether humans have an immortal soul or not, a limited skepticism of sorts, yet he nevertheless asserts that according to reason we must believe there is a God and that our souls are immortal on practical (i.e. moral) grounds. See Chapter Four where I discuss how theoretical knowledge for Nietzsche resembles the non-theoretical knowledge given in the Postulates of Practical Reason for Kant. Of course Nietzsche's respect for Kant is not unequivocal, but he reserves his criticisms to Kant's moral philosophy and the content of the postulates themselves and not for Kant's epistemology.

<sup>16</sup> Burnham 2007: 114.



deliberate employment of a unity of method, a shrewd courage, the ability to stand alone and give an account of themselves” (BGE §210). In other words, Nietzsche thinks that even the most radical skepticism should not entail giving up the rigorous pursuit of truth.

Nietzsche implies that truth is indeed among the philosopher of the future’s goals when he writes, “They will not dally with ‘Truth’ to be ‘pleased’ or ‘elevated’ or ‘inspired’ by her. On the contrary, they will have little faith that *truth* of all things should be accompanied by such amusements for our feelings” (BGE §210). If anything, by not being deluded by “elevated” or “inspired” feelings, the skeptical philosopher of the future will be more rigorous and honest about the quest for truth than those who have believed that truth is attainable. This then is not the skepticism of Cratylus where every assertion from an interlocutor is met with a wag of the finger.

Elsewhere Nietzsche makes similar points to the ones made in BGE §209. It is the mere prejudice of a certain type of philosopher to have “faith in opposite values” (e.g. truth vs. error and selfishness vs. unselfishness) where one of the values in each pair is given greater esteem and the other is denigrated. Among these opposed pairs is truth vs. error and knowledge vs. deception. Nietzsche thinks that “it is on account of this ‘faith’ that [philosophers] trouble themselves about ‘knowledge,’ about something that is finally baptized solemnly as ‘the truth’” (BGE §2). If one were a skeptic *and* one were ultimately concerned with truth as the philosophers Nietzsche discusses here are, then it follows that one would not affirm anything. However, if it is possible that in addition to the value the truth possesses, that “a higher and more fundamental value for life might have to be ascribed to deception,” then the skeptic can still publically affirm out of a will to deceive.<sup>17</sup> For practical purposes, the sort of skeptical position Nietzsche embraces, unlike the unhealthy

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<sup>17</sup> Recall the discussion in Chapter Two regarding the value of errors for life.

one he rejects, effectively abolishes or at least suspends “the essential opposition of ‘true’ and false” (BGE §3) because given such a skepticism we cognitively are cut off from truth. Given that “it is no more than a moral prejudice that truth is worth more than appearance” (BGE §34), it follows that given a skeptical estimation of our cognitive abilities there is no reason not to affirm despite not possessing epistemic justification. The criteria of evaluation that this healthy kind of skeptic uses to determine what to affirm will therefore have to include considerations in addition to epistemic or alethic criteria, but a discussion of these criteria will have to wait for Chapter Five.<sup>18</sup>

Based on the sections that I have just discussed, we can see that Nietzsche embraces skepticism but with several qualifications. The healthy skeptic must still be able to will and must be strong enough to assert positions despite the skeptical abstention from belief in the truth of those positions. Presumably, this entails not being squeamish about asserting and even defending a position that one does not, strictly speaking “believe” in.<sup>19</sup> Also, this kind of skepticism does not exhaust the characteristics of Nietzsche’s philosophers of the future; they will also be, among other things, critics in the Kantian sense and experimenters.<sup>20</sup> Now that I have established textual precedent for thinking Nietzsche was a skeptic of some kind,<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Chapter One where I discuss the Preface to GS. Nietzsche talks about being “superficial out of profundity,” which I take to be an example of believing without possessing epistemic justification.

<sup>19</sup> There is some ambiguity in the phrase “believe in.” One can believe in something in the sense of holding the proposition in question to be true. A skeptic of the type I have been describing will refrain from believing in things in this sense. One can also believe in something in the sense of having trust in the thing’s efficacy (e.g. the way one can be said to believe in the constitution). A Nietzschean skeptic and philosopher of the future will believe in certain things in this sense.

<sup>20</sup> The German for “experimenter” here is *Versucher*, which is more literally translated as “attempter,” but “experimenter” captures Nietzsche’s point that the philosophers Nietzsche envisions will attempt new projects as experiments without fully knowing their outcomes in advance.

<sup>21</sup> It may be argued that the passages in the “We Scholars” section I discussed are about Nietzsche’s philosophers of the future and not about Nietzsche’s own position. This, by itself, is a fair criticism if my argument for Nietzsche’s skepticism were limited to these passages. However, I show in the rest of the chapter

the task of the rest of the chapter is to determine what reasons Nietzsche gives for his skepticism, the exact nature of his skepticism as an *epistemological* position (as opposed to analyzing it in terms of healthy vs. unhealthy as I did here), and what the broader implications of such a skepticism are for the rest of Nietzsche's philosophy.

*Nietzsche's Skepticism in "On Truth and Lies"*

At the beginning of this chapter I discussed an argument that Nietzsche could make in favor of skepticism based on his critique of the will to truth. However, as I also noted while such an argument is clearly available to Nietzsche and he may have even had it in mind, he nowhere explicitly makes it. The goal of the next few sections is to look at claims and arguments that Nietzsche makes in support of a skeptical position. This will involve looking at both an early, unpublished work, "On Truth and Lies in an Extramoral Sense," and a much discussed passage, the correct interpretation of which is hotly contested, in the relatively late *Beyond Good and Evil*.

Perhaps none of Nietzsche's other unpublished writings have been as influential or philosophically controversial as his "On Truth and Lies."<sup>22</sup> Written in 1873, this essay is Nietzsche's first sustained treatment of the themes of truth, knowledge, and human cognition. Beginning with a delightfully sarcastic description of the pride humans feel because of their knowledge of the world (quoted to open Chapter Two), Nietzsche then turns to a critique of this supposed capacity to know. This critique begins with an observation that should already be familiar to the reader, namely that the intellect, which we

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that Nietzsche makes skeptical claims and offers considerations in favor of skepticism throughout his latter works.

<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the most famous and controversial philosopher greatly influenced by "On Truth and Lies" was Derrida. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to evaluate the influence of Nietzsche on Derrida's positions on truth and language. See Schrift (1985) for more on Nietzsche's influence on Derrida (as well as other 20<sup>th</sup> Century French philosophers).

suppose allows us to know this about reality, is “merely a device for detaining [us] a minute within existence” (TI §1 (79)), i.e. human cognition’s purpose is not to give us knowledge of the world but to help us survive. Of course, even if the purpose of our cognitive faculties is survival, this does not entail that human cognition does not give us knowledge of the world. It may well be the case that believing the truth aids in survival more than believing lies and errors do thus making the cause of some of our beliefs truth-sensitive. However, if we keep in mind the purpose of the intellect (or in other terms, the explanation for its evolution), we can see that human cognition’s access to truth is something that needs to be demonstrated and not something that can be taken for granted prior to such a demonstration. Nietzsche observes that it is only our pride that allows us to presume that we are not deceived by our practically oriented intellect.

Setting aside the question of whether we can know anything, Nietzsche points out that one of the survival mechanisms that the intellect provides us is the ability to deceive others. “As a means for the preserving of the individual, the intellect unfolds its principle powers in dissimulation, which is the means by which weaker, less robust individuals preserve themselves” (TI §1 (80)). For example, a weaker individual can convince a more powerful individual to not attack through various kinds of dissimulation such as projecting more power than one actually has or convincing the other that one is supernaturally protected. In fact, given the effectiveness to which the intellect is put to these ends, “there is almost nothing which is less comprehensible than how an honest and pure drive for truth could have arisen among [humans]” (TI §1 (80)). Nietzsche argues that it is our social nature that accounts for the establishment of a “uniformly valid and binding designation” for things, and “this legislation of language likewise establishes the first laws of truth” (TI §1 (81)). Here I take Nietzsche to mean that with the establishment of the conventions of

language, the conditions for what *counts* as true are established. With such conditions in place, a distinction between true and false, between truth and lie, is possible—note that unless more can be said, these conditions only establish what counts as true and what counts as false given certain conventions, not what is actually true and false independently of what we take to be the case.

With the invention of the lie (as opposed to mere dissimulation and deception) comes the injunction against lying. At this stage, however, “what [people] hate is basically not the deception itself, but rather the unpleasant, hated consequences of certain sorts of deception” (TL §1 (81)). Unless more can be said, the lie is merely the breaking of certain social conventions of what counts as true. The following are still open questions: “Are designations congruent with things? Is language the adequate expression of all realities?” (TL §1 (81)).

Nietzsche’s unambiguous answer to these questions is that besides the truths of logic (“truth in the form of a tautology”), which are but “empty husks” (i.e. lacking content about the world),<sup>23</sup> “[humans] will always exchange truths for illusions” (TL §1 (81)). In other words, we may be able to make a distinction between truth and lies at the level of what counts as true according to the conventions of language use, but all our claims will be illusions when they are taken to be about reality. Nietzsche argues that words are not attached to things but to “nerve stimul[i].” “The further inference from the nerve stimulus to a cause outside of us is already the result of a false and unjustifiable application of the principle of sufficient reason” (TL §1 (81)). Here Nietzsche is rejecting the position of his early philosophical mentor Schopenhauer, developed in *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of*

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<sup>23</sup> Notice Nietzsche’s unwillingness here to question the truths of logic, which contrasts with his calling into question our ability to know whether logic is adequate to reality in his later works. I will discuss Nietzsche’s skepticism regarding logic later in this chapter.

*Sufficient Reason*. Schopenhauer argues that we can infer the existence of an empirical world within space and time as the cause of our sensations.<sup>24</sup> In order to understand the force of this objection, it will be necessary to make a brief digression into Schopenhauer's argument in *On the Fourfold Root* and the use that he makes of the principle of sufficient reason there.<sup>25</sup>

Schopenhauer's basic premise in *On the Fourfold Root* is that the principle of sufficient reason (PSR) is not a *single* principle at all. In its classical formulation, the PSR is a unitary principle with universal application. Schopenhauer calls attention to Wolf's definition of the PSR as "being the most comprehensive: *Nihil est sine ratione cur potius sit, quam non sit.*"<sup>26</sup> To put the PSR in positive terms, for everything there is a reason for its being. This simple formulation of the PSR hides the fact that it is applied differently to different sorts of objects. Schopenhauer shows that through the history of philosophy "two distinct applications of the [PSR] have been recognized...the one being its application to judgments, which, to be true, must have a reason; the other, its application to changes in material objects, which must always have a cause."<sup>27</sup> In other words, the PSR is sometimes used to show that every true judgment must have a reason for its being true—in these cases, the PSR has an epistemic function. The PSR can also be used to show that every change in a material object (or one could say every event) has a cause—in these cases, the PSR has a metaphysical function.

Schopenhauer argues that that which grounds the PSR is the epistemic situation that it presupposes, namely that there is some object (or representation) for some subject that is

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<sup>24</sup> Schopenhauer 1907: §21.

<sup>25</sup> According to Thomas Brobjer, Nietzsche read a great deal of Schopenhauer leading up to his writing of "On Truth and Lies" in 1873. See Brobjer 2008: 254-255.

<sup>26</sup> "Nothing is without reason for its being." Schopenhauer 1907: §5.

<sup>27</sup> Schopenhauer 1907: §15.

in need of an explanation. This connection between subject and object is the “connection which is expressed by the [PSR] in its generality.” As Schopenhauer has already shown, the PSR is not applied univocally in its every employment. Rather, “this connection assumes different forms according to the different kinds of objects, which forms are differently expressed by the [PSR].”<sup>28</sup> Only the first class of objects will concern us here, “that of intuitive, complete, empirical representations”<sup>29</sup> because Nietzsche’s implicit rejection of Schopenhauer’s use of the PSR concerns material, empirical reality.

The basic assumption of Schopenhauer’s discussion of empirical reality is Kant’s transcendental idealism. For Kant (and for Schopenhauer) objects that exist in space and time exist only insofar as they appear to a subject—they are phenomena as opposed to noumena. In Schopenhauer’s language, we can only cognize the world in terms of a representer and what is represented.<sup>30</sup> The important consequence, for our purposes, is that material, empirical objects in space and time do actually exist, but they exist only as representations. According to Schopenhauer, the particular form of the PSR we employ when we think about objects of this sort is the law of causality, i.e. from the existence of some state or change in one material object we can infer what caused that state or change, which must also be empirical in nature. Here is Schopenhauer’s formulation of this version of the PSR: “When one or several real objects pass into any new state, some other state must have preceded this one, upon which the new state regularly follows, i.e. as often as that

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<sup>28</sup> Schopenhauer 1907: §16.

<sup>29</sup> Schopenhauer 1907: §17.

<sup>30</sup> Schopenhauer 1907: §19.

preceding one occurs.”<sup>31</sup> For every particular change in the empirical world, there is a regular empirical cause of that change; this is the PSR as the law of causality.

What work can this version of the PSR do for Schopenhauer? Among other things, Schopenhauer thinks that it is the PSR, as the law of causality, which establishes the empirical existence of the external world.<sup>32</sup> Because of the transcendental idealism that Schopenhauer takes from Kant, the objects of the senses, i.e. our representations, depend on the subject; they have no reality except as they appear to us. “It is therefore the Understanding itself which has to create the objective world.”<sup>33</sup> However, for Schopenhauer (unlike for Kant) the work of the Understanding and empirical intuition (sensation) that provide the Understanding with data are themselves within the empirical domain. They depend on the body (in this case the brain and the various sensory organs) for their existence and function, and in fact Schopenhauer says that the brain and the understanding are identical.<sup>34</sup>

We can infer, claims Schopenhauer, the empirical reality of material objects because of the physical effects those objects have on our sensory organs and ultimately our nervous system. Because of changes in the brain qua subject we can legitimately infer (by PSR as the law of causality) what causes those changes, namely the existence of empirical objects. This is legitimate in Schopenhauer’s view because the subject is itself empirical, so we do not have

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<sup>31</sup> Schopenhauer 1907: §20.

<sup>32</sup> One of the other conclusions Schopenhauer draws from this formulation of the PSR is a refutation of the cosmological argument for God’s existence. Because the PSR when used in reference to empirical objects can only be used to infer the existence of other empirical objects (and their states) one cannot legitimately infer the existence of some non-empirical object (in this case God) from the existence of anything empirical, including the totality of empirical objects. See §20.

<sup>33</sup> Schopenhauer 1907: §21.

<sup>34</sup> See Schopenhauer 1907: §22.



an illegitimate use of the law of causality where something empirical causes something non-empirical (or vice versa). Therefore, ultimately for Schopenhauer, it is our scientific understanding of the workings of the brain, its connection via nerves to the sensory organs, and the physical functioning of the sensory organs that justify our belief that external objects exist and that they are the way we think they are.<sup>35</sup>

This digression into Schopenhauer's philosophy completed, we can now make sense of Nietzsche's skeptical assertion in "On Truth and Lies." We can see now that Nietzsche thinks Schopenhauer is not justified on the basis of the PSR that empirical objects exist in reality. Simply because we have a particular nerve impulse does not justify our reasoning that it must be ultimately caused by some external object. Why might Nietzsche think that Schopenhauer's reasoning is unjustified? There are two possibilities here: Nietzsche might reject the simple claim that we can infer the existence of external objects based on the changes in our nervous system, or Nietzsche might reject Schopenhauer's idealism according to which not only do we know the existence of external objects because of their effects on the brain, but those objects also depend on the brain for their existence. Even though it is clear that Nietzsche's target in "On Truth and Lies" is the Schopenhauer of *On the Fourfold Root*, we only have evidence that Nietzsche rejects the claim that we can infer the existence of external objects based on changes in our brain ("nerve stimul[i]"). A refutation of Schopenhauer's version of transcendental idealism will have to wait thirteen years for the publication of *Beyond Good and Evil*, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

So what does Nietzsche think is wrong with Schopenhauer's claim that we can use the PSR in the form of the law of causality to infer the existence of external objects from the changes we experience in our brain? It is clear that Nietzsche regards the kind of knowledge

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<sup>35</sup> For the most in-depth treatment in English of Schopenhauer's *On the Fourfold Root* see White 1992.

we would have if such an inference were legitimate as knowledge of the thing in itself—“pure truth, apart from any of its consequences” (TL §1 (82)). Never mind that it seems to be the case that Nietzsche here misunderstands Schopenhauer’s transcendental idealism—external, empirical objects are not the thing in itself for Schopenhauer. Our goal is to determine what Nietzsche’s skeptical position is in “On Truth and Lies”; it is not to evaluate how good a reader Nietzsche is of his philosophical mentor. In any case, Nietzsche thinks that the “creator [and user] of language only designates the relations of things to men” (TL §1 (82)), i.e. the only thing we are able to speak of is how things relate to us and not the way things are in themselves. This may just seem like a restatement in simpler terms of post-Kantian idealism, but as we shall see, there is more to Nietzsche’s position than that.

Thus far Nietzsche could be in agreement with Schopenhauer’s position that we can infer the existence of external objects from their effects on us. However, Nietzsche argues that we cannot. His argument in his own words goes as follows:

One can imagine a man who is totally deaf and has never had a sensation of sound and music. Perhaps such a person will gaze with astonishment at Chladni’s sound figures;<sup>36</sup> perhaps he will discover their causes in the vibrations of the string and will now swear that he must know what men mean by ‘sound.’... In the same way that the sound appears as a sand figure, so the mysterious X of the thing in itself first appears as a nerve stimulus, then as an image, and finally a sound. (TL §1 (82-83))

Our situation as human cognizers attempting to cognize external objects is like that of the deaf person who tries to discover what the subjective sensation of sound is like from viewing Chladni’s sound figures. Just as the deaf person cannot infer from the effects of sound that he or she can experience what sound is like for a hearing person, a human cognizer cannot

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<sup>36</sup> The translator of “On Truth and Lies” (Daniel Breazeale) informs us that “Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni (1756-1827) [was a] German physicist, one of the founders of modern scientific acoustics. His ‘sound figures’ are patterns made on a sand-covered flat surface by the sonic vibrations produced by a string affixed below the plane” (Nietzsche 1979: 24-25n55).

get “out of his or her head,” as it were, to external, empirical objects on the basis of the experience of the brain/nervous system being affected in a particular way. As we saw, Schopenhauer thinks that our scientific knowledge of how the brain and sensory organs work and how they are affected by outside objects allows us to infer the existence of those outside objects. However, the scientific knowledge that forms the basis of this inference is itself based on knowledge of external objects, namely the study of brains, nerves, and sensory organs. Nietzsche correctly infers that this is an illegitimate use of the PSR. The only thing that Nietzsche would allow that the PSR gets us in the case of sensory experience is that the changes we experience have some cause or other we know not what.<sup>37</sup>

After a brief discussion about the inadequacy of our general concepts (e.g. “leaf”) for describing a world made up of unique particulars (e.g. all of the actual leaves out there) (TL §1 (83)), Nietzsche draws his skeptical conclusion:

What then is truth? A moveable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions. (TL §1 (84))

It is tempting to think that Nietzsche is advancing the claim that there is no such thing as truth (“truths are illusions”). However, it is clear that he is talking not about truth *simpliciter* but about what *counts as* true in a given social context. What is ultimately an illusion, for Nietzsche, is that we have access to things in themselves when in reality the only thing to which we have cognitive access is “a sum of human relations.” Nietzsche confirms this interpretation in the next paragraph: “To be truthful means to employ the usual metaphors”

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<sup>37</sup> That is not to say that Nietzsche endorses the PSR, and I think that he ultimately cannot, given his skepticism. However, in TL he is only committed to inferring the external world on the basis of nerve stimuli being an illegitimate use of the PSR even if we grant the truth of the PSR.

(TL §1 (84)). So Nietzsche is not claiming that truth does not exist but rather that we lack sufficient justification to know that what counts as true is indeed true.

To illustrate this main skeptical point, Nietzsche uses another example.

If I make up the definition of a mammal, and then, after inspecting a camel, declare ‘look, a mammal,’ I have indeed brought a truth to light in this way, but it is a truth of limited value. That is to say, it is a thoroughly anthropomorphic truth which contains not a single point which would be ‘true in itself’ or really and universally valid apart from man. (TL §1 (85))

Notice the two senses of truth Nietzsche employs here, “true in itself” and “anthropomorphic truth.” Nietzsche is not claiming that truth in itself does not exist, nor is he claiming that we don’t have access to truth of any kind.<sup>38</sup> Nietzsche is simply advancing the skeptical hypothesis that when we think and make claims about the world, we are only in contact with our particular relationship to things. Since we cannot step outside ourselves, as it were, to see what that relationship is like, we must be content with our anthropomorphic truths and remain skeptics about what things are like in themselves, i.e. independently of our relationship to them.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Clark argues in her chapter about “On Truth and Lies” (1990: 63-93) that Nietzsche reaches his strong epistemological conclusion—All truths are illusions—because he holds a metaphysical correspondence theory of truth, a theory of truth that she claims he will reject in his later career. Given that Nietzsche distinguishes between two different conceptions of truth (“true in itself” and “anthropomorphic truth”), it seems strange to claim that Nietzsche held any particular theory of truth to be privileged. His concern is to establish the limits of what can be known (or even better to describe the human cognitive situation) not to advocate one theory of truth over another. As we will see, a significant difference between Clark’s reading of Nietzsche and my own, in general, is that Clark takes Nietzsche to be concerned with establishing a theory of truth, while I argue that Nietzsche is not concerned with adopting a particular theory of truth, but instead is trying to determine what the limits of human cognition are regardless of what theory of truth one holds. Berry (2011), contra Clark, has a reading more in line with my own, viz., that in “On Truth and Lies,” Nietzsche, qua cultural physicist, is recommending that we suspend judgment in a manner reminiscent of ancient skepticism.

<sup>39</sup> Clark asks “Why [in “On Truth and Lies”] does [Nietzsche] not regard correspondence to phenomenal reality as a plausible candidate for truth?” (1990: 88-89) It seems to me that she has just answered her own question. This is simply not the problem Nietzsche is dealing with in this essay. As she stated earlier in her chapter on “On Truth and Lies,” Nietzsche is trying to give a naturalistic account of our cognitive apparatus. Given said apparatus and how it functions, if (contra Schopenhauer and Berkeley) common sense takes truth to be correspondence with things as they are apart from our representations of them (our cognition of them), then we do not have access to truth and all of our ‘truths’ are “lies” or literally false. However, none of this

Many of the considerations Nietzsche raises in TL are about language and its inadequacies and I have not treated those aspects of the text in any significant detail beyond mentioning them. This was intentional because my claim is that his main and most philosophically significant point is that we should be skeptical about our ability to know what things are like in themselves. Nietzsche's points about language, when taken alone, may help us to see how to better understand the claims we make about the world, but without the main argument I've just described, these observations about language are insufficient to establish a skeptical hypothesis.<sup>40</sup>

To summarize the main points of my interpretation of "On Truth and Lies," Nietzsche's skeptical thesis in this essay is twofold: he rejects the idea that we can have any knowledge apart from our human interest in and relation to things, and he rejects the notion that we can infer from the changes we experience in our nervous system to the existence of external, empirical objects. Nietzsche therefore rejects that we have any objective knowledge (i.e. knowledge uncorrupted by our "subjective" needs and desires), and he rejects that we have knowledge of the empirical world. At least in "On Truth and Lies," his credentials as a kind of radical skeptic are secure. We turn now to a much later work, *Beyond Good and Evil*, to see Nietzsche make a much stronger case for a form of skepticism similar to that he espouses in "On Truth and Lies."<sup>41</sup>

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commits Nietzsche to a theory of truth. I think Nietzsche is intentionally *avoiding* adopting a theory of truth here. His goal is to undermine our pretention to get at some deep experience-independent reality.

<sup>40</sup> Clark (1990: 69-77) has a good discussion of Nietzsche's views on the nature of language and metaphor in "On Truth and Lies" and shows how Nietzsche's treatment of these themes is not by itself sufficient to establish his strong epistemological claim that our truths are illusions.

<sup>41</sup> See Berry 2006 and 2011 for more discussion on the skepticism of "On Truth and Lies." Also see Cinelli (1993) who connects Nietzsche's discussion on truth in "On Truth and Lies" to his larger project, arguing as I do that Nietzsche never endorses a theory of truth.

*The Skepticism of Beyond Good and Evil §36*

If Nietzsche's skeptical position were limited to his early works, it would be of little interest to this study, which by in large focuses on what can be said of Nietzsche's general position regarding matters pertaining to human cognition. In this section, I will show that BGE §36, an important passage from Nietzsche's later period that has received a great deal of attention by commentators, offers a compelling argument for a skeptical position that is at least as, if not more, radical than the skepticism of his earlier works. As we will also see, BGE §36 makes explicit the connection between Nietzsche's skepticism and his critique of the will to truth, so this section serves not only as a statement of one of the strongest cases for skepticism that Nietzsche makes but also elucidates the connection between Nietzsche's epistemology and his broader philosophical project.

On an initial, superficial reading of BGE §36, Nietzsche appears to be making an argument that the world as it is in itself—its “intelligible character”—is will to power.<sup>42</sup> This reading of the passage becomes implausible once two things about it are noted, one regarding its formal structure and the other regarding the content of its claims. From the perspective of the passage's formal structure, the problem with the claim that BGE §36 is an argument that the world is will to power is that Nietzsche introduces the major (and controversial) premises as hypotheticals, e.g. “*suppose* nothing else were ‘given’ as real except our world of desires” and “we have to make the experiment of *positing* the causality of the will hypothetically as the only [kind of causality].” So formally, if we take into account the

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<sup>42</sup> There is little consensus regarding what Nietzsche's concept of the will to power means. It can be seen as a thesis regarding the most fundamental explanatory principle of either human activity, all life, or even any phenomena. David Owen (2007: 33) regards it as “a general hypothesis concerning life” given any living creature's “architectonic interest in the feeling of power.” According to Owen, it is in virtue of the will to power as an explanatory principle that forms the basis of “translating man back into nature” (BGE §230). Lanier Anderson (1994) makes the broader claim that the will to power is, for Nietzsche, the unifying explanatory principle of all the sciences. While I am sympathetic to Anderson's stronger claim, as we will see, I disagree with him on how to interpret BGE §36. I discuss the will to power further in Chapter Six.

way Nietzsche states the premises, he cannot conclude that the world is will to power; all he can legitimately conclude is a hypothetical conclusion, viz. if x, y, and z, then the world is will to power.

From the perspective of the passage's content, the problem with viewing it as an argument that the world in itself is will to power is that Nietzsche does not endorse several of the major premises and in fact rejects them. Nietzsche begins his argument by asking his reader to "suppose nothing else were 'given' as real except our world of desires and passions, and we could not get down, or up, to any other 'reality' besides the reality of our drives." As Clark points out, this is a move reminiscent of Descartes' method of argument in the *Meditations*.<sup>43</sup> Descartes argues that we cannot take for granted that the external world is given as real because the testimony of the senses can be legitimately doubted, our internal experiential life is given privileged epistemic status—for Descartes thoughts were the paradigmatic internal experience, for Nietzsche (in this passage) it is the drives. For this argument the most important affective drive for establishing that the world is will to power is not surprisingly one's own individual will.

The problem with this move in the argument is that Nietzsche denies that we have this kind of cognitive access to the will, i.e. that it is "given" as real to us. In BGE §19, just a few sections before the section we are considering, Nietzsche argues against Schopenhauer's claim that the will is "absolutely and completely known." This is hardly consistent with the will's being given to us as real. Later in the argument Nietzsche asks the reader to consider "that the causality of the will hypothetically as the only one" and "whether all mechanical occurrences are not, insofar as a force is active in them, will force, effects of will." However,

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<sup>43</sup> Clark 1990: 213-214.

these suppositions that Nietzsche asks the reader to consider hypothetically are claims that he explicitly rejects elsewhere.<sup>44</sup> For example:

Today we no longer believe a word of all this. The ‘inner world’ is full of phantoms and will-o’-wisps: the will is one of them. The will no longer moves anything, hence does not explain anything either—it merely accompanies events; it can also be absent (II VI §3)<sup>45</sup>

While it is clear from this passage that Nietzsche denies that the will exists as it is commonly understood, i.e. something of which we are consciously aware, he does not deny that there is something (or some thing/s) “in us” that is responsible for our action (see BGE §19 where Nietzsche discusses his view of the relation between the self, will, and action). Whatever this will-like thing is, it is not something simple and perspicuous to consciousness which is what would be required for the argument in BGE §36 to get off the ground as a straightforward argument that Nietzsche would endorse.<sup>46</sup>

Given that Nietzsche clearly does not mean to endorse an argument for the conclusion that the world “viewed from the inside” is will to power, the question is what is Nietzsche trying to show by making an argument for a hypothetical claim whose antecedent he denies (If the will is given to us as real, then the world as it is in itself is will to power)?

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<sup>44</sup> I am indebted to Clark’s thorough treatment of Nietzsche’s non-endorsement/repudiation of this argument in (1990: 214-215) where she brings up these and other reasons to suppose Nietzsche would not have accepted the conclusion to the argument in BGE §36.

<sup>45</sup> My only concern here is to show that Nietzsche denies that we have the kind of knowledge of the will that would be required for him to endorse the conclusion of the argument in BGE §36. For Nietzsche’s discussion of his reasons for rejecting that we have this knowledge of the will see GS §127, an important, extended discussion of the problems with viewing the will as causal and with Schopenhauer’s doctrine that it is only the will that has reality.

<sup>46</sup> Lanier Anderson argues that Nietzsche is making a straightforward argument in BGE §36 that the will to power is the unifying underlying principle of the sciences (broadly construed). He denies, contra Clark and myself, that there is good reason to think that Nietzsche does not endorse the conclusion of this argument. He claims that Nietzsche makes a stronger claim than he needs to in stating the major premise (that “the world of drives and affects is the only given world”) and that Nietzsche only needed the weaker claim that “there is a world of drives and affects in our experience.” This point is well made, but Anderson does not address the argument’s dependence on claims about the will that Nietzsche explicitly denies elsewhere, nor does he adequately address the argument’s hypothetical structure. (Anderson 1994: 729-750.)



We will first look closely at Clark's interesting but inadequate answer to this question and then examine my own view that this is an argument for the sort of radical skepticism I have attributed to Nietzsche.

Maudmarie Clark argues<sup>47</sup> that Nietzsche's purpose in including an argument in BGE that the world is will to power, which depends on premises that he ultimately rejects, is to warn his readers that even though he *interprets* the world as will to power, his reason for doing so is his own moral prejudice. As we will see later in this section, Nietzsche thinks that philosophers do not hold their metaphysical positions because they are actually true and supported by good reasons but because those metaphysical positions reflect their own values. Philosophers construct a (metaphysical) world that exemplifies or justifies the set of values, needs, and (often unconscious) desires of the philosopher in question. Nietzsche's assertion that the world is will to power is no different; "his doctrine is 'a desire of the heart that has been filtered and made abstract,' a 'prejudice' he has baptized 'truth.'<sup>48</sup> In other words, Nietzsche's positing the world as will to power is merely a projection of his own values, and since this positing is not accompanied by good reasons, it is not a candidate for truth.

Clark argues that Nietzsche not only rejects that there are good reasons for accepting that the world is will to power but also that Nietzsche holds that this claim is literally false. This is in contrast to well-established scientific truths, which she claims Nietzsche holds are not merely projections of the values of the theorist. She makes a sharp divide then between claims that are, on the one hand, merely interpretations that reflect the theorist's values (e.g.

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<sup>47</sup> Clark's interpretation of why Nietzsche would make an argument that he actually denies can be found in Clark 1990: 218-227.

<sup>48</sup> Clark 1990: 219.

the Stoic's interpretation of nature (BGE §9)) of which Nietzsche's doctrine of the world as will to power is one and, on the other hand, those that are candidates for truth because they can be supported with reasons that do not depend on the values of a particular person.<sup>49</sup>

What Clark claims Nietzsche is doing is taking the straightforward psychological phenomenon of willing power and glorifying it by generalizing it beyond psychology to the entire world or all life. So Nietzsche "pictures life [and the world] as will to power because he values the will to power, not because he has reason to believe that life [or the world] is will to power."<sup>50</sup> Clark is on to something when she claims that Nietzsche is trying to show that his doctrine of the will to power is a projection of his values onto the world. However, ultimately Nietzsche has other reasons for producing an argument the conclusion of which he did not affirm. These reasons take us to the heart of Nietzsche's motivation for embracing a kind of radical skepticism and this skepticism's connection to the will to truth.<sup>51</sup>

I will begin my interpretation of BGE §36 by taking up Clark's suggestion that it should be interpreted in light of what Nietzsche claims about philosophers and philosophical doctrines in Part One of BGE. As we have already seen, in Part One of BGE Nietzsche entreats his readers to consider the question of the value of truth, which leads to a discussion of the nature, origin, and effects of the will to truth, especially as that will is exhibited by

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<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, my disagreement with Clark's interpretation of Nietzsche's epistemological views hinges on my denial that for Nietzsche we can distinguish between claims about the world that have (moral) value-neutral reasons and those that do not. I will discuss, in detail, my disagreement with Clark on this issue further in Chapter Four.

<sup>50</sup> Clark 1990: 227.

<sup>51</sup> Janaway (2007) agrees with Clark and myself that BGE §36 cannot be an argument that the world is will to power that Nietzsche would endorse. While noting the affinities of this section with Schopenhauer's thesis of the one will underlying the world as experienced, Janaway goes on to point out that Nietzsche is actually critical of such metaphysical speculation. However, Janaway misses the Cartesian and skeptical aspects of this passage that I will draw out in my own discussion to follow.

philosophers and scientists. The important question to be answered for our purposes is to what extent does the nature of the will to truth undermine our claims to know the world?

After having considered the extent to which “the faith in opposite values”<sup>52</sup> (BGE §2) is a mere moral prejudice and not essential oppositions that are written in to the nature of things, Nietzsche claims to have discovered by observing philosophers and their writings that “the greater part of conscious thinking must still be included among instinctive activities, and that goes even for philosophical thinking” (BGE §3). This means that “‘being conscious’ is not in any decisive sense the *opposite* of what is instinctive: most of the conscious thinking of the philosopher is secretly guided and forced into certain channels by his instincts.” Nietzsche is claiming that the among the oppositions posited to exist in reality but which are merely the prejudices of metaphysicians, i.e. have no grounding in reality, is the opposition between thoughts that are determined by instinct and thoughts that are determined by conscious reasoning.

The mere fact that a thought is “forced into certain channels” by instincts of which we are not aware does not, on its own, show that these thoughts are false. For example, my tendency to believe on the basis of instincts of which I am unconscious that my partner is unfaithful to me does not entail or even affect the truth of whether my partner has been unfaithful to me or not. My partner will be faithful (or not) regardless of what I believe about his or her conduct.<sup>53</sup> The problem for the philosopher (or the lover concerned about the faithfulness of his or her partner) is that while instinctual causes of which we are

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<sup>52</sup> Some examples of opposing values that Nietzsche gives in BGE §2 are the pairs truth and error, the will to truth and the will to deception, selfishness and selflessness, and disinterested purity and lust.

<sup>53</sup> This, of course, excludes the case where my instinctual tendency to believe my partner is unfaithful causes me to act differently toward him or her, which in turn causes him or her to actually be unfaithful. In such a case there is a sense in which my tendency to believe something has affected the truth value of that belief, but this kind of causation is not the relevant sense for the question under discussion.

unaware do not in themselves bear on the *truth* of the matter, those causes can undermine our *epistemic justification* for believing something to be the case. To return to the example of my belief that my partner is unfaithful to me, suppose that I discover what I take to be good, if not decisive, evidence that my partner has been unfaithful such that I conclude with subjective certainty that my partner has, in fact, been unfaithful. Every additional piece of evidence that I encounter I take to confirm the belief. Now suppose that after extensive therapy I discover that I, because of some childhood trauma, have an unconscious instinctual tendency to believe that with whomever I am romantically involved, he or she will be unfaithful to me. As we have said, this discovery about my instinctual tendencies to believe things does not bear on the truth of the matter. In our example, the only thing that affects the truth of whether my partner has been unfaithful to me is whether or not he or she has actually been unfaithful. However, what does a discovery about some sort of unconscious psychological necessity of belief formation do to my epistemic justification for the belief?

Nietzsche, I argue, thinks that the fact that our thinking is “secretly guided and forced” in this way undermines our beliefs’ epistemic justification. Going back to the example above, my discovery that I would come to believe that my partner is unfaithful to me no matter what kind of evidence or lack thereof I actually possessed should undermine my confidence in the original judgment. The fact that my belief was instinctually determined by factors that are not truth sensitive (my childhood trauma and the instincts they engendered in this example) negates the positive epistemic status of my belief. For Nietzsche, our status as cognizers is far worse than the status of a neurotic lover questioning his or her partner’s faithfulness. Whereas the lover can conceivably discover the cause of his or her neurotic tendencies and then reevaluate the evidence in light of that new knowledge,

the determination of thought by unconscious instincts is global for Nietzsche such that for every discovery we make about our instinctual drives we can question the epistemic legitimacy of that belief as well. In other words, we always have reason to doubt the truth sensitivity of our evidence for believing something. This shows that Nietzsche would endorse the skeptical argument I made at the beginning of this chapter, viz. given that we can never tell for sure whether our reasons for thinking something is true are truth-indicative reasons or whether they spring from unconscious sources which are not sensitive to the fact of the matter, we never are in possession of the epistemic justification required for knowledge as it is traditionally understood.<sup>54</sup>

Philosophers who do not recognize that their doctrines are determined by instinctual drives, as described above, Nietzsche calls “innocent” and “childish” (BGE §5). “They are not honest enough in their work” because they “pose as if they discovered and reached their real opinions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely concerned dialectic.” The philosophers Nietzsche describes mistakenly think the rational reasons they produce in favor of their views are the reason they hold the view in the first place. In reality, those reasons are produced after the fact—after the philosophers’ instinctual drives have come as “an assumption, a hunch, indeed a kind of ‘inspiration.’” Philosophical doctrines are nothing but the prejudices of philosophers which “they baptize ‘truths’” without having, at the same time, the courage to admit that this is the case.

This leads Nietzsche to his skeptical conclusion regarding philosophy itself.

Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir; also that the moral (or immoral) intentions in

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<sup>54</sup> There are, of course, self-referential difficulties with this position. I will not deal with them here; they will be discussed in chapter four. For now, it will suffice to say that the distinction between healthy and unhealthy skepticism discussed earlier in this chapter will be important.

every philosophy constituted the real germ of life from which the whole plant had grown. (BGE §6)

What one takes to be true (for what seem to be good reasons) is a product, not of reasons that are sensitive to the truth of the claims in question, but rather this “taking to be true” is a product of the drives that are constitutive of a particular type of human life.<sup>55</sup> Truth is not what is aimed at, and if truth is hit, it is by accident (and we would never know that it was hit), and so it does not count as knowledge as it is traditionally understood.<sup>56</sup> Nietzsche puts it this way in *The Gay Science*, “Thus the strength of knowledge does not depend on its degree of truth but on its age, on the degree to which it has been incorporated, on its character as a condition of life” (GS §110). His point is that the strength of our confidence in our understanding is correlated to how long it has been believed and how important that belief or set of beliefs is for maintaining the conditions for our kind of existence. Nietzsche’s skeptical argument is based on the fact that the explanation for why we have the particular cognitions that we do could just as easily be facts about the cognizer as it could be facts about objects of cognition. Given this, in order for us to know that our cognitions correspond to the truth we would need a faculty that was shown to be truth-sensitive. However, he notes that “we simply lack any organ for knowledge, for ‘truth’” (GS §354).

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<sup>55</sup> It is beyond the scope of this chapter to elucidate Nietzsche’s theory of types, although appeals to types (in Nietzsche’s sense of the term) will come up again when I discuss Nietzsche’s criteria of evaluation in Chapter Five.

<sup>56</sup> By “knowledge as it is traditionally understood” I mean true belief plus whatever positive epistemic status (e.g., justification or warrant) that is required for knowledge. For this argument to work this extra criterion would clearly have to be an internalist one. If the extra criterion required for knowledge is externalist, then the most we can conclude from the skeptical argument Nietzsche offers is that we can never know that we know something. This is, as far as I’m concerned, not an interestingly different point than the conclusion that we can never know anything. Of course Nietzsche would not be interested in internalist versus externalist debates about the nature of knowledge, and so Berry 2011 is right that Nietzsche is not developing an epistemology per se but rather advancing a position on the human cognitive situation that has epistemological implications.

In BGE §9 Nietzsche uses the Stoics as an example of how philosophical doctrines and systems grow out of the drives of the philosophers who formulate them and thereby support a particular form of life.

[W]hile you [Stoics] pretend rapturously to read the canon of your law in nature, you want something opposite, you strange actors and self-deceivers! Your pride wants to impose your morality, your idea, on nature—even on nature—and incorporate them in her; you demand that she should be nature ‘according to the Stoa,’ and you would like all existence to exist only after your own image. (BGE §9)

The Stoics claim to be, and probably think themselves to be, in search of the truth about the nature of reality, but according to Nietzsche what they really desire (probably in many cases unconsciously) is that nature be in conformity with their desires, morality, and mode of existence.<sup>57</sup> The Stoic conception of nature is simply an instance of a generalized problem of philosophizing in general. Philosophy “always creates the world in its own image; it cannot do otherwise” (BGE §9).<sup>58</sup> Nietzsche calls this world creation the most spiritual form of the will to power. Again, what may seem to someone a disinterested search for truth cannot be distinguished from an unconscious drive to create a world in which certain drives of theirs can thrive or gain mastery (see BGE §6).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Nietzsche makes the same point more generally in GS §121:

We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we can live—by positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content; without these articles of faith nobody now could endure life. But that does not prove them. Life is no argument. The conditions of life might include error.

The reasoning here is that if a belief’s survival benefit (condition of life) is sufficient by itself to explain why that particular belief is held, then we cannot be certain that the belief is true because as Nietzsche notes, “The conditions of life might include error.” Also see Owen (2007: 160n12) for a reading of BGE §9.

<sup>58</sup> See Descartes (1996). Conway 1997 argues that Nietzsche fails to apply this insight to himself and “[issues] himself an exemption from his otherwise inclusive diagnosis of modernity” (248). His charge is that Nietzsche does not acknowledge that Nietzsche’s own philosophy creates a world in his image. Throughout this dissertation, I argue to the contrary that Nietzsche self-consciously applies this insight to himself, and this is essential to understanding his position.

How do these considerations help us to interpret BGE §36? As I have shown, the passages I have just discussed in Part One of BGE point toward a strong skeptical objection that can be made against any knowledge claim. As we have seen, Clark shows any philosophical position that Nietzsche affirms is subject to the same skeptical argument that he levels against Stoicism and philosophy in general. What is striking about the argument Nietzsche produces in BGE §36 is not only does he reject the antecedent of some of the major premises (most importantly that we have immediate knowledge of the will), but also that he is asking his reader to consider the possibility that the instinctual drives that determine our cognition are better known than the external world.

Consider Descartes' method of argumentation in the *Meditations*.<sup>60</sup> He asks us to consider the possibility that all of our cognitions of external reality (and the truths of mathematics and logic) are caused by a dream state or a powerful deceiver rather than being veridical cognitions of the world as it actually is. Descartes starts with a phenomenon, dreaming, which is a well established case of things appearing a certain way to a cognizer where the cognizer turns out to be wrong in thinking those appearances are the way reality actually is. We sometimes take what we dream to actually be the case because we do not realize we are dreaming. The next step in Descartes' argument is to consider that if we are sometimes deceived in this way, we cannot eliminate the possibility that we are always

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<sup>59</sup> More needs to be said about the relationship between drives, human types, and morality and how these determine human cognition. For now, all that is important is that we as cognizers cannot in principle distinguish our cognition being determined by instinctual drives and the like from cognizing things as they actually are. I will discuss how this occurs in Chapter Four. For more about this relationship between drives and types and human cognition see Conway 1997 and Janaway 2007.

<sup>60</sup> Berry (2011) argues that we should see Nietzsche's skepticism as akin to the ancient Pyrrhonian variety rather than the modern Cartesian influenced variety. If she is correct, then my contention that BGE §36 is a Cartesian style skeptical argument is problematic at best. In the next section I will engage the question of which of these two kinds of skepticism is closer to Nietzsche's own, but for now suffice it to note that reading Nietzsche along with Descartes here in §36 cannot be entirely unjustified as Nietzsche had just invoked Descartes' epistemological views in the preceding section.



deceived in this way. Descartes argues that if we consider the possibility that we are so radically deceived, all that we are immediately certain of is our own existence qua thinking (in the form of doubt). Regarding all of our other cognitions we could not tell the difference between being radically deceived and cognizing the world as it actually is.

Nietzsche asks us to consider a similar possibility. Rather than starting with dreams as the established case in which we are sometimes deceived, Nietzsche starts with the fact he thinks he has established that sometimes we are deceived by our instinctual drives (as well as needs, desires, etc.) to take something to be the case that is not the case. So the radical possibility of deception Nietzsche asks his readers to consider is instead of cognizing the world as it really is, our cognitions are actually determined by our will to power. This possibility replaces Descartes' hypothesis of an evil deceiver causing false cognitions in us.

What advantage does Nietzsche gain with his shift in focus away from dreaming to the way instinctual drives can interfere with veridical cognition? I think Nietzsche makes this move because it allows him to push the sphere of what we can possibly doubt further than Descartes is able to. If I consider the possibility that I am dreaming, I still cannot bring myself to doubt the truth of ideas that are "clear and distinct." However, if I consider that the possibility that my cognitions in all their aspects are determined by instinctual drives, I can even call into question the truth of the clearest and most distinct cognitions. This leads Nietzsche to have an entirely different evaluation of the possibility of what he calls "immediate certainties." The fact that I am thinking and therefore exist is one that is absolutely indubitable for Descartes due to its clarity and distinctness, though even logical truths are subject to the global doubt brought on by considering the possibility of an evil deceiver. Nietzsche, however, denies that there are any such immediate certainties, the faith in which he calls "a moral naïveté" (BGE §34). If we are going to consider the possibility of

the skeptical scenario and think our cognitions are or might be deceptive, we are not entitled to think that any cognitions whatsoever are veridical (unless one can show that a certain privileged class of beliefs are immune from doubt—something Nietzsche denies can be shown). In Nietzsche's words, "[A]nyone like that would at least have ample reason to learn to be suspicious at long last of all thinking" (BGE §34). The philosopher, therefore, has a duty to be suspicious of everything. Nietzsche will argue that this radical skepticism requires us to reevaluate the value of what is merely apparent, but a discussion of Nietzsche's reevaluation of the merely apparent will have to wait for chapter four.

So I suggest that Nietzsche's argument for radical skepticism in BGE §36 can be reconstructed as follows:

1. There are at least two possible causes of our cognitions: a) the world which actually is as it appears or b) our instinctual drives creating a world in their image.
2. If our cognitions are caused by our instinctual drives, then there is a sense in which the world for us appears as it does because we (unconsciously) will it to be that way.
3. The will in question is the movement of a particular drive or set of drives to gain mastery or power over other competing drives (see BGE §6 and §19) and so can be called "will to power."
4. If we posit the causality of the sort of willing which produces our cognitions as the only kind of causality, then the world we cognize is actually an expression of the will to power.
5. Given that we cannot in principle distinguish between our cognitions being caused by a world that is as it appears and set of drives with power over other drives, we are just as entitled to think that the world is will to power as we are in thinking that the world is as it appears.

This argument rests on the assumption of a provisional hypothesis (in keeping with its conditional structure). It cannot be meant to show that the world is the will to power, and it certainly cannot be meant to show an even stronger claim that the world *as it is in itself* (the

world's "intelligible character" "viewed from the inside") is will to power because of Nietzsche's rejection of the legitimacy of the concept of the thing in itself, a topic I will discuss later in the chapter. Since Nietzsche has shown in BGE Part One that we cannot distinguish between our cognitions being caused by our instinctual drives vying for power and our cognitions being caused by a world that is as it appears, we have no epistemically justifiable reason to think that the world is as it appears to be rather than the play of wills vying for greater and greater power. Nietzsche is not entitled to the conclusion that the world is in itself actually will to power, but he is entitled to a conclusion that is just as radical: As far as we can tell from our finite, human perspectives, the world might as well be will to power, and we could not tell the difference if it was.<sup>61</sup>

This powerful skeptical argument leads Nietzsche to a position I will call his metaphysical agnosticism<sup>62</sup>—for any metaphysical claim, i.e. for any claim about the deep structure of reality, no matter how well justified or certain it seems to be one can never, in principle, tell whether one has come to believe that claim on the basis of good, objective reasons or because of the subjective character of one's instinctual drives. Therefore, no human cognizer can ever have knowledge about the deep structure of reality. I will discuss Nietzsche's metaphysical agnosticism in more detail as well as consider other arguments Nietzsche makes in favor of it after I have discussed Nietzsche's skepticism regarding our judgments about logic and his views regarding the Kantian thing in itself. Before turning to

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<sup>61</sup> In Chapter 1 I noted that Richardson (1996) denies that Nietzsche's skepticism is akin to the Cartesian variety I have argued for here. Instead he argues that Nietzsche is a skeptic because he thinks "it's not just that we might be wrong; we are" (224). In other words, it is not a lack of justification that prohibits us from having knowledge, it is that our beliefs are not true. I take my argument in this section to show that even though Nietzsche certainly offers reasons for us to think many of our beliefs are literally false, he also has good reasons for thinking that we lack the justification required for knowledge contra Richardson's contention.

<sup>62</sup> I use the term "agnosticism" in a religiously neutral sense in keeping with the literal Greek meaning of the term, which literally translates as "without (*a-*) knowledge (*gnōsisi*)."

these topics I first need to address what kind of skeptic Nietzsche is, as this philosophical term is by no means univocal.

*Nietzsche's Skepticism: Modern or Ancient?*

Those who are sympathetic to my position that Nietzsche is some kind of radical skeptic may take issue with my association of his skepticism with that of Descartes. This worry is not unfounded, and reading Nietzsche as a skeptic in the Cartesian tradition has been vigorously challenged by Jessica N. Berry in her book, *Nietzsche and the Ancient Skeptical Tradition* (2011). There she distinguishes between two kinds of skepticism, the ancient skeptical tradition and the modern one, arguing that Nietzsche's position (and lineage of intellectual influence) places him squarely in the ancient skeptical tradition. It is a mistake, she claims, to see Nietzsche as a modern skeptic as I have implicitly done.

Modern skepticism is characterized primarily as an epistemological position with theoretical commitments. In its various forms it embraces a theory of knowledge, which includes the conditions that must obtain in order for a cognition to count as knowledge. Furthermore, such skepticisms conclude that those conditions do not obtain for a particular domain of propositions (or all propositions if one is a radical, global skeptic). What those conditions are and which domains of claims cannot meet those conditions vary across the history of modern skepticism, but what is important for Berry is that all modern skepticisms share the features of assenting to positive doctrines about the nature of knowledge and the positive truth-claim that human beings do not, in fact, have access to knowledge. This form of skepticism is philosophically problematic because it commits one to holding a contradiction, viz. that we can know that we cannot know. Such a position, in claiming that we know that we do not have knowledge, not only commits one to a contradiction, but also

violates the very spirit of skepticism by making dogmatic claims about knowledge and our access to it.

Ancient skepticism, on the other hand, does not make any such claims about the nature and extent of human knowing. It does not hold any theoretical or doctrinal positions at all. Rather, it is a practice of never ceasing inquiry and the ability to oppose any argument for a positive position with an equally compelling argument for the contrary position. Thus, even though no position is taken on whether human beings can know or not, the ancient skeptic withholds assent on every philosophical position in favor of finding new arguments and continuing inquiry. The ancient skeptical practice, in its most basic form, involves meeting any dogmatic claim with a series of arguments for the opposing side, which are meant to have equal force to the arguments for the original dogmatic claim. Ultimately such practice is supposed to lead one to a state of tranquility or the good life.

Berry is convincing in her analysis of Nietzsche's intellectual development as a classical philologist, which included a great deal of contact with the ancient skeptical tradition. Nietzsche's commitments to overcoming dogmatism and cultivating intellectual honesty<sup>63</sup> are clearly influenced by and can be rightfully claimed to be inheritors of ancient skepticism. More important for my inquiry than tracing Nietzsche's intellectual influences is the fact that Berry highlights, namely that Nietzsche does not offer an account of the nature or essence of knowledge nor is he interested in doing so. Such an account would be as dogmatic as the Platonic, Christian, and ascetic positions he seeks to undermine in the critical portion of his project. Berry's position that skepticism is a way of life has the virtue of cohering with Nietzsche's concern with overcoming nihilism and affirming life. As I have

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<sup>63</sup> I treat Nietzsche's commitment to intellectual honesty (also referred to by Nietzsche as "intellectual cleanliness") in Chapter Five where I argue that this concept is important for understanding how Nietzsche can be a skeptic and still have a concept of objectivity and avoid perniciously global relativism about justification.

already made clear, I agree that Nietzsche does not endorse any claims about the true nature of knowledge or truth; such stances would violate skepticism and are also questions Nietzsche just does not seem to be interested in.

Here, however, is where my agreement with Berry's take on this matter ends. While Nietzsche avoids taking a position on the nature of knowledge, he does want to describe the human cognitive situation.<sup>64</sup> His understanding of the human cognitive situation is such that if one accepts or grants for argument any one of various traditional understandings of what it means to know, then one cannot consistently claim that we can know anything. In other words, while Nietzsche's position on human cognition may not by itself amount to an epistemology (as Berry claims), his position does have epistemological implications for various theories. That Nietzsche wants to engage with the epistemological ideas of the modern tradition should be clear from the Cartesian strain in his thought I have identified in this chapter and the Kantian strain I identify in the next. Ultimately I think it is wrong to see Nietzsche as a skeptic in either the modern or ancient tradition. He adopts elements from both traditions, just as he was influenced by both traditions. His skepticism is certainly a practice or way of life, but he also thinks that it has implications for the debates that make sense only within the modern tradition.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> I treat Nietzsche's analysis of the human cognitive situation, referred to as "perspectivism," in the next chapter.

<sup>65</sup> The one remaining (and hugely important) question I have neglected here is what the status of Nietzsche's positive claims are. In this case, what is the status of his claim that if we grant some conception (or other) of knowledge, we cannot be said to have knowledge? Given Nietzsche's commitment to the practice of skepticism, this cannot be a straightforward claim of what Nietzsche thinks he knows. My conclusion is that this positive claim (and others like it) is a claim to coherence with a particular cognitive perspective and not a claim about what the absolute fact of the matter is independent of the human take on it. I go into more detail about what this means in Chapter 4.

*Nietzsche's Skepticism regarding Logic*

As we have already seen in BGE Part One, Nietzsche makes the case that philosophers and the doctrines they develop are determined by unconscious, instinctual drives. These cases of cognition being guided by non-truth-sensitive factors apply not just to the content of the doctrines but to the logic employed in deriving and arguing for them as well. “Behind all logic and its seeming sovereignty of movement, too, there stand valuations or, more clearly, physiological demands for the preservation of a certain type of life” (BGE §3). We make the judgments (including logical judgments) that we do because they promote the survival or flourishing of a certain type of life, not necessarily because those judgments are adequate to reality, i.e. map onto reality in a truthful way.<sup>66</sup>

The moral prejudice that Nietzsche thinks underlies the faith in opposite values “looms in the background of all [philosophers'] logical procedures” (BGE §2). If we are to doubt the epistemic justification for our philosophical doctrines on the grounds that they are determined by moral prejudices and unconscious drives, neither of which are sensitive to the truth of the matter, then we have no right to trust our logical judgments and inferences either, if they are determined by the same truth-insensitive factors. As Nietzsche puts it, “Anyone [with skeptical doubts] like that would at least have ample reason to learn to be suspicious at long last of *all* thinking” (BGE §34, emphasis mine). In other words, we have no reason to give logic an exception from the sorts of skeptical considerations Nietzsche makes. Such an exception would be another merely moral prejudice.

Broadly speaking there are two main ways Nietzsche thinks our logical judgments are determined by non-truth-sensitive factors, the survival benefit they provide (or provided in the past during the formative years of our species) and the grammatical structure of the

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<sup>66</sup> For a more thorough discussion of Nietzsche's views on logic see Hales 1996.

natural language in which they are articulated. In BGE §4 Nietzsche calls our logical judgments “fictions” because without these and other possibly false judgments that we take for granted “man could not live.” The reasons these judgments are believed is not because we have good reasons to believe they are true, but because they are “life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating.” Nietzsche explains this idea further in GS §110:

A few of these [kinds of judgments, including logic] proved to be useful and helped to preserve the species: those who hit upon or inherited these had better luck in their struggle for themselves and their progeny. Such erroneous articles of faith...were continually inherited, until they became almost part of the basic endowment of the species.

Reason, employing what we take to be logical truths, allowed those who held these judgments to be true to survive or flourish to a greater degree than those who did not. It could have been the case, according to Nietzsche, that “innumerable beings who made inferences in a way different from ours perished; for all that, their ways might have been truer” (GS §111). We can see how this possible explanation for why we hold certain things to be true in logic undermines our certainty that those logical rules are true. If the degree to which logical “truths” seem self-evident is due to their benefit for our species’ survival, then, unless the survival benefit of a belief is truth-sensitive, we have reason to doubt the validity of logical truths. As we already saw in Chapter Two’s discussion of the will to truth, Nietzsche holds that error and false beliefs are often more conducive to survival than truth. Therefore, the fact that logic is among the things that provides survival benefit and is necessary for us to believe in and use because of particular conditions of our type of existence, we cannot infer that logic is true or adequately maps onto reality. In the next



chapter I will further discuss Nietzsche's view that some beliefs' possible survival benefit might explain why they are held almost universally.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to the survival benefit that logical judgments have, Nietzsche thinks that certain sorts of judgments, presumably including logical ones, are determined by the structure of the natural language used by the individual. Nietzsche holds that "conscious thinking *takes the form of words, which is to say signs of communication*" (GS §354). Given that different natural languages have different syntactical and semantic rules, it follows that an individual's thought will be different given the natural languages they know and use. In GM I §13 Nietzsche argues that it is a mere prejudice of certain languages that we divide up the world the way we do and connect thoughts using the rules we do. Given that different natural languages are structured differently, we can account for what Nietzsche takes to be the non-universality of logic. "We are not inclined to concede that our human logic is logic as such or the only kind of logic (we would rather persuade ourselves that it is merely a special case and perhaps one of the oddest and most stupid cases)" (GS §357). Much more can be said about how language structures and determines our thought, and I will discuss it further in the next chapter. For now it should suffice to have shown how even seemingly apodictic logical judgments are held on the basis of non-truth sensitive factors like survival-benefit and the structure of the natural language(s) a person knows and employs, and so, like all of our beliefs and cognitions, we must doubt the truth of even logic itself.

#### *The Thing in Itself for Nietzsche*

The radical skepticism I have attributed to Nietzsche, namely that we cannot be certain that any of our beliefs about the world are not fully determined by merely subjective

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<sup>67</sup> See WP §507 (1887), 515 (1888), and 516 (1887-1888) for more discussion of how the pervasiveness of certain kinds of logical judgments is explained by their survival benefit for those who hold them.

factors in non-truth sensitive ways, entails that we cannot have knowledge of what things are like in themselves apart from how they appear to us. The use of the Kantian idiom here is entirely appropriate given the post-Kantian influence on Nietzsche and his indebtedness to Schopenhauer.<sup>68</sup> If Nietzsche's only claim about things in themselves is that we cannot have knowledge of them, his position seems to be no different from Kant's, albeit they come to their conclusions for radically different reasons. In this section, I argue that Nietzsche's skepticism goes beyond Kant's regarding things in themselves. For Nietzsche, not only do we not have knowledge *about* things in themselves, but we also do not have knowledge *that* things in themselves *exist* at all. Contrary to the standard view in the Nietzsche scholarship, I argue that, despite some indications to the contrary, Nietzsche did not hold that there are no things in themselves, but only that we cannot know either way whether there are things in themselves or not.<sup>69</sup> This makes Nietzsche metaphysically agnostic with regard to the realism/anti-realism question, a view I will explain more in the next section.

Nietzsche claims explicitly that knowledge cannot get "hold of its object purely and nakedly as 'the thing in itself,' without any falsification on the part of either the subject or the object" (BGE §16).<sup>70</sup> This however does not entail that there is no truth about the object itself, just that we do not have access to it. It seems like an entirely coherent and reasonable position to claim that even if we do not have access to truth, there is nevertheless a truth of the matter—a way things are in themselves apart from our cognition of them. Nietzsche

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<sup>68</sup> For an important, in-depth study of Nietzsche's relationship to post-Kantian thought see Hill 2003.

<sup>69</sup> Among those who hold that Nietzsche denies the existence of the thing in itself without qualification are Clark 1990, Richardson 1996, and Poellner 1995.

<sup>70</sup> It is interesting that here Nietzsche attributes possibly deceiving factors to both the subject *and the object*. Thus far we have only shown how "subjective" factors can undermine connection between cognition and truth. It would be interesting, but beyond the scope of this work, to look at how features of the object can deceive us.

complicates this skepticism by denying that we have even enough knowledge to conclude that there is a distinction between the thing-in-itself and appearance (see GS §354).

There is a tension in Nietzsche's thought on the issue of whether there are things in themselves. On the one hand, that there is a distinction between appearance and reality, between the phenomenal world and the world as it is in itself, seems to be a necessary distinction, one that we cannot help but make. In fact, it is reasonable to conclude that the judgment that there are things as they are in themselves is among the synthetic *a priori* judgments Nietzsche considers "necessary" in BGE §11. However, just a few sections later Nietzsche claims that the thing in itself involves "a *contradictio in adjecto*" (BGE, §16). Here Nietzsche's claim is that there is something contradictory in the concept of "thing in itself"—or rather a contradiction between the concept "thing" and the modifier "in itself." Here we are confronted with a sort of antinomy. On the one hand, it seems to be necessarily true that there is a truth of the matter independent of human cognition. On the other hand, Nietzsche thinks that there is a contradiction in thinking there are things as they are in themselves. How are these two incompatible positions to be resolved?

Maudemarie Clark argues that at least in his later works (those published after *Beyond Good and Evil*), Nietzsche denies that there are things themselves at all.<sup>71</sup> This is in keeping with her attribution of a sort of post-Kantian anti-realism to Nietzsche, whereby truth "cannot be independent of our cognitive interests, of our best standards of rational acceptability."<sup>72</sup> On this notion of truth, reality completely independent of human cognition is an incoherent notion, and so there cannot be a way things are in themselves. To make her

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<sup>71</sup> See Clark 1990: 111-114.

<sup>72</sup> Clark 1990: 60. Leiter (1994) also endorses this view. Anderson (1996 and 1998) objects that Nietzsche never endorses this notion of truth and argues that Nietzsche does not offer a theory of truth but argues that on some theories of truth we do not have access to truth and on other theories of truth we do have access to truth. I discuss this debate further in the next chapter.

case, Clark cites Nietzsche's story of "How the True World Finally Became a Fable" from *Twilight of the Idols* to show that Nietzsche did ultimately reject the possibility of the thing in itself. If Clark is right, then the standard view of Nietzsche on this issue is correct, he ultimately denied that there are things in themselves. However, I will show that the "True World" story in TI does not commit Nietzsche to a denial that there are things in themselves and that his considered position is that we simply do not have epistemic access to whether there are things in themselves or not.<sup>73</sup>

The "True World" story describes six moments in the history of philosophy regarding the distinction between the "true world" and appearance, in other words the phenomenon/thing-in-itself distinction. The third moment in this attenuated history clearly represents Kantianism with its distinction between theoretical reason's lack of access to the "true world" and the necessity for practical reason to postulate the ideas of God and the soul in the realm of the in itself:

The true world—unattainable, indemonstrable, unpromisable; but the very thought of it—a consolation, an obligation, an imperative. (At bottom, the old sun, but seen through mist and skepticism. The idea has become elusive, pale, Nordic, Konigsbergian [i.e., Kantian].) (TI "True World")

The story does not end there, however. In the sixth and final moment, Nietzsche writes, "The true world—we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one" (II, "True World"). It is reasonable to suppose that this last period in the history of philosophy is Nietzsche's own position because he calls it the "end of the longest error" and the "high point of humanity."

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<sup>73</sup> Coker (2002: 6-7) and Hussain (2004) reject Clark's view that the "True World" fable undermines Nietzsche's endorsement of the falsification thesis, i.e. the thesis that our cognition of the world distorts or falsifies the way it actually is independent of our cognition of it. Stewart (1986: 375) holds that based on the "True World" fable it is undecidable whether Nietzsche is offering a rejection of the thing in itself or not.

Clark takes this passage to mean that Nietzsche denies the existence of the thing in itself. However, this is not the most plausible way to read this passage. In the “True World” story, Nietzsche claims that we have “abolished” the true world, not that we have discovered that it was incorrect to believe that such a world exists. Clearly if there were a “true world” or things in themselves, they would not be the sorts of things that could be abolished by an act of human will, and if there are no things in themselves to begin with, to say that one has abolished them would be nonsensical.<sup>74</sup> Nietzsche, in TI, is not talking about literally abolishing the thing in itself, but rather of abolishing it from our thought, removing its ability to affect the way we think about things, and its ability to affect how we live our lives. Notice that his concern in the other moments of the story is the “true world’s” practical effects and not its metaphysical validity. His concern in this passage is not getting the right metaphysical answer but showing how changing views toward the possibility of a “true world” have practical consequences. For example, in the second to last moment of the “True World” story, Nietzsche highlights that the true world is “useless” and no longer “obligating.” In keeping with his relative devaluation of the will to truth (compared to most of the history of philosophy), it is the practical consequences and not the fact of the matter regarding things in themselves that ultimately count, and therefore this passage in TI should not be read as taking a stance on a metaphysical issue.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> The logic here is similar to that of Nietzsche’s famous saying “God is Dead.” “God is dead” certainly does not mean that God once existed and no longer does. If, *per impossible*, this were the case, then such a being would not be God. Nietzsche is making a practical claim about the role God plays in the life of our culture, viz. once God played a central role in it and now God is more and more at the periphery.

<sup>75</sup> Bett (2000: 82) argues that Nietzsche’s “True World” story does not amount to an argument for skepticism. Rather, it is a criticism of the idea that an otherworldly realm, such as the one posited by Christianity, has replaced the “here and the now” as what is most important and real. Reginster (2001: 219) argues that this passage illustrates that Nietzsche recognized a tension between skepticism and anti-essentialism such that Nietzsche cannot be both anti-essentialist and a radical skeptic. I disagree with this reading because it ignores that Nietzsche operates with at least two different conceptions of truth.

Moving from Nietzsche's dominant practical concern with this issue to the metaphysical question, why might Nietzsche claim that "we do not 'know' nearly enough to be entitled to [the distinction between 'thing-in-itself' and appearance]" (GS, §354)? We lack knowledge of what reality is like in itself for the skeptical reasons I have examined in this chapter, but the claim that there is a way things are apart from our cognition despite our lack of access to it seems to be something else altogether. Nietzsche does not deny that there is some sort of necessity to our belief that there is a legitimate distinction to be made between the thing-in-itself and appearance. That such beliefs are necessary (in some sense) is not in question; Nietzsche thinks that human beings, at least most of them, cannot help but make the sorts of judgments Kant calls synthetic *a priori*, and this would presumably include the belief that there are things in themselves.

It is high time to replace the Kantian question, 'How are synthetic judgments a priori possible?' by another question, 'Why is belief in such judgments necessary?'—and to comprehend that such judgments must be believed to be true, for the sake of the preservation of creatures like ourselves; though they might, of course, be false judgments for all that! Or to speak more clearly and coarsely: synthetic judgments a priori should not 'be possible' at all; we have no right to them; in our mouths they are nothing but false judgments. Only, of course, the belief in their truth is necessary, as a foreground belief and visual evidence belonging to the perspective optics of life. (BGE, §11)

At first glance, it seems as though this passage supports Clark's reading that Nietzsche rejects the existence of things in themselves because Nietzsche claims that "in our mouths [synthetic a priori judgments] are nothing but false judgments." This need not commit Nietzsche to the claim that there are no things in themselves, however. In this passage, Nietzsche connects our not having a right to a judgment, our lacking justification, with the judgment's being false. But notice he says that the judgment is false "in our mouths." It is clear that the notion of truth Nietzsche is employing in this passage includes truth

conditions that are dependent on the individual who is making the claim and not just on the state of affairs the claim is about.

Nietzsche is not employing a standard conception of truth in this passage because truth is generally taken to be a non-epistemic notion, but as we will see in Chapter Four, Nietzsche uses more than one concept of truth to make his position regarding human cognition clear. To make sense of the claim that synthetic a priori judgments are false “in our mouths,” I take it that Nietzsche is making use of something like the Kantian *quid juris* / *quid facti* distinction, a distinction between questions about what is lawful and questions about matters of fact.<sup>76</sup> That Nietzsche is employing something like this distinction is evidenced by Nietzsche’s claim that we have “no right” to such judgments. I take it that his point is that perhaps given the cognitive situation in which we find ourselves, we cannot help but posit the existence of things in themselves underlying experience, but we cannot be sure whether this is simply a fact about us—we are unable to deny the existence of things in themselves—or whether this fact is indicative of what there really is. Given that we could not, in principle, distinguish between these two possibilities, we are not justified in concluding that there are things in themselves or that there are not things in themselves.<sup>77</sup>

I certainly do not want to deny that there is a tension between my interpretation of Nietzsche on the topic of things in themselves and the text. Nietzsche seems to deny

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<sup>76</sup> See Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, A84/B116. *Quid facti* questions are those questions whose answers are determined by the way things actually are, independent of any human contribution. *Quid juris* questions are those questions whose answers are determined by what we, as human cognizers, have the right to claim given our cognitive capabilities.

<sup>77</sup> R. Kevin Hill in his book, *Nietzsche’s Critiques: The Kantian Foundations of his Thought* (2003), takes Nietzsche’s denial of the thing in itself to entail something akin to Berkeley’s ontological idealism, i.e. all that exists are minds and their representations (137). This will not do as an interpretation of Nietzsche’s denial of things in themselves because while Berkeley’s idealism rejects the existence of anything but minds and their representations, it is difficult to see how such minds do not fit the criteria for being things in themselves, i.e. what is ultimately real apart from our own cognitive activity and commitments. The only consistent interpretation of Nietzsche’s rejection of the thing in itself must focus on our not having a right to posit things in themselves, and therefore, we must read Nietzsche as advocating metaphysical agnosticism.

outright the existence of things of themselves, whereas I am arguing that he merely thinks we cannot know and so must remain agnostic as to their existence. Nietzsche, as we have seen, makes use of distinctions between the way things appear to us and the way they might be independent of any cognizer's access to them. It is with this distinction that he is able to claim that our cognition falsifies reality and that we must be skeptical if we are operating with traditional understandings of truth and knowledge. I take his denial of things in themselves to be the denial that there can be any things in themselves for a cognizer, but ultimately he must admit that it is possible that there is a way things are in themselves and that it is possible that things in themselves do not exist. We must remain agnostic about which of these two possibilities obtains because it is beyond the scope of human cognition, and it is indeed outside such a scope by definition.

*Nietzsche's Metaphysical Agnosticism*

So far in this chapter we have seen how radical Nietzsche's skepticism is. It even goes so far as to deny that we can know the truths of logic or whether there are things in themselves or not. This total lack of sufficient epistemic justification for our claims and cognitions leads Nietzsche to what I call metaphysical agnosticism. Metaphysical agnosticism, as I am applying it to Nietzsche, means a lack of commitment regarding realism/non-realism debates,<sup>78</sup> and claims about the deep structure of reality. If the sort of

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<sup>78</sup> Christoph Cox (1999) argues that Nietzsche does take a position on this debate, holding that Nietzsche is a robust anti-realist, i.e. there is no fact of the matter outside of the cognitive perspectives taken on things. He holds that Nietzsche holds three theses and that an anti-realist conclusion follows from them:

- (1) That it makes no sense to give an absolute description of "what there is";
- (2) that it only makes sense to say "what there is" relative to a background theory, which will have its own purposes, principles, and criteria of individuation;
- (3) that there exist a host of such theories, many of which are equally warranted yet incompatible with one another; and thus
- (4) there is no uniquely correct "way the world is" but rather many "ways the world is" as there are warranted theories. (156)



skepticism I have attributed to Nietzsche in this chapter is in fact his position, then metaphysical agnosticism follows, i.e., we have no right from an epistemological perspective to make any claims whatsoever about the deep structure of reality. All that remains is to discuss the arguments Nietzsche offers in various places within his works for and against idealism. I argue that what seems to be an argument for idealism is really an argument *against* realism, which when combined with an argument he offers against idealism (clearly leveled against Schopenhauer) creates a sort of antinomy leading to agnosticism regarding these debates.<sup>79</sup>

In GS §56 Nietzsche considers something like Descartes' dream argument in the *Meditations*. But here, instead of making a skeptical argument as Descartes does, he makes a conceptual claim about dreaming versus waking experience. Nietzsche describes an experience where one is dreaming and then one wakes "only to the consciousness that I am dreaming and that I must go on dreaming lest I perish." His point here, I think, is that *even if* we can distinguish being awake from being asleep dreaming, there is no essential difference between dreaming experience and waking experience. From this he draws the following conclusion:

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I think that it is rather uncontroversial that Nietzsche would endorse 1-3. Cox thinks that 4 follows from them and so concludes that Nietzsche endorses the anti-realist position 4 expresses (Cox grants that the texts (e.g., BGE §24 and WP §481) are ambiguous with respect to the exact position Nietzsche endorses and so the best he thinks he can offer is that Nietzsche's anti-realism follows from his other theoretical commitments). However, 4 does not follow from 1-3. 1-3 make claims about what may be asserted and what is epistemically warranted, but 4 makes an ontological claim, from what we may legitimately assert it does not follow that the world is or is not a certain way.

<sup>79</sup> No writers I have encountered conclude Nietzsche is a straightforward realist, although I take Hill's (2003) position that Nietzsche's position is akin to Berkeley's idealism to be an attribution of realism (even though Hill does not refer to it as such). Clark (1990) and Leiter's (1994) position on Nietzsche's epistemology is clearly influenced by anti-realism. Anderson also paints Nietzsche as an anti-realist, while denying (contra Clark and Leiter) that Nietzsche rejects the falsification thesis. Skeptical interpretations of Nietzsche's epistemology such as mine and Berry's (2011) must claim that Nietzsche cannot take a stand on realism/anti-realism debates in principle.

What is appearance for me now? Certainly not the opposite of some essence: what could I say about any essence except to name the attributes of its appearance! Certainly not a dead mask that one could place on an unknown  $x$  or remove from it! Appearance is for me that which lives and is effective.  
(GS, §56)

Here by “essence” Nietzsche simply means what things are like in themselves. Realism—that there is some “way things are” apart from how things appear to us—while conceptually distinct from anti-realism, is *experientially* indistinguishable from it. All that we can say about reality is what appears to us, and this Nietzsche thinks is experientially indistinguishable from the experience of dreaming. In the experience of dreaming there is no external reality underlying what appears, and therefore, it makes no difference to us whether we suppose that there is some reality behind appearances. It does not matter if the world that we experience and live in is nothing but a dream or if it corresponds (adequately or inadequately) to a mind-independent reality.<sup>80</sup>

This argument seems as though it should lead Nietzsche to an idealist or anti-realist position, but he argues against idealism (or at least the idealism of Schopenhauer) in BGE

§15:

To study physiology with a clear conscience, one must insist that the sense organs are not phenomena in the sense of idealistic philosophy; as such they could not be causes! Sensualism, therefore, at least as a regulative hypothesis, if not as a heuristic principle. What? And others even say that the external world is the work of our organs? But then our body, as a part of this external world, would be the work of our organs! But then our organs themselves would be—the work of our organs! It seems to me that this is a complete *reductio ad absurdum*, assuming the concept of a *causa sui* is something fundamentally absurd. Consequently, the external world is not the work of our organs—?

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<sup>80</sup> Clark claims that this passage indicates that Nietzsche thinks that “As the dream exists only for the dreamer, the world exists only for the knower” (Clark 1990: 118). Whereas Clark takes Nietzsche to be making a strong anti-realist metaphysical claim; I take Nietzsche to be making a claim about how realism and anti-realism are indistinguishable in terms of how we experience the world; the effect for us, in either case, is the same.

This recalls Schopenhauer's position discussed earlier in the section on the "Truth and Lies" essay. Schopenhauer thought that the empirical world depended on the mind (as for Kant) and that the mind was itself part of the empirical world because the mind, for Schopenhauer, is identical to the brain. Thus the cause of the empirical world is a part of the empirical world itself; in other words, the brain is the cause of, among other things, itself. Nietzsche thinks that this sort of self-causation is absurd and impossible, and therefore that such an idealism is incoherent. This could apply to any idealism that claims that the experienced world depends on the subject, if that subject is considered a part of the world. The only idealisms remaining are those in which the subject depends on something that is not a part of the empirical world such as Berkeley's idealism, which depends on the mind of God.

Schopenhauer would respond to Nietzsche's criticism by pointing out that according to his idealism, the subject may be self-caused at the level of the phenomenal realm, but it is not self-grounded in the way that Nietzsche rejects. For Schopenhauer, a single, undifferentiated noumenal will underlies the empirical world (which includes the human subject) upon which the empirical world and the human subject depend. Thus the subject, for Schopenhauer, is not ultimately self-grounded, and so Nietzsche's criticism misses its mark of undermining the rationality of Schopenhauer's idealism. Nietzsche, however, also rejects the concept of Schopenhauer's noumenal "One will" as "unprovable" (GS §99) as he must give that we cannot know neither whether there are things in themselves nor what the nature of the thing in itself (if it exists) is.

These last two arguments of Nietzsche's I have considered to close this chapter (for and against idealism) are certainly not decisive, and I think Nietzsche's skeptical arguments discussed earlier in the chapter do a far better job of establishing his metaphysical agnosticism. Nevertheless, the arguments regarding idealism are useful in showing that

Nietzsche regarded the problem of realism vs. non-realism to be a philosophically important one, or at least one that he needed to address. The most important lesson to draw from this chapter is that Nietzsche believed that the psychological origin of our beliefs and conceptual structures is sufficient to undermine any epistemic justification that they might have. This is because we can never be sure if the reasons we take something to be true are actually truth indicative reasons or the result of some unconscious cognitive process that does not correlate positively with whatever the fact of the matter might be. Thus, from an epistemic perspective, we are completely cut off from the way really things are, which leads Nietzsche to the position that I have called his “metaphysical agnosticism.” Metaphysical agnosticism amounts to the position that one ought not to make any definitive claims about the deep structure of reality.

Given Nietzsche’s metaphysical agnosticism, several pressing questions regarding Nietzsche’s views on epistemology and cognition remain. If cognition is not, so far as we can tell, sensitive to truth, to what, if anything does it respond? If we cannot have knowledge (in the traditional sense), what positive epistemic status (if any) can our claims enjoy? Does Nietzsche’s position lead us to an unacceptable, “anything goes” relativism about what we can rightfully claim? And finally, since knowledge is denied to us, what criteria (if any) are available to us to evaluate our claims? In the next two chapters I will begin to answer these questions. The lesson to be learned from the current chapter on Nietzsche’s skepticism is that the answers to these questions must be consistent with the radical skepticism I have attributed to Nietzsche, and they must deal with the self-referential problems associated with it.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### NIETZSCHE'S ACCOUNT OF COGNITION: PERSPECTIVISM

Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a 'pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject'; let us guard against the snares of such contradictory concepts as 'pure reason,' 'absolute spirituality,' 'knowledge in itself: these always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing something, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective 'knowing.'

GM III §12

#### *Introduction*

In the last two chapters we have seen how Nietzsche analyzes the will to truth and its relationship to other drives of human psychic life. The unconditional will to truth is far from the fundamental drive in the life of human affects but is rather a secondary affect in the service of particular types of lives. For most types, especially essentially healthy types of human beings, truth is valued only conditionally and is often subordinated to other higher values. Only for ultimately nihilistic and weak types does the will to truth take on an unconditional value, but even then truth is not desired for its own sake; it is desired for the sake of the preservation and flourishing of (in this case) a weak type of human being.

We have also seen what Nietzsche takes to be the skeptical implications of the fact that the will to truth merely serves the promotion of particular types of life. Nietzsche thinks that in principle we can never distinguish the formation of a belief for reasons that are

responsive to the fact of the matter and the formation of a belief by (often unconscious) drives, desires, and affects that are not necessarily truth sensitive. If beliefs are formed by drives in this way rather than aiming at truth, such beliefs come into existence to further the ends of the drive in question. This leads Nietzsche to a radical skeptical position in which we can know nothing of the deep structure of reality—the way things are in themselves to use Kantian terminology—a position I call Nietzsche’s metaphysical agnosticism. Because of our lack of cognitive access to the way the world is apart from how things (merely) appear to us,<sup>1</sup> for all we can tell our cognitions have as much to do with our largely idiosyncratic constitution as thinking beings as with the way the world is.

The skeptical position Nietzsche adopts is not his last word on the human cognitive condition. Nietzsche develops a sophisticated theory of what it is to think, to believe, and even to know. He spells out in more detail than we have examined so far how it is that our affective life of drives, desires, and values shapes how we conceive of the world. In this chapter, I examine these details of Nietzsche’s theory of cognition. First, I elucidate his two favored analogies for how human cognition functions, optical perspective and textual interpretation. I then examine how he reinterprets what it means to make truth claims in light of this picture of how cognition functions and the fact that we do not have access to the cognizer independent fact of the matter. Next, I will look at examples Nietzsche gives of how various non-cognitive aspects of our mental life influence or determine how we conceptualize things. Finally I deal with the important and challenging self-referential difficulties with Nietzsche’s position, specifically the charges that it is self-referentially inconsistent and that it is epistemically self-defeating. The chapter ends with a discussion of

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<sup>1</sup> As we will see by the end of the chapter, it ultimately does not make sense for Nietzsche to call what appears to us “merely” apparent.”

how Nietzsche's theory of cognition changes the value of the apparent (as opposed to the way things are in themselves). I conclude that Nietzsche advocates a position that I have dubbed "metaphysical agnosticism." According to metaphysical agnosticism we must refrain from asserting anything about reality independent of our act of cognizing, and the only things we can legitimately assert are about the world as it appears from our (limited) cognitive perspectives. This is important because it shows that the only sense in which we have access to truths is access to truths that have to do directly with *us*, i.e. our cognitive perspectives and the values and drives they promote.

*The Optical Perspective Analogy for Human Cognition*

Nietzsche argues that human cognition is analogous in certain respects to seeing objects from a particular optical perspective. This analogy is the most famous of Nietzsche's explanations of his theory of human cognition, which is why I have chosen to call his general theory of human cognition perspectivism. Although Nietzsche does not use the perspective analogy as often as the ubiquity of the term "perspectivism" in Nietzsche scholarship would indicate, I think the popular use of the term for his theory is fortuitous because a discussion of this analogy's merits and drawbacks is extremely useful for pinpointing just what Nietzsche thinks is going on when we think and conceptualize.

Nietzsche's most famous discussion of the perspective analogy is in the third essay of GM. In the context of a discussion of what happens when the ascetic ideal, which is both against life and helps to preserve a certain type of life, is "induced to philosophize" (GM III §12), Nietzsche contrasts the ascetic, life-denying account of reason and knowledge to the perspectival account that he endorses. This famous passage is worth quoting at length:

Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a 'pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject'; let us guard against the snares of such contradictory

concepts as ‘pure reason,’ ‘absolute spirituality,’ ‘knowledge in itself’: these always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing something, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective ‘knowing’; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity,’ be. But to eliminate the will altogether, to suspend each and every affect, supposing we were capable of this—what would that mean but to castrate the intellect? (GM III §12)

Before delving into Nietzsche’s analogical use of optical perspective to elucidate what happens in cognition, it is important to note the position(s) he is rejecting, namely that the knowing subject (i.e. human cognizer) is “pure, will-less, painless, [and] timeless.”<sup>2</sup> What, with each of these adjectives, is Nietzsche rejecting? I will consider each of these adjectives and consider the kind of cognizer Nietzsche rejects one by one. First, the knowing subject is not “pure [*reines*].” I take it that here Nietzsche is rejecting the idea that human beings are exclusively or even primarily thinking beings, and more importantly that our faculty of cognition is unmixed with other non-cognitive functions or faculties (i.e. pure). This would be, I take it, to reject the Kantian idea of a pure reason that is any more than conceptually separable from other aspects of our mental life or the Cartesian idea of a *res cogitans* that is separate from the extended being that makes up our animal nature. Instead Nietzsche thinks that human knowing is mixed with non-cognitive functions, i.e., the mind is a part of our animal nature, and reason has other interests and ends besides reason itself.

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<sup>2</sup> Janaway (2007: 187) points out that this is a direct quotation of Schopenhauer’s description of the subject in aesthetic experience. While Schopenhauer is certainly an important target here, Nietzsche’s point is, I argue, a general one that goes beyond Nietzsche’s polemic with his former mentor, Schopenhauer. This is in part because we see in the next line Nietzsche calling contradictory the concepts ‘pure reason [*reine Vernunft*],’ ‘absolute spirituality [*absolute Geistigkeit*],’ and ‘knowledge in itself [*Erkenntnis an sich*]’. These are clearly jabs at Kant and Hegel and perhaps others. Between these three thinkers, Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer a wide range of epistemological positions and theories of the knowing subject are covered, showing that Nietzsche’s point in this passage is a broad one and not merely polemical.



Second, the knowing subject is not “will-less [*willenloses*]” for Nietzsche. Here Nietzsche is rejecting the idea that cognizing is unmixed with willing. On the standard view of belief formation (at least with respect to most beliefs), we do not exercise volitional control over what we take to be true. For example, I did not choose to believe that there is a computer in front of me, that massive objects exert gravitational force on one another, and that the earth is round. Not only did I not choose to believe these things, but also I cannot choose to cease believing them. Contrary to this fairly straightforward and seemingly obvious observation, Nietzsche’s position, I take it, is that willing plays a more important, central role in belief formation than is generally granted by the philosophical tradition and common sense.

Third, Nietzsche rejects the view that the knowing subject is “painless [*schmerzlos*].” I take it that the view he is rejecting here is that cognition is unmixed with feeling or affect, that our assent to truth-claims is not responsive to, and therefore independent of, our life of feelings, emotions, and drives. What is being rejected here is the thesis that we are able to attain a degree of objectivity about a mind-independent world regardless of how we are affected internally. However, as we have seen, Nietzsche argues that it is precisely the life of the affects which has the most determining power over how we cognize things and whose influence over our cognition we cannot separate from the influence of the things cognized. Far from being “painless” knowing subjects, our internal lives of pleasure and pain (as well as other more subtle affects) are essential in determining how things seem to us and how we divide up the world with concepts. This point, and its skeptical implications, should be familiar from the discussion in Chapter Three.

Finally Nietzsche rejects the idea that the knowing subject is “timeless [*zeitlos*],” i.e. that it is able to get a hold of eternal truths about the world. In other words, even though the

human being exists at a particular time, the truth of his or her knowledge is not time bound, e.g. it is true that at a time  $t$ , there is one pair of glasses on the table in front of me, and at another time  $t_2$ , there is not a pair of glasses on the table in front of me. So in a certain sense much of our empirical knowledge about objects in the world is time bound and not “timeless.” However, in another sense—the one relevant to Nietzsche’s point—the truth-value of the proposition “At time  $t$ , there is one pair of glasses on the table in front of me” does not change over time. It will be and has always been true that at that particular time there are/were/will be glasses on this table. What is Nietzsche’s point here? I think it is that—and this will be shown more clearly as we get into his account of perspectivism—human cognizers do not have epistemic access to these kinds of eternal truths.

These rejected accounts of the knowing subject along with “pure reason” and “knowledge in itself,” Nietzsche thinks, “demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction” (GM III §12). Rather he claims that “there is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective ‘knowing.’” Nietzsche’s point here is that just as necessarily, we cannot see something except from a particular optical perspective, we cannot cognize something except from a particular cognitive perspective. The relevant features of an optical perspective for seeing an object are the position of the seeing subject relative to the object seen, the lighting conditions for the object seen, the size of the object seen relative to the size of the other objects in the subject’s visual field, etc. If any of these factors change, what shows up in the viewer’s optical field, his or her phenomenal experience of the object, will also change. In other words, the phenomenon of what is seen (as opposed to the object as it is in itself) depends in part on the conditions under which it is seen.

Analogously, Nietzsche holds that when we cognize something, there are various

relevant factors about the cognizing subject such that when they are different the phenomenal experience of the thing cognized is also different. According to the text in the third essay of GM, these subjective factors include “active and interpreting forces,” “affects,” and “the will.” Granted, at this point precisely what Nietzsche means when he says that these factors are analogous to the optical perspective in the phenomenal experience of seeing something is unclear. However, what is clear is that Nietzsche is rejecting the idea that cognition gets at an unmediated thing itself in the act of cognition, just as seeing does not get at its object in an unmediated, perspective independent way. This fact, Nietzsche thinks, precludes us from having knowledge as it is traditionally conceived hence his use of quotation marks around “knowledge” when he refers to “perspective ‘knowing,’” i.e. the knowledge human cognizers have according to Nietzsche’s perspectivism would not count as knowledge according to traditional conceptions.

Against my view, Brian Leiter argues, in his essay “Perspectivism in Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*,” that Nietzsche’s use of the optical perspective analogy undermines any interpretation of his account of cognition as entailing a radical skepticism. Leiter identifies four “uncontroversially” true claims regarding our visual grasp of objects that are analogous to our cognitive grasp of objects:

Necessarily, we see an object from a particular perspective: for example, from a certain angle, from a certain distance, under certain conditions (perspectivism claim).

The more perspectives we enjoy—for example, the more angles we see the object from—the better our conception of what the object is actually like will be (plurality claim).

We will never exhaust all possible perspectives on the object of vision (infinity claim)

There exists a catalogue of identifiable factors that would distort our perspective on the object: for instance, we are too far away or the background conditions are poor (purity claim).<sup>3</sup>

He then writes, “Now what is striking about these four claims is that they do not appear to entail any optical analogue of the Received View [the view that Nietzsche’s perspectivism entails radical skepticism].”<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the plurality claim entails that by taking more visual perspectives on an object “the more we will know about its actual nature,” and the purity claim entails we can “maintain some sort of ‘[epistemic] visual hierarchy’: some visual perspectives will simply be better than others—better, that is, in virtue of their adequacy to the real visible nature of the object.”<sup>5</sup> If cognition is analogous to vision in these respects, then Leiter claims that Nietzsche cannot have in mind a skepticism-entailing account of cognition when using the optical perspective analogy. Contra Leiter, I think as they are stated the plurality claim and the purity claim do not have the implications that he thinks they have, i.e. I do not think that Leiter successfully shows that the optical perspective analogy precludes a skepticism-entailing account of cognition.

Starting with the plurality claim, certainly it is *often* true that by taking more perspectives on an object, we are provided with more information about the object’s nature. However, it is not clear that taking more visual perspectives on an object necessarily entails that our conception of the object will be better. Some objects or ways of viewing objects may be such that no matter how many additional visual perspectives we take on the object, our conception of the object will not be made more accurate. In fact, we can imagine an object that is obscured from our visual grasp in such a way that taking more perspectives on

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<sup>3</sup> Leiter 1994: 344.

<sup>4</sup> Leiter 1994: 345. For more on what Leiter characterizes as the “Received View” see Chapter One.

<sup>5</sup> Leiter 1994: 345.

the object actually reinforces or extends an erroneous conception of the object.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the plurality claim must be modified if it is to be plausible. I suggest:

Modified Plurality Claim: The more perspectives we enjoy, all else being equal and in the absence of certain kinds of distorting factors, the better our conception of what the object is like will be.

This modification of the plurality claim connects it directly to the purity claim. If the purity claim remains intact, as stated by Leiter, then his argument for the anti-skeptical implications of the perspective analogy are unaffected despite the modifications made to the plurality claim. This is because the purity claim states that we can identify those factors that would distort our visual grasp of an object such that taking more perspectives would not yield a better grasp on the object's actual nature.

But how secure is the purity claim as stated by Leiter? Certainly there are many factors that would distort our visual grasp of an object that can be identified, e.g. a straight object's being half submerged in water such that it appears bent and a round object's being at such distance that it appears rectangular. However, it is unclear what Leiter means by stating that "a catalogue" of such factors exists. If he means that there is a fairly large set of distorting factors that we are able to identify, he is certainly correct, but if he means that we are (even in principle) able to identify all of the possible factors that could distort our visual grasp of an object, the claim is rather implausible. It is possible that there are factors that distort our visual grasp of an object of which we could never be aware. Given this, while we can maintain a "visual hierarchy," such a hierarchy will be based solely on those factors that

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<sup>6</sup> This claim is certainly logically consistent, i.e. there is no contradiction in the claim that in certain cases our visual grasp of objects is obscured such that the more perspectives we take on the object the worse our conception of what the object is actually like will be. An example of such a case would be if we were presented with a convincing (down to the microscopic level) three-dimensional hologram of a chair. The more visual perspectives one takes on the chair, the more convinced one would be that it is actually a chair, and one would, with each additional perspective, build a more and more complex and detailed conception of what he or she takes the chair to be like.

distort our visual perspective that we *can* identify. Given the possibility of distorting factors that we could (in principle) never identify, an absolute “visual hierarchy” is impossible. Certain optical perspectives are known to be better than others on the assumption that there are no non-identifiable distorting factors, so, for example, my close inspection of a cut diamond under a magnifying glass is better for identifying flaws in the diamond than your quick glance from a distance. However, we cannot eliminate the possibility that there are distorting factors common to both of our visual grasps of the diamond that prevent either of us from having an adequate or veridical conception of what we see.

Returning to the focus of our inquiry, we can see that there is a direct analogy between cognition and optical perspective. There are factors that we can in principle identify that distort our cognitive grasp of a situation. Using the example from Chapter Three of the neurotic lover questioning his or her partner’s faithfulness, we can see that being psychologically predisposed because of childhood trauma to take anything as evidence that my partner has been unfaithful to me both distorts our cognitive grasp of the situation and can in principle be identified as such, e.g. through intensive psychological therapy. These sorts of distortions of one’s cognitive perspective, despite all of the harm they may do, do not have radical skeptical implications. However, Nietzsche’s point is that various distortions of one’s cognitive perspective may in principle be undetectable such that we cannot tell at all whether what we take to be the case corresponds with what is actually the case or not. The possibility of distortions of this kind does have skeptical implications according to Nietzsche. This is directly analogous to distortions to our visual perspective that we cannot

in principle be aware of that Leiter does not consider, thus undermining his claim that the optical perspective analogy precludes a skeptical interpretation of Nietzsche's perspectivism.<sup>7</sup>

This lack of access to truth, what Nietzsche calls "falsification" is the "essence of phenomenalism and perspectivism as I [Nietzsche] understand them." This is because consciousness, by its very nature, grasps only "a surface and sign-world," which is a "corruption, falsification, reduction to superficialities, and generalization" (GS §354).

Nietzsche ties this directly to what I called in the last chapter metaphysical agnosticism:

You will guess that it is not the opposition of subject and object that concerns me here: This distinction I leave to the epistemologists who have become entangled in the snares of grammar (the metaphysics of the people). It is even less the opposition of 'thing-in-itself' and appearance; for we do not 'know' nearly enough to be entitled to any such distinction. We simply lack any organ for knowledge, for 'truth': we 'know' (or believe or imagine) just as much as may be *useful* in the interests of the human herd, the species; and even what is here called 'utility' is ultimately also a mere belief, something imaginary, and perhaps precisely that most calamitous stupidity of which we shall perish some day. (GS §354)

Nietzsche makes it clear that his aim in identifying perspectivism is not to critique the subject/object distinction or the thing-in-itself/appearance distinction. His aim is to show that we come to believe things on the basis of something other than good reasons, i.e. our cognitive facilities are not truth-sensitive. Our beliefs are sensitive to what is useful for a particular type of life, which, at the most general level, is the type of life of the human species, and there is not a necessary correlation between usefulness and what is actually the case.

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<sup>7</sup> Janaway (2007: 203-204) argues that the optical perspective metaphor implies neither skepticism nor relativism. This claim is sustainable only if one ignores what Nietzsche writes regarding cognition in BGE and GS (not to mention the late unpublished *Nachlass* fragments). Ignoring these texts will work only if one accepts Clark's untenable (see Chapter 1) developmental approach which sees Nietzsche's views on truth and knowledge shift between BGE and GM. Janaway is certainly correct that nothing about GM III §12 entails any kind of skepticism, but nothing about this passage precludes a skeptical position either, and as I argue in Chapter One, a great deal has been missed about Nietzsche's theory of cognition because of an overemphasis of GM III §12 and an lack of emphasis on the rest of Nietzsche's corpus, especially BGE Part One.

This point is made more clearly in BGE §11 where Nietzsche considers a particular sort of cognition, Kantian synthetic a priori judgments. Nietzsche asks “Why is belief in such judgments necessary?” If the answer were that such judgments are logically necessary, then it would be reasonable to claim that we are epistemically justified in taking such judgments to be true. However, “such judgments must be believed to be true for the sake of the preservation of creatures like ourselves.” The necessity of believing synthetic a priori judgments is not logical necessity but a psychological or perhaps evolutionary necessity. We could not get along in the world, given the type of creatures we are (i.e., human beings with particular needs, desires, and conditions of flourishing), without holding such beliefs:

though they might, of course, be false judgments for all that! Or to speak more clearly and coarsely: synthetic judgments a priori should not ‘be possible’ at all; we have no right to them; in our mouths they are nothing but false judgments. Only, of course, the belief in their truth is necessary, as a foreground belief and visual evidence belonging to the perspective optics of life. (BGE §11)

I will return to this passage later in the chapter to analyze the way in which Nietzsche uses the notions of truth and falsity, but for now it is important to note that our cognitive perspective “sees” things according to the “optics of life.” In other words, just as an optical perspective is determined by things like the relative positions of the viewer and the object viewed, the lighting conditions, etc., our cognitive perspective is determined by what serves and enhances a particular type of life.

What work does the optical perspective analogy do for Nietzsche? If all it shows us is that cognition, like sight, is mediated, i.e. that it does not have unmediated direct access to its objects, then Nietzsche’s position is neither remarkably novel nor radical. However, while Nietzsche would most certainly affirm that his position includes the claim that cognition only has mediate access to its objects, his position is far more radical than simply this. Here



the optical perspective analogy can elucidate Nietzsche's position, but only if we keep in mind the ways in which the analogy is not a perfect one. When we look at an object we always look at it from a certain angle, and because of this we are only able to see one (or perhaps two, given binocular vision) aspect(s) of the object at a time. However, it is completely perspicuous to the average seeing subject that there are other angles from which the object may be viewed, and the viewing subject is, under normal circumstances, free to change his or her position in order to see other aspects of the object by looking at it from a different angle. In other words, many of the factors that determine optical perspective are either directly or indirectly under our control.

Things are not so simple when it comes to our cognitive perspective, however. Take this definition that Nietzsche gives "Perspectivism" in the *Nachlass*:

It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm. (WP §481 1883-1888)

So instead of viewing angles, lighting conditions, and the like, it is things like our drives, their ends, and the strength of various drives relative to one another that determine our cognitive perspective. While this certainly entails that we do not have unmediated access to the objects of cognition just as we do not have unmediated access to the objects of sight, there is an important difference between "our drives and their For and Against" and factors like the angle at which something is viewed. Whereas under normal circumstances we have a great deal of control over our visual perspective on things, we do not have the same kind of control over our drives and affects. So whereas we can take any number of different visual perspectives on the objects of everyday experience, we can only take a limited number of cognitive perspectives on things, and these are limited by the way we are constituted—something almost certainly outside of our control.

Another respect in which the optical perspective analogy fails to capture an essential aspect of Nietzsche's theory of cognition has to do with the possibility of incommensurate perspectives. As Lanier Anderson writes, "There is a sense in which all visual perspectives are compatible, whereas on Nietzsche's view, not all cognitive perspectives are."<sup>8</sup> Each visual perspective of an object is compatible with every other because they are all views of the same individuated object, and the various aspects under which the object is viewed can be reconciled according to the laws of optics. But as Anderson observes:

In the most extreme case, [cognitive] perspectives may have differences in their standards of rationality and theory choice which make them not simply incompatible, but incommensurable world views, in the sense that they cannot be measured by any common standard, and no non-question begging reasons are available to decide between them. This possibility has generated charges that perspectivism is a form of wholesale relativism.<sup>9</sup>

We will deal with the relativism charge in detail later, but the point I want to draw from Anderson for our present purposes is that the possibility of incommensurable perspectives is generated from the fact that we can never have a view from outside a cognitive perspective to determine that the same object is being cognized from each perspective. We are also unable to determine what the laws are that govern the relationship between the object cognized and the perspective of the cognizer. In the case of optical perspective, the laws of optics describe our non-perspectival access to the object seen. Analogous laws regarding cognition in general are unavailable to us in principle because they would have to be formulated from a non-perspectival position. Therefore, we must accept the possibility that there can be more than just mere disagreement about the truth-value of a proposition; there may be cases when such a disagreement is not resolvable by rational means and where the

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<sup>8</sup> Anderson 1998: 4.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson 1998: 8.

justification of the competing propositions is fully consistent within its corresponding perspective.<sup>10</sup> A discussion of what the possibility of incommensurate perspectives means for objectivity and discourse must wait for Chapter Five. For now, it is sufficient to note that in these respects the optical perspective analogy does not fully do justice to Nietzsche's theory of cognition.

While Nietzsche's theory of cognition has been popularly labeled "perspectivism" because of his use of the optical analogy in his most widely read work *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the analogy is limited.<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche writes about cognition in many more passages than the ones in which he explicitly uses the terms like "perspective" and "perspectivism."<sup>12</sup> In the next section, I look at another analogy that Nietzsche employs in elucidating his theory of cognition, namely textual interpretation, which illuminates to an even greater degree the radical nature of Nietzsche's project. I will then turn to his positive accounts of truth and knowledge.

#### *The Textual Interpretation Analogy for Human Cognition*

Nietzsche, whose graduate education and professorship were in classical philology (i.e. the interpretation of classical texts), was sensitive to and interested in the difficulties and problems associated with textual interpretation. It is not surprising, therefore, that textual interpretation is one of his favored analogies for human cognition. This analogy is especially

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<sup>10</sup> Poellner (1995) argues that "One implication of Nietzsche's reasoning is that for beings experiencing different sensations, encountering different patterns of resistance, and having different interests and concerns, there would indeed be different 'objective realities.'" (103).

<sup>11</sup> Cox (1999: 122) agrees that the optical analogy for human cognition is limited and must be taken in the context of everything else Nietzsche has to say on the topic, and Cox uses this point to reject Leiter's position that the optical perspective analogy entails that we have access to mind independent objects. However, Cox fails to see how even apart from considering other texts, Leiter's position can be rejected as I argued in the previous section.

<sup>12</sup> In addition to GM, Nietzsche uses the terminology of "perspective" and "perspectivism" in BGE Preface, §2, §11, §34, §188, GS §354, and §374—all of which are in the period after writing Zarathustra through GM. It is not surprising that these are also the works in which questions of epistemology are the most prominent.

prevalent in the *Nachlass* where he famously claims that there are no facts, “only interpretations” (WP §481 1883-1888). The purpose of this section is to get clear on what Nietzsche means when he claims that there are no facts and only interpretations. In order to analyze this claim, it will be important to determine what (if anything) in human cognition corresponds to each of the four elements of textual interpretation: 1. The text itself. 2. The interpretation of the text. 3. The one who interprets. 4. The “true” meaning of the text. According to Nietzsche’s interpretation metaphor, it is clear that our cognition of things is the correlate of the interpretation of the text, but what Nietzsche takes to be the correlate of the text itself and the “true” meaning of the text requires a closer look. With a clear understanding of what Nietzsche tries to show using the interpretation metaphor, we will be prepared to formulate what his theories of cognition, truth, and knowledge are.

To interpret a text is to attempt to discover or disclose the meaning of the text. Texts, when in their original language, are immediately given, e.g., the opening lines to T.S. Elliot’s “The Wasteland” are “April is the cruelest month, breeding/Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing.” These lines *are* part of the text of the poem. They are repeatable; no other texts for the opening lines of this poem exist or could exist (different lines would constitute a different poem), and we have access to them, i.e. if we possess a copy of the poem, then we have access to the text of the poem. An interpretation of the poem’s text is what the poem is taken to mean. Obviously, an indefinite number of interpretations of these lines is possible, and according to the discipline of literary criticism, some interpretations of the text are better than others. However, no one single interpretation can exhaust the meaning of a literary text like “The Wasteland.” No matter how many illuminating interpretations of it are given, more are possible that would further our understanding. Because we could not, in

principle, create a set of all the good interpretations of a text like this, it follows that there is not one single meaning of the text.

Nietzsche's position is that human cognition is like the interpretation of a text. But if our thought is like an interpretation for Nietzsche, what is the text itself in this analogy? When we think, what is it we are giving an interpretation *of*? If we look at two of the most important passages in the published works where Nietzsche employs the interpretation metaphor, BGE §22 and GS §374, we see that it is the world, "existence," or nature that is the text of which our cognitions are supposed to be interpretations. When we make a truth claim, we are making a claim about what we take the world to be like. Nietzsche's claim is that truth claims are not claims about the way the world literally is but rather are interpretations of the "text" of nature or the world. So, for example, physics, according to Nietzsche, is "only interpretation and exegesis of the world" (BGE §14).

This [understanding of nature as operating in conformity to laws] is interpretation, not text; and somebody might come along who, with opposite intentions and modes of interpretation, could read out of the same 'nature,' and with regard to the same phenomena, rather the tyrannically inconsiderate and relentless enforcement of claims of power. (BGE §22)

The scientist who makes claims about the laws of nature is giving an interpretation of the text of nature; he or she is "reading" off of the text of nature. Given the exact same set of phenomena, other modes of interpretation are always possible.

According to a *Nachlass* fragment, "Rational thought is interpretation according to a scheme that we cannot throw off" (WP §522 1886-1887). Cognitions themselves, which can be expressed as truth claims, are our interpretations of the "text" of the world. The standards of rationality that we employ and that govern the way we think about the world are a "scheme" that we are bound to follow, that "we cannot throw off." These standards of rationality, I take it, are things like the law of non-contradiction, the principle of sufficient

reason, and the like. This is perhaps not, by itself, terribly radical. This brief fragment in the *Nachlass* makes clear that at least some of our standards of rationality are necessary such that we cannot think otherwise. But what kind of necessity is this? If it is absolute logical necessity, then all possible (good) interpretations of the world must obey some limited set of standards, but if the necessity in question is some other weaker kind of necessity, then the possibilities for world interpretations are potentially endless.

Nietzsche must have in mind the latter because he thinks that we at least cannot exclude the possibility that there are other kinds of interpretations that are incommensurate with our own human interpretations of nature.

The human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself in its own perspectives, and *only* in these. We cannot look around our own corner: it is a hopeless curiosity that wants to know what other kinds of intellects and perspectives there *might* be; for example, whether some beings might be able to experience time backward (which would involve another direction of life and another concept of cause and effect). But I should think that today we are at least far from the ridiculous immodesty that would be involved in decreeing from our corner that perspectives are permitted only from this corner. (GS §374)

It is groundless speculation to try to determine what other perspectives beings radically different from ourselves could have on the world. But the fact that it is possible that such beings could interpret the world in ways that are incommensurate with our own is a possibility we cannot exclude. Such beings, if they exist, could have radically different standards of rationality, and this passage indicates Nietzsche thinks the differences in interpretative perspective might even go all the way to the forms of our sensory intuition of time and (presumably) space. Given this, we cannot exclude that there may be an “infinite [number of] interpretations” of the world (GS §374).

In this same passage, Nietzsche questions “how far the perspective character of existence extends.” This, by itself, is ambiguous. Does he mean to question whether or not

we have, in addition to our mediated, perspectival cognition of things, some kind of non-perspectival access to the world? Or does he mean to question whether or not, apart from our (perspectival and interpretative) access to things, there exists a non-perspectival world, i.e. a world as it is in itself? Nietzsche does little to clarify which of these he means because in the following lines he then asks whether “existence without interpretation, without ‘sense’ [given by us], does not become ‘nonsense.’” The difficulty in interpreting this passage is that there are two separate questions one could ask: One could ask whether there *is* an “existence without interpretation,” or one could ask if we, as human cognizers, are able to *think* an “existence without interpretation.” This is the distinction between an ontological, metaphysical question and an epistemological question.

Nietzsche is not entirely clear which of the two questions he means to ask. It seems to me that he asks both in this passage.<sup>13</sup> He asks whether existence is “essentially actively engaged in interpretation” or not, and he asks whether we can think of the world apart from our own interpretation of it. The question about whether reality itself has an essentially interpretative or perspectival character is, not surprisingly, met with a skepticism consistent with the metaphysical agnosticism that I discussed in the Chapter Three. “[Whether existence is essentially engaged in interpretation] cannot be decided even by the most industrious and most scrupulously conscientious analysis and self-examination of the intellect.” To give an answer to metaphysical questions about what reality is essentially, we would have to take on perspectives which we are incapable of taking on. “In the course of this analysis the human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself in its own perspectives, and *only* in

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<sup>13</sup> Cox 1999 and Nehamas 1983: 475 argue that this passage is problematic for the very reason that it advances a positive ontological thesis while denying that we have epistemic access to perspective-independent reality. I have chosen to focus on Nietzsche’s epistemology here. I deal with the possibility of a Nietzschean metaphysics in Chapter Six.

these.” We cannot think of things, including the examination of our own cognitive powers, except from our own finite human perspective. The question about the nature of anything in itself is completely beyond our grasp because as Nietzsche says, “We cannot look around our own corner.”

If we cannot answer questions about what the world is like in itself, all of our cognitions about the world are uniquely human interpretations of the “text” of nature. We can think *that* there exists a nature in itself apart from our (or any) interpretation, but any particular thing that we think *about* nature will be an interpretative claim made from our unique perspective. We must, according to Nietzsche, remain agnostic regarding all metaphysical claims including whether there is a reality apart from interpretation and any claims about the deep structure of our own cognitive abilities. So Nietzsche’s point in using the textual interpretation analogy is not simply that there is no one single true meaning of the text of nature, i.e. different descriptions and explanations for nature can be adequate just as various interpretations of a texts can be. Additionally, he is pointing out that we do not have access to the unmediated text of nature at all. Here there is an important disanalogous element in the relationship between textual interpretation and cognition. In textual interpretation, we have access to the text itself, as in my example of the first two lines of “The Wasteland,” but in the act of cognizing, the text is always hidden from us. We can indeed think of nature as being a text that we read, but actually we are always already interpreting that text such that the text itself is beyond our grasp. Perhaps our access to nature, for Nietzsche, is better compared to the access someone who does not read Ancient Greek has to the Platonic dialogues via reading them in translation. Whatever such a person thinks Plato is claiming is one of many possible interpretations, but even what is “given” to such a reader is already an interpretation and not a text in itself since it is a translation.



We are now in a position to make sense of Nietzsche's claim in the *Nachlass* (WP §481 1883-1888) that there are no facts but only interpretations. Nietzsche cannot be making the positive claim that there are no facts about the world as it is in itself, as this would violate his metaphysical agnosticism. As far as we can tell, it is entirely possible that there are definite ways reality is apart from our cognition of it, and it is possible that reality is perspectival or interpretative all the way down, even apart from *our* perspective on things—Nietzsche must allow for both of these possibilities given his metaphysical agnosticism. In principle we are cut off from the kind of access that would be required to make such claims with any epistemic justification. This leads us to the correct interpretation of Nietzsche's claim that there are no facts and only interpretations. Any cognition we have of the world or any claim we make expressing our cognition of things will not be a fact in the sense of an fully adequate description of the text of nature, but rather is one interpretation among many possible interpretations.

Alexander Nehamas argues that Nietzsche calls our claims “‘interpretations’ in order to call to our attention the fact that they are never detached or disinterested, that they are not objective in a traditional sense.”<sup>14</sup> There are not, according to Nehamas's take on Nietzsche on this point, final ultimate expressions of what reality is like. “[Nietzsche] does not seem to me to be claiming that no particular theory can ever be true. Science [and other legitimate interpretations], he argues, provide neither an ultimate description of the world nor a description of the world as it is in itself.”<sup>15</sup> So far, Nehamas's take on the textual interpretation analogy is not so different from mine (although I have not yet given an account for how a theory qua interpretation can be true). However, he and I differ slightly

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<sup>14</sup> Nehamas 1985: 65.

<sup>15</sup> Nehamas 1985: 65.

on why there can be radically different, incommensurate interpretations. Nehamas claims that “like textual interpretations, all our modes of interacting with the world are additions that make an already indeterminate object even more multifarious and complex.”<sup>16</sup> Certainly our cognitive interactions with the world add to its complexity, but it does not follow that the objects we cognize are themselves “indeterminate.” A given text, as we noted before, *is* a determinate object. It is the sum of our various possible takes on that object that are indeterminate. Nehamas thinks that there are seemingly conflicting interpretations because our take on objects is only partial and that they do not actually conflict (when they are adequate interpretations) because they are only partial, never complete, interpretations.

If Nehamas’s goal were to show that for Nietzsche there is no one true *meaning* (for us) of the text of nature, then his interpretation and mine would be in agreement. However, he takes Nietzsche’s use of the textual interpretation metaphor to show that there are multiple equally correct or adequate interpretations of the text of nature. But this is not Nietzsche’s claim at all. He never discusses the “true meaning” of the text or contents the idea that there exist multiple adequate interpretations with the claim that there is only one. His point, as I hope to have shown, is that through our various theoretical inquiries we take ourselves to have access to nature itself (the text), but in reality we only have access to interpretations of nature. Nehamas is correct that there are multiple interpretations of nature because there are different modes of life that do the interpreting, but talk of an interpretation’s adequacy to the text is misguided because we do not have access to the text—at least so far as we can tell. Nietzsche does have an account of why some interpretations are better or preferable to others, but it is not because they are interpretively adequate to the underlying nature of things. This account will be discussed in Chapter Five.

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<sup>16</sup> Nehamas 1985: 62.

Brian Leiter resists the pull to read Nietzsche's use of the textual interpretation analogy as having these seemingly relativistic consequences, as for example Nehamas thinks it does when he claims that "texts can be interpreted equally well in vastly different and deeply incompatible ways."<sup>17</sup> Such readings of the use of the interpretation analogy are influenced by the shift toward relativism of poststructuralism and as such are anachronistic, claims Leiter, because Nietzsche had a "continuing loyalty to many of the canons of philological *Wissenschaft*,"<sup>18</sup> an academic discipline, as I have noted, in which he was professionally trained. Among the aspects of this scientific (in the broad sense of the German "*Wissenschaft*") discipline Nietzsche admired was its "art of reading well—of reading facts without falsifying them by interpretation, without losing caution, patience, delicacy, in the desire to understand" (A §52).<sup>19</sup>

Leiter thinks Nietzsche's use of a textual metaphor when discussing naturalism shows that Nietzsche cannot hold that there are multiple equally good yet incompatible interpretations of the objects of cognition. For example, Nietzsche writes that among his goals is "to translate man back into nature, to become master over the many vain and overly enthusiastic interpretations and connotations that have so far been scrawled and painted over that eternal basic text of *homo natura*" (BGE §230). Clearly Nietzsche thinks there is something wrong about the "metaphysical" interpretations of man, and he hopes to correct these misreadings of the "text of *homo natura*." Leiter's point is that this is inconsistent with there being multiple incompatible readings of the text.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Nehamas 1985: 3.

<sup>18</sup> Leiter 2002: 37.

<sup>19</sup> As quoted by Leiter 2002: 37.

<sup>20</sup> Leiter 2002: 38.

Leiter has two arguments against the kind of reading I am giving of the textual interpretation analogy; I will call them the “*Wissenschaft*” argument and the “naturalism” argument. Regarding the “*Wissenschaft*” argument, Leiter is certainly correct to point out that Nietzsche respected the rigor, method, and results of the philological discipline. However, this respect does not entail that Nietzsche thinks that there is a single correct interpretation of the text of the world. According to Nietzsche, “There simply is no science (*Wissenschaft*) ‘without presuppositions’” (GS §344). In other words, even if a particular science, e.g. philology, entails one particular “reading” of a text, that single reading is dependent on the presuppositions that constitute the science in question. Given other presuppositions, i.e. a different science, different conclusions would be reached by applying the methods entailed by those different presuppositions. Since we do not have access to the text of nature itself, we can only get a single interpretation by constituting a science through making these sorts of presuppositions, but outside of a single science we are unable to get at the truth itself independent of all presuppositions. We are now in a position to see more clearly Nietzsche’s meaning in the *Antichrist* passage. In this passage, Nietzsche calls philology the art of “reading facts without falsifying them by interpretation.” Leiter never discusses the fact that Nietzsche, even here, claims that interpretation falsifies, but more importantly we see that philology can only read facts (instead of falsifying by interpretation) by taking a particular text as given. This taking a text as given is one of the founding presuppositions of this particular science. The human cognitive situation, prior to any presupposition, does not have access to a text and so is interpretation all the way down.

Leiter’s “naturalism” argument is that Nietzsche claims that a naturalistic interpretation of the text of “*homo natura*” is better than metaphysical interpretations of that text. Claiming that one interpretation is better than another, Leiter thinks, is incompatible

with the view that there are inconsistent yet equally good interpretations of things like the text of *homo natura*. Even if we ignore the fact that Leiter does not take into account our lack of access to the text of nature itself, we can see that my claim that there are multiple inconsistent yet equally good interpretations does not entail, as Leiter thinks it does, that all interpretations are good or that there are not some interpretations that are better than others. Given that the concept of naturalism is underdetermined, i.e. there are multiple competing views as to what counts as naturalistic explanation, there may be many inconsistent ways of interpreting the text of *homo natura* that Nietzsche would agree are legitimate, and this is entirely consistent with the claim that other interpretations, including metaphysical ones, are inadequate.<sup>21</sup>

Of course, I have not dealt here with the questions of whether some interpretations are actually better than others or not, whether some interpretations make better sense of the (inaccessible) text of nature or not, or if there are some interpretations that are better than others, what kinds of standards would allow us to determine which are better. Given passages like the one we just discussed, Leiter is quite right to claim that Nietzsche must be committed to the view that some interpretive perspectives are better than others. However, we are not yet in a position to discuss what sorts of criteria differentiate good interpretations from bad ones Nietzsche might have in mind. A discussion of what makes an interpretation better than another will have to wait for Chapter Five.

One point complicates my rejection of Leiter's arguments. He acknowledges that for Nietzsche, "We cannot establish any fact 'in itself.'" In other words, Leiter ultimately agrees that we are entirely cut off from possessing epistemic access to the text of the world as it is

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<sup>21</sup> For some good discussions of the indeterminacy of the label "naturalism" and the sense in which Nietzsche can be considered a naturalist see Coker 2002, Cox 1997, and Cox 2002.

in itself. However, this lack of epistemic access is, according to Leiter, “compatible with the mature Nietzsche thinking there are facts in the only real world, i.e., the so-called ‘phenomenal’ world.”<sup>22</sup> This point highlights quite nicely the difference between Leiter’s (as well as Maudmarie Clark’s) position and my own. Leiter and Clark are in agreement with me that human cognizers do not have access to the way things are in themselves, but whereas Leiter and Clark think that there are facts about the world as it appears to us (the phenomenal world), my position is that, for Nietzsche, the factors (to be discussed in the next section) that determine each individual’s interpretive perspective are such that there may be multiple incommensurate perspectives on things, and so there are no intersubjective “facts,” even about the phenomenal world.

This section has showed that cognition is like textual interpretation in that there is no one single way of cognizing of the world. Multiple incompatible interpretations can be equally good, although not all interpretations are good ones. We do not yet have the resources to show what, for Nietzsche, makes some interpretations adequate and others not, but we can see that he is committed to the view that there does not exist a single adequate interpretation of the “text” of reality. This is because there is an important disanalogy between textual interpretation and cognition. Whereas in textual interpretation the text is given, in cognition, there is no text given. Even our most basic perceptual intuitions are already interpretations of things; we are always already cut off from the text.

*The Elements that Determine Cognitive Perspectives*

So far we have discussed at length what cognition is not. It is not access to things as they are in themselves, and so whatever distinguishes various perspectives on things, it

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<sup>22</sup> Leiter 2002: 38n8.

cannot be their adequacy to the way things really are.<sup>23</sup> The world of human thought is epistemically cut off from what we take ourselves to be cognizing. As we noted above in discussing Nietzsche's textual interpretation analogy for human cognition, there can be multiple different and perhaps incompatible perspectives on things. We "see" things from a unique perspective and we "read" the "text" of nature from our own interpretative framework. What determines these different perspectives? What individuates a perspective? Nietzsche holds that all cognition, including even mathematics and the mathematization of reality in the natural sciences "determine[s] our human relation to things," and rather than giving us knowledge of the world, are "merely the means for general and ultimate knowledge of man" (GS §246). This would seem to commit Nietzsche, insofar as he is concerned with the problem of human cognition, to a project much like Kant's project in the *First Critique*, that of determining the conditions for the possibility of cognition in human beings in general. This generalization of Nietzsche's project is not too far off the mark, but we must make one significant caveat. Whereas for Kant the conditions under which human cognition are possible are universal and necessarily so,<sup>24</sup> for Nietzsche that which determines an

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<sup>23</sup> This way of putting it is not quite correct. Given Nietzsche's metaphysical agnosticism, we cannot know whether cognition is adequate to the way things really are.

<sup>24</sup> While Kant claims that the conditions for possible experience are necessarily universal for all human cognizers, he leaves open the possibility that there are other sorts of beings for whom the conditions of experience are different:

We can accordingly speak of space, extended beings, and so on, only from the human standpoint. If we depart from the subjective conditions under which alone we can acquire outer intuition, namely through which we may be affected by objects, then the representation of space signifies nothing at all. This predicate is attributed to things only insofar as they appear to us, i.e. are objects of sensibility. The constant form of this receptivity, which we call sensibility, is a necessary condition of all the relations within which objects can be intuited as outside us, and, if one abstracts from these objects, it is a pure intuition, which bears the name of space. Since we cannot make the special conditions of sensibility into the conditions of the possibility of things, but only of their appearances, we can say well that space comprehends all things that may appear to us externally, but not all things in themselves, whether they be intuited or not, or by whatever subject they may be intuited. *For we cannot judge at all whether the intuitions of other thinking beings are bound to the same*

individual's cognitive perspective, as we have already noted, is a person's "type," and types can vary from individual to individual. Therefore, contra Kant, the conditions for possibility of cognition are not universal across all human beings, and if there are any aspects of our cognitive perspective that *are* shared by all cognizing human beings, this universality is empirical and contingent rather than a priori and necessary.

What factors constitute a type; what individuates them? In the previous chapters we have already hinted at the sorts of factors that determine how an individual of a certain type cognizes the world—these factors include things like needs, conditions of survival, values and moral systems, desires, instinctual drives, history and culture, language, and even physiology. For Nietzsche how one cognizes the world is as least as much a symptom of these factors—the “human relation to things”—as it is an indication of the way the world is. Given that Nietzsche's primary project is to initiate a reevaluation of values, i.e. to create a social world in which affirmative, strong, and healthy types are favored over nihilistic, weak, and sickly types, the way an individual cognizes the world is important for indicating whether they represent ascending or descending life. In this section, I show how each of these factors plays a part in determining how the world is cognized for Nietzsche. While for the purposes of this study we are more interested in how various factors about the cognizing subject affect how he or she cognizes the world, Nietzsche, given his larger project, is perhaps more interested in looking at this relation from the opposite direction, i.e. regarding particular beliefs and other cognitive stances as reflecting the type of person one is.



The most basic aspects of how we cognize the world, the very foundations of human rationality and the rules through which we make inferences and judgments, are conditioned by what was once necessary for our species to survive.

We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we can live—by positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content; without these articles of faith nobody now could endure life. But that does not prove them. Life is no argument. The conditions of life might include error. (GS §121)

Nietzsche argues that other thinking beings may have made inferences in different ways than we do, and individuals who used those rules for making judgments “were favored with a lesser probability of survival” than individuals who made the sort of inferences and judgments that we do. Nevertheless, these other forms of rationality, despite their being less beneficial for survival, “might have been truer,” i.e. there is not necessarily any *epistemic* privilege attached to a way of thinking or a judgment’s being suited for survival. Nietzsche’s idea is that there potentially exist within us multiple impulses to judge in radically different ways, and that how we end up actually judging is a result of the struggle among those impulses (“For every drive wants to be master—and it attempts to philosophize in that spirit” (BGE §6)) with the results of some struggles being more favorable for survival than others, and so those become the dominant modes of judging. However, we must not make the mistake of thinking that simply because cognizing a certain way aids survival that it is likely to be true (GS §111; see also HH §517). Nietzsche makes a similar point later in *Beyond Good and Evil* writing, “Behind all logic and its seeming sovereignty of movement, too, there stand valuations or, more clearly, physiological demands for the preservation of a certain type of life” (BGE §3), and again in the *Nachlass*: “In order for a particular species to maintain itself and increase its power, its conception of reality must comprehend enough of

the calculable and constant for it to base a scheme of behavior on it” (WP §480 1888; see also §678 1883-1888).

Peter Poellner argues that Nietzsche offers these evolutionary concerns as an independent argument for skepticism, an argument which he ultimately sees as failing.<sup>25</sup> According to Poellner, Nietzsche’s argument goes something like this: cognition has evolved in human beings because it helps us survive and reproduce. The particular way we cognize the world is determined by evolutionary success. False or unjustified cognitions often offer more evolutionary success than true or justified ones. Therefore, given the truth of evolution, our claims about the world are unjustified. Poellner is correct in his evaluation of this argument that it is epistemically self-defeating; we must presuppose the truth of claims that the argument claims we do not have access to in order for the argument to be sound. However, Nietzsche can be read more charitably on this score. Nietzsche’s skeptical position, as I have argued, is based on the fact that we cannot eliminate the possibility that it is our intellectual drives that determine cognition and not the way the world is independently of our cognition. Starting from the position of metaphysical agnosticism that follows from this, from our perspective evolution best accounts for the existence of the human organism and its structure (including the structure of its cognition). We cannot eliminate the possibility that false beliefs contribute to our survival just as much or more than true ones, and so our best explanation for the existence of our cognitive functions is consistent with and even reinforces (but does not establish) the skepticism Nietzsche adopts for other reasons.

Because our cognitive system evolved because it aided in preserving a certain type of life (and not because it aims at truth), it is therefore not a conscious *rational* process that determines how we think about the world; it is rather the interplay of our various instinctual

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<sup>25</sup> Poellner 1995: 137-162.

drives, which have been selected for because of their relative survival benefit.<sup>26</sup> According to Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*, each individual instinct “must first have presented its one-sided view on the thing or event.” Next, these one-sided views fight amongst themselves, and a “contract” or “reconciliation” is reached among them, which results in the judgment of which we are conscious. We are deceived about the nature of cognition because “only the last scenes of reconciliation and the final accounting at the end of this long process rise to consciousness” (GS §333). So Nietzsche concludes that:

By far the greater part of conscious thinking must still be included among instinctive activities, and that goes even for philosophical thinking... So, ‘being conscious’ is not in any decisive sense the opposite of what is instinctive: most of the conscious thinking of a philosopher is secretly guided and forced into certain channels by his instincts. (BGE §3)

But why think this; why conclude that “[understanding] is actually nothing but a *certain behavior of the instincts toward one another*” (GS §333)? The answer Nietzsche gives in this passage seems to indicate that he thought careful introspection discovers that cognition is a war of the various instinctual drives amongst one another. He observes that “[the instincts hurting one another] may well be the source of that sudden and violent exhaustion that afflicts all thinkers (it is the exhaustion of the battlefield).” The very thinkers in whose discipline the job of understanding cognition belongs (*viz.* philosophy) are not in the best position to see this fact because “conscious thinking, especially that of the philosopher, is

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<sup>26</sup> This may seem to contradict what Nietzsche says at BGE §13:

Physiologists should think before putting down the instinct of self-preservation as the cardinal instinct of an organic being. A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength—life itself is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results.

However, what Nietzsche is rejecting here is an *instinct* for survival, not the evolutionary explanations for various traits that they allow an organism to survive in a particular environment. Nietzsche is not rejecting the basic insight of evolutionary theory, but rather only unnecessary teleological posits regarding a drive to self-preservation.

the least vigorous and therefore the relatively mildest and calmest form of thinking; and thus precisely philosophers are the most apt to be led astray about the nature of knowledge” (GS §333).<sup>27</sup>

Now certainly not every way of thinking contributes to or detracts from the survival of the human species. “[Some] new propositions, though not useful for life, were also evidently not harmful to life: in such cases there was room for the expression of an intellectual play and impulse” (GS §110). The flourishing and expansion of the various areas of human inquiry beyond what is practically useful and benefits the survival of the species is dependent on these “new propositions” (or ways of thinking) that were neutral with respect to survival. Because of this the play of instinctual drives that condition human cognition are underdetermined by the conditions of the survival of the human species, and therefore other explanations are needed for the specificity of what ends up being cognized. Indeed, Nietzsche argues that:

Physiologists should think before putting down the instinct of self-preservation as the cardinal instinct of an organic being. A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength—life itself is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results. (BGE §13)

If an instinct for the “discharge of strength,” rather than a drive for self-preservation, is the primary drive in organic life, then we should not expect to find the only explanation for the way we cognize the world (and the battle of drives that determine that cognition) in their benefit for survival.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> There are obvious self-referential difficulties with this position. How could someone whose thoughts are determined by non-rational, non-truth sensitive instinctive drives be justified in thinking that that was the case? In other words, this position is epistemically self-defeating, meaning it is a position that if true could never be known to be true. I respond to the charge that this position is *viciously* epistemically self-defeating later in this chapter.

<sup>28</sup> Notice that this does not undermine the explanatory value of survival benefit for some of our ways of thinking or beliefs about the world. It is merely the claim that survival benefit is only part of the story, and

Given this, Nietzsche theorizes that there are other factors above and beyond mere survival that determine the specificity of what is cognized—most prominent among them values and moral systems. Recall that in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche examines how the Stoics, rather than basing their morality on an objective view of nature, imposed their morality onto their conception of nature. Speaking to the Stoics, Nietzsche writes:

Your pride wants to impose your morality, your ideal, on nature—even on nature—and incorporate them in her; you demand that she should be nature ‘according to the Stoa,’ and you would like all existence to exist only after your own image—as an immense eternal glorification and generalization of Stoicism. (BGE §9)

It is not only the Stoics, however, who make this kind of projection of their moral system onto the world. All philosophy and even all cognition make a similar projection, as Nietzsche affirmed just a few sections before: “Behind all logic and its seeming sovereignty of movement, too, there stand valuations.” But these valuations are themselves the expression of “physiological demands for the preservation of a certain type of life” (BGE §3).

Not all of an individual’s cognition, however, is determined directly by that individual’s type. Nietzsche argues that much of how we see the world is influenced by the cultural traditions we have inherited and the natural language that we speak both of which represent the needs and conditions of existence of various human types that existed in the distant past. Those who invented cultural practices or who first used various grammatical tropes did so because those ways of thinking and seeing were among the things that allowed for their flourishing and preservation. As cultural practices are transmitted through socialization and languages are learned by each subsequent generation, the ways of cognizing

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given that for Nietzsche the primary instinct of life is “discharge of strength,” we can look here for explanations for ways of thinking as well.

that those artifacts engendered are also passed down even if the needs and instincts that they served no longer exist. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, for example, can be read as a story of how various moral beliefs and ways of looking at the world that accompany them continue to survive in modern European culture long after the needs that they served had ceased to exist. For example, in the first essay of GM Nietzsche shows how a certain conception of morality develops from the power struggles between the strong, ruling class and the weak, disenfranchised class. It was necessary, in order for this conception of morality to form, that the human being be conceived of as a free, independent, unitary, and morally responsible subject, so that e.g., there is “a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was free to express strength or not to do so” (GM I §13).

This way of thinking about human subjects, Nietzsche thinks, gets transposed onto the way we think about things in general. People began to think of every object as having an underlying substance. This category of substance became ingrained in our thinking and preserved through the subject-object form of language. We still cognize using the concept of substance even if it no longer serves the needs it once did because of this “misleading influence of language” (GM I §13). Complicating matters, cognition, like any cultural practice, can maintain the same form, but the need it responds to can change (see GM II §13). One way to read the entire GM is as a study on how the relationship between a particular set of cognition, values, and cultural practices changed over time in response to new needs. It is beyond the scope of this work to explore the specificity of the particular relations between these elements that Nietzsche studies in that work. It is enough for our purposes to note the general strategy Nietzsche employs for analyzing this relationship.

In general we can say that for Nietzsche ways of cognizing either respond to contemporary needs of an individual type or are ways of responding to past needs, which

have been transmitted through morality, culture, religion, language, etc. The specific explanation of the way a particular individual cognizes the world is analogous to the explanation for an organism's phenotype. An organism's phenotype is determined by chance mutations of genetic material being selected for by the survival and reproductive benefit those mutations give to individuals of the species from generation to generation. A particular organism's phenotype is proximately explained by the inheritance of genes from its parents, but taking a larger view from the perspective of evolutionary history, the explanation is in terms of random genetic mutations and the needs of organisms for survival and reproduction in various sorts of environments. An individual has some of its phenotypic traits that respond to needs it shares with its ancestors and others that respond to needs that its distant ancestors once had but no longer are relevant for the individual in question. So for example, human beings have a placenta during gestation, and this responds to a need we share with our ancestors, namely the nourishment of the developing fetus. But humans also have a tail bone which we inherited from our distant ancestors who once had need of a tail, but it is a phenotypic structure that we no longer need.

Analogously, our ways of thinking about the world are inherited through cultural transmission, and some of those ways of thinking respond to needs we share with our cultural/linguistic ancestors and other ways of thinking that respond to needs our ancestors once had but we no longer share. The single biggest difference between inheritance of phenotype and ways of cognizing is that perhaps the ways we cognize the world are more malleable at the individual level than a phenotype is, and this must be the case if Nietzsche's project of overcoming nihilism is to succeed, since in order to overcome nihilism we would need to change the way we think about the world (See D §103, a passage I discuss at length in Chapter Six).

Before turning to the implications of the way value systems determine cognition, we must explore an objection that one might raise to the picture just painted. Nietzsche's idea that various factors about the cognizing subject are such that "we construe the world in our image" (WP §116 1888) could be taken to mean that we are able to cognize the world any way that we like, i.e. that the world (for us) conforms to our desires. However, this is obviously not the case, as anyone who has ever been let down by something has observed. Indeed, Nietzsche affirms, "Happiness and virtue are no arguments. But people like to forget—even sober spirits—that making unhappy and evil are no counterarguments. Something might be true while being harmful and dangerous in the highest degree" (BGE §39). While this may seem obvious enough to be left unsaid, given Nietzsche's broader theory of perspectivism and dependence of the world we cognize on factors immanent to the subject, he cannot take for granted the common sense observation that we do not always get what we want.

However, the fact that we do not construct a world that fulfills (rather than reflects or is dependent on) our practical concerns could be used as an argument for (an extremely limited but nevertheless strong) metaphysical and epistemological realist position. According to such an argument, the reason the world does not conform exactly to our needs (even though we cognize it in terms of them) is because there is a determinate way things are, apart from those needs, which impinges itself upon our cognitive faculties. Several responses are in order: First, as I have shown, Nietzsche argues against the conceivability (for us) of things in themselves and therefore argues that all metaphysical claims are false (or nonsense) in some sense. So while we must be agnostic with respect to the existence of a mind independent world, this does preclude the possibility that there is a world that simply escapes our cognitive grasp.



Nietzsche can maintain this agnosticism about the mind-independent world despite the fact that the world does not exactly (or even closely) correspond to our desires because this can be explained in other ways than by appealing to the way things are independently of our cognition of them, ways that are consistent with his metaphysical agnosticism. The fact that we have complex and contradictory value systems precludes the possibility of a state of affairs obtaining that exactly corresponds to all of our desires. Furthermore, humans are finite and often extremely weak creatures, meaning that we may simply be unable to construct a “perfect” world. Indeed, the very notion that we have needs and desires seems to entail that the world (whether it is given independently of cognition or is constructed by us) is, at least sometimes, not the way we would like it to be. Lanier Anderson argues that “the world can frustrate and surprise us” because, while our cognition of the world is dependent on our values and desires, the raw “chaos of sensation” is independent of these practical concerns.<sup>29</sup> I agree with Anderson that if there were a realm of pure sense-data, our conceptualizations would falsify it. However, it seems that Nietzsche cannot appeal to a determinate something (*X*) that we are incapable of cognizing to account for any fact about what we do cognize. Nietzsche’s rejection of our access to sense-data must be as thorough as his rejection of our access to the thing in itself. While Nietzsche may not reject the existence or conceivability of sense data as strongly as he does the existence or conceivability of the thing in itself, Nietzsche cannot appeal to sense data as an explanation for anything. He equally rejects metaphysics and an empiricism that appeals to a sensory given, both of which are equally opposed to his perspectival account of cognition.

Another response to this argument for a limited realism is available to Nietzsche, although it is not one he explicitly makes. Just as we do not have cognitive access to the way

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<sup>29</sup> Anderson 2005: 191.

the world is apart from how it appears to us, we are not perspicuous enough to ourselves as willing or knowing subjects either. Given this, there may exist some aspect of our cognitive or volitional functioning that is independent of our conscious needs and desires that produces the cognitions that come to us—many of which are not in accordance with what we would like to be the case. In his *Meditations* Descartes has a similar response to the argument that since the world (as it appears) does not conform to my will it must not be produced by my mind:

Nature has apparently taught me to think [that ideas resemble and are derived from things existing outside me]. But in addition I know by experience that these ideas do not depend on my will, and hence that they do not depend simply on me...And the most obvious judgment for me to make is that the thing in question transmits to me its own likeness rather than something else...*Then again, although these ideas do not depend on my will, it does not follow that they must come from things located outside me.* Just as the impulses...seem opposed to my will even though they are within me, so there may be some faculty not yet fully known to me, which produces these ideas without any assistance from external things; this is, after all, just how I have always thought ideas are produced in me when I am dreaming.<sup>30</sup>

Nietzsche is committed to the thesis that Descartes considers here, namely that the thinking subject may be split, i.e. that it may not be a simple, unitary thinking faculty, but may have various capacities and roles that are not in agreement just as what we imagine in dreams does not conform to what we would will to imagine were we awake. Given this, we are certainly not entitled to think that the source of the content of our cognitions is from mind-independent objects. It is true that we cannot affirm the contrary thesis that the content of what we cognize is determined solely by factors in the subject either. All Nietzsche is entitled to is that the way human beings cognize the world is at least in part determined by various factors pertaining to the cognizing subject and that these factors can be different such that the world that appears to one type of person may be inconsistent with the world as it

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<sup>30</sup> Descartes 1996: 26-27. Emphasis mine.

appears to another type. How and what we think tells us about our *relation* to things, rather than about things themselves or ourselves as thinking beings.

If we think of cognition as this relation between a particular human type and the world as it is in itself, there is an active element and a passive element involved in every act of cognition. The passive element is whatever is contributed by the thing that is cognized, and the active element is contributed by the constitution of the cognizing subject. We can certainly talk about our cognitions in terms of the way the world is (as we most often do), or we can think of them in terms of the way differences in the subject's constitution change the way things are cognized, as I have discussed in this section. However, even though we often talk about things in these terms, strictly speaking we can never know the exact ratio of activity to passivity in any cognition, i.e. we cannot know what in the cognition is the perspectival human contribution and what pertains to the thing itself. This has one particularly interesting consequence; given a case where two individuals agree in their cognition of an object or state of affairs, this agreement can be explained either by the objective adequacy of the cognition to thing cognized or by a shared set of relevant cognitive perspectives. I will discuss the implications of this for Nietzsche's concept of objectivity in the next chapter.

#### *Cognition and Practical Reason*

As we saw in the last section, cognition is the expression or projection of values onto experience whether they are the values of the individual having the experience or the historical values that have been inherited by the individual via language and culture. Indeed, Nietzsche argues that "all experiences are moral experiences, even in the realm of sense perception" (GS §114). What does it mean for an experience (or cognition) to be moral? The goal of this section is to explicate exactly what it means to claim that all experiences are

moral and to elucidate the connection, for Nietzsche, between cognition and practical reason.<sup>31</sup> I argue that Nietzsche's account of cognition as practical activity implies that the status of the judgments we make based on those cognitions is akin to Kant's concept of the postulates of practical reason—our judgments regarding God and the immortality of the soul which are valid for all rational moral agents, but which have no theoretical value because of the limiting conditions of possible experience.<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche himself did not explicitly make the connection between his account of cognition and Kant's practical philosophy, nor do I claim that Nietzsche intended to make such a connection. My only purpose is to show an affinity between the structure of their accounts of cognition and the postulates of practical reason in order to elucidate an aspect of Nietzsche's perspectivism. I will begin by briefly explaining how the postulates of practical reason relate to Kant's theory of cognition, and then show how Nietzsche's conception of cognition as practical activity matches up to Kant's account in substantively interesting ways.

Kant called his project in the *Critique of Pure Reason* a Copernican revolution in thought. Just as Copernicus discovered that the earth orbits the sun rather than the other way around, Kant reversed how the relationship between subject and objects is conceived in cognition. Instead of the mind conforming to the nature of objects as was traditionally conceived (Locke is a paradigmatic example), Kant showed that the objects of cognition conform to the structure of the mind of the cognizing subject. Among the tasks of the *Critique of Pure Reason* was to show what these structures of the cognizing subject are and determine the proper scope and limits of claims to knowledge. Of importance to this study,

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<sup>31</sup> I mean "practical reason" in the broad Kantian sense of the term, which is the domain of reasoning that regards the determination of the will as opposed to theoretical reason, which functions in the domain of theoretical cognition.

<sup>32</sup> See Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason*. 5:122-141 for more on the postulates of practical reason.

Kant took himself to have shown that forms of our intuition (space and time) as well as the concepts we employ to make judgments (e.g. causation and substance) apply only to things as they appear to us and not to things as they are in themselves because they are among the necessary conditions of possible experience. These fundamental aspects of our cognition of objects are our contributions to experience and not aspects of reality independent of cognition. In this respect we can see that Nietzsche's project and Kant's are similar in that they both take our cognitions to be determined by factors immanent to the cognizing subject and not mind-independent reality.<sup>33</sup> The only major difference between the two thinkers on this point is that Kant conceives of the concepts of the understanding as being necessary for any cognition whatsoever because of their dependence on logical truths, whereas Nietzsche takes all of the concepts we employ in experience to be entirely contingent on the type of beings we are.

After showing that the forms of space and time and the concepts of the understanding are the necessary conditions of possible experience, Kant then showed that these could only be applied to objects of possible experience and not beyond them. Ideas such as God, freedom, the world as a totality, and an immortal soul can never be the objects of any possible experience, and so we can, in principle, never have theoretical knowledge of them. Nevertheless, reason is inevitably led by its very nature to think these ideas, but they are only valid theoretically as regulative ideals and not as the objects of knowledge proper. This is not the end of the story for these ideas of reason, however. Reason, for Kant, in addition to having a theoretical employment that produces speculative knowledge also has a

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<sup>33</sup> Actually this is not strictly speaking correct. As I showed earlier in this chapter, Nietzsche must be agnostic with respect to what in an experience is contributed by the object (if anything) and the subject. All cognition is an indication of the relationship between cognizer and cognized where the nature of each as it is in itself is inaccessible.

practical employment. Reason gives the agent laws, which in virtue of their form alone are practically necessary, i.e. all rational agents are morally bound by the duties that follow from them. This moral law is expressed in a categorical imperative. Kant argues that in order for morality to be binding (as it in fact is), the agent must possess freedom, and additionally, in order for our duty to bring about the highest good to be possible (which it must be if it is to be binding), God and an immortal soul must exist. In other words, our rational awareness of being under a necessarily unconditional moral law forces us to posit the existence of freedom, God, and immortality—the latter two of which Kant calls the Postulates of Practical Reason. These postulates (and the idea of freedom), Kant claims, demand our rational assent, and so are subjectively necessary (given the sorts of cognizers we are), but have no value for theoretical knowledge because they go beyond the realm of any possible experience. Kant says, then, that we have practical knowledge of these things because they are subjectively necessary, and we can expect other rational beings to assent to their existing.

Returning to Nietzsche, it is clear from his discussion of moral judgments in GS §335 that he thinks judgments in general are best thought of as actions and not as the activity of detached (pure) reason. So when we make a judgment about some object or state of affairs the best way to understand why the judgment was made is to consider how the will was determined in judging that way rather than considering the (rational) reasons that might epistemically justify the judgment. Nietzsche makes this point even more clearly in a *Nachlass* note from 1888 where he cautions his readers as to the dangers of the “distinction between ‘theoretical’ and ‘practical,’ e.g. in the case of Kant.” In other words, he rejects Kant’s strict separation of these spheres and considers “thinking well” to be an action like any other. Instead of a “pure spirituality” (or a pure reason) determining how we pose the problems of “knowledge and metaphysics,” these are really the result of “the last pallid impression of a

physiological fact; the voluntary is absolutely lacking, everything is instinct, everything has been directed along certain lines from the beginning” (WP §458 1888). In another note that we will discuss at length later in this chapter, Nietzsche makes an even stronger claim:

The ‘apparent world,’ therefore, is reduced to a specific mode of action on the world, emanating from a center. Now there is no other mode of action whatever; and the ‘world’ is only a word for the totality of these actions. Reality consists precisely in this particular action and reaction of every individual part toward the whole. (WP §567 1888)

In other words, the cognition of the world (i.e., the world as it appears to us) is an action on the part of the cognizing subject (the “center” from which the world (for us) “emanates”). As Nietzsche writes, “We ‘know’ (or believe or imagine) just as much as may be *useful* in the interests of the human herd” (GS §354).<sup>34</sup> So whether we think of the judgment that expresses a particular cognition or the act of cognizing itself, they are both subject to the kinds of explanations one would give to any kind of action.<sup>35</sup> But how does all of this relate to Kant and the postulates of practical reason?

As we have already seen, Nietzsche is fairly close to Kant in terms of the Copernican revolution—the objects of experience depend, at least in part, on the cognizing subject. However, the concepts and categories that condition the experience of an object are contingent on the type of being in question. If Nietzsche is correct, then the necessity that Kant thinks our judgments regarding objects of possible experience have is merely an illusion, and so our judgments do not possess the kind of objective validity Kant thinks they do. Given a plurality of possible cognitive perspectives, there are as many different ways humans cognize the world as there are types. Therefore, there is no *necessary* intersubjective

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<sup>34</sup> Notice Nietzsche’s use of scare quotes around “know” indicating that he is not referring to knowing properly speaking but rather to what is usually presumed to be knowing.

<sup>35</sup> Richardson 1996: 36 makes this same point.

objective validity possessed by our judgments about the world.<sup>36</sup> This lack of objective validity is, however, not a lack at all for Nietzsche because it is based on conceiving of our cognition of objects from a perspective of a pure (not practically engaged) reason.

Given this significant departure for Nietzsche from Kant's position in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, we can see the importance of Nietzsche's conception of cognition as a practical activity that is directly conditioned by the needs and values of the cognizing subject. Our cognition of objects responds to the needs of a practical reason rather than a theoretical reason in the same way that the concept of freedom and the postulates of practical reason (God and the immortal soul) do for Kant. For example, the judgment that all events have causes is, in Kant's system, a synthetic *a priori* truth that satisfies the demands of theoretical reason. It is true that such a judgment can only be applied to things as they appear and not to things as they are in themselves, but it has objective validity because it is logically necessary that all cognizing subjects make such a judgment regarding appearances. In contrast, for Nietzsche the judgment that all events have causes is entirely contingent on the demands of the cognizer's practical reason, and one might say for one who does in fact judge that all events have causes, that proposition is a postulate of practical reason. Now of course Kant's postulates of practical reason have intersubjective validity because the demands of practical reason to which the postulates respond are necessary and applicable to all rational beings. For Nietzsche, however, things are more complicated. He denies both the objectivity and intersubjective universality of moral claims. No ethical imperatives are categorical for Nietzsche; all of them are hypothetical, i.e. contingent on some particular

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<sup>36</sup> There may be contingent intersubjective objective validity for judgments on the assumption that two or more individuals share a relevant cognitive perspective. This validity cannot be necessary for Nietzsche because any agreement on cognitive perspective is based on the contingent fact that two or more individuals are of a relevantly similar type.



need or desire of the individual or type in question.<sup>37</sup> So while Kant can claim that there is an intersubjective validity and practical objectivity (even though there is no theoretical objectivity) to the claims that humans are free, God exists, and the human soul is immortal, Nietzsche can only hope for intersubjective agreement about any judgment if the cognizers in question share a type of a relevant kind. And he can only call judgments (practically) objective relative to a particular contingent set of needs, desires, values, etc.

This highlights what are two of the biggest differences between Kant's system and Nietzsche's. First, for Kant theoretical ends and practical ends are both legitimate and separate domains of reason's interest. Nietzsche, while not denying that reason has a theoretical interest, thinks that reason's theoretical interests are always subordinate to reason's practical interests. All cognition is practically oriented; knowledge is never desired unconditionally or for its own sake (see Chapter Two and the introduction to Chapter One). Second, for Kant, within the domain of reason's practical interest, pure reason is able to legislate on its own behalf without being contaminated by the contingent desires of the subject. The subject gives itself the moral law by acknowledging what imperatives are rationally necessary in virtue of their form, independent of any content given in sensible nature. For Nietzsche, reason is never pure in this way. Reason does not exist without sensible/empirical content; it is always a response to a given need or desire. To use Kant's language, for Nietzsche the practical activity of a subject is always determined heteronomously and never autonomously.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> It is beyond the scope of this work to discuss Nietzsche's rejection of moral realism. Of course, a great deal of interesting work has been done in the area of Nietzsche's critique of traditional morality as his contribution to this domain of philosophy was recognized much sooner than his contributions to epistemology and metaphysics. For discussions of Nietzsche's meta-ethics relevant to the claim I just made that he rejects or questions the objectivity of moral claims, see e.g., Berry 2011 and Leiter 2002.

Patrick Wotling offers a similar view of Nietzsche's position in his article "«L'Ultimate Scepticism». *La Vérité Comme Régime D'Interprétation*," although he does not make these claims about the relation of the practical and theoretical in relation to Kant. He argues that Nietzsche shows that the practice of philosophers rather than the content of their theories betrays that there is no disinterested rationality and that we do not have the unfettered access to truth that we thought we had.

Truth is error, the truth is that species of error that reaches to conceal its nature and be received as the negation of that which is: this dramatic conclusion does it lead to the end of questioning pure and simple, and definitely return philosophical ambition to the number of illusions which has lulled humanity for all time?<sup>39</sup>

Here Wotling is asking whether Nietzsche's discovery that truth is in reality error end the philosophical project altogether.

Despite Nietzsche's initial, provisional conclusion is that there is no truth; truth does not exist, Nietzsche does not conclude that this is the end of philosophy. The "*culte de l'objectivité*" which would lament the fact that truth is illusion is not a universal human trait, as there are some cultures, e.g., Greek tragic culture, which do not unconditionally value truth for its own sake. Nietzsche goes on, Wotling claims, to introduce a new understanding of

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<sup>38</sup> In my research I have not discovered any other scholar who makes a connection between Kant's postulates of practical reason and Nietzsche's understanding of human cognition. Young (2006) makes a similar connection between Nietzsche's understanding of cognition and aesthetic judgments as described by Kant in the *Third Critique*. Two important recent works dealing with the relationship between Nietzsche and Kant's philosophy are Hill (2003) and Green (2002). Hill argues that Nietzsche developed all of his most important philosophical doctrines in response to Kant, and argues for this by showing "how one can arrive at distinctively Nietzschean positions by making plausible, intelligible moves in response to Kantian problems" (8). Green argues that much of the Kantian influence in Nietzsche's thinking occurs through Nietzsche's reading of the neo-Kantian Afrikan Spir. This influence, Green claims, is most evident in Nietzsche's falsification thesis, i.e., that our cognition of the world is necessarily false. Rather than understanding Nietzsche's claim that our cognitions about the world are false as being derived from the claim that our judgments are radically different from the way the world really is, Green holds that Nietzsche, via the neo-Kantian influence of Spir, thought that there were contradictions in the very concept of "empirical object."

<sup>39</sup> Wotling 2006: 485. Translation mine.

truth that both takes into account philosophy's practical and affective nature and allows for philosophical inquiry to continue.

In establishing the fact that the irrefutable is not truth, Nietzsche shows that *irrécusabilité* can and should be interpreted from a more fundamental ground. To resist the theoretical challenge is the sign of something quite different from theoretical validity: the sign that we are on a ground where the logic of conscious rationality, with its arsenal of procedures and demonstrative evidence, is no longer effective. In short, a sign that we are on practical ground - in other words, we are dealing with a value rather than a mere representation, within the range of speculation, and likely truth or falsity. And such has been the false fundamental question of philosophy: do not understand that truth is a value and not an essence.<sup>40</sup>

In other words, Wotling is claiming that the move from understanding philosophy as practice and not theory leads us to a new conception of truth: truth as value and not essence. So while Nietzsche's claim that there is no truth is valid, Wotling sees this claim as a provisional step toward Nietzsche's final considered position that truth is intimately tied up with value, that truth has practical rather than theoretical value.

I agree with Wotling that Nietzsche's understanding of truth is affected by his recognition of the practical and affective nature of the philosophical endeavor. However, Wotling seems to imply that Nietzsche simply replaces one concept of truth with another: truth as value instead of truth as essence. Here our disagreement is small but significant. I argue, as we will see, that Nietzsche does not replace one concept of truth with another but rather allows that we can understand truth in multiple senses. On some understandings of truth (including the traditional one, what Wotling calls "truth as essence") we do not have access to truth. On other understandings of truth (including truth as value), we can have access to truth. How this works will be made clear in the next section.

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<sup>40</sup> Wotling 2006: 487. Translation mine.

We now have a general picture of how Nietzsche thinks cognition works and an understanding of what Nietzsche thinks the implication for our grasp of the world is given that picture. Via Wotling we have seen that Nietzsche has the resources for a new conception of truth. The task of the rest of this project is to work out the philosophical implications of this position. The rest of the current chapter is concerned with two topics: 1. Determining how to understand Nietzsche's truth claims given the general skepticism and metaphysical agnosticism of his perspectivism and 2. Responding to objections that his perspectivism is self-referentially incoherent and epistemically self-defeating.

*Truth and Justification in Perspectivism*

Nietzsche writes in his *Nachlass* that “[t]here are many kinds of eyes. Even the sphinx has eyes—and consequently there are many kinds of ‘truths,’ and consequently there is no truth” (WP §540 1885). The first part of this aphorism is clearly an expression of Nietzsche's perspectivism, but Nietzsche, at least here, thinks that his position of cognition entails that there are many kinds of truths, i.e. there is not a single true description of the world and this has the consequence that there is no truth at all. Taken as a whole, this seems to be a self-referentially inconsistent claim. It, on the one hand, claims that there are multiple truths (as many truths as there are kinds of eyes), and on the other hand, it claims that there is no truth. Additionally, by being a declarative sentence, Nietzsche is making and advancing the truth claim that there are no truths, this seems to performatively contradict both the claim that there are many truths and the claim that there is no truth. Is Nietzsche hopelessly confused? Or is there more going on here? In this section, I argue that the *Nachlass* section cited above, when taken in the context of Nietzsche's broader theory of cognition, is not incoherent, and in doing so I hope to further elucidate Nietzsche's theory of cognition.

As I noted in Chapter One, there is broad, if not universal, consensus within the secondary literature that Nietzsche uses terms like “truth” and “knowledge” in many different senses.<sup>41</sup> His project is not to determine what the essence of “truth” is, and so the sense in which he is using the term must be determined by the context in which it is found. On the assumption that Nietzsche is in fact using “truth” in multiple senses, we can show that on a purely formal level, the claim above from the *Nachlass* is not self-referentially incoherent. By calling two distinct senses of “truth” “truth<sub>1</sub>” and “truth<sub>2</sub>”, we can reformulate the claim as follows: “There are many kinds of truth<sub>1</sub>, and consequently there is no truth<sub>2</sub>.” On this assumption of different senses of truth, the two clauses no longer contradict one another, and if Nietzsche is advancing the claim as a whole as “true<sub>1</sub>” and not “true<sub>2</sub>” then the self-referential inconsistency goes away. However, one further problem remains; what could it mean that there are many kinds of truth? What could it mean that there is no truth? Answering these questions will require making clear what the different senses of “truth” Nietzsche employs are and the status his positive truth claims are supposed to have vis-à-vis the claim that there is no truth.

A problem here is the fact that Nietzsche makes all sorts of claims that are explicitly *truth* claims. For example in the *Antichrist*, Christianity is criticized because, among other things, “neither morality nor religion has even a single point of contact with reality” (A §15).<sup>42</sup> Of course this could be a problem for Nietzsche even if he did not invoke things like

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<sup>41</sup> Richardson (1996: 232n31) is the one most cited for this insight.

<sup>42</sup> However, Nietzsche offers a very idiosyncratic concept of truth in the *Antichrist*, much more so than the “internal” conception of truth that I attribute to him in the following paragraphs. So perhaps it is a mistake to think that this alethic claim could even be mistaken as evidence against my reading of Nietzsche’s perspectivism. The theologian’s concepts of true and false are “necessarily reversed.” For the theologian “whatever is harmful to life is called ‘true’; whatever elevates it, enhances, affirms, justifies it, and makes it triumphant, is called false” (A §9). If Nietzsche employed a concept of truth more like the commonsense notion of correspondence with reality, then the theologians would not be “reversing” the concepts of true and

“truth” and “reality” for his claims. Indeed the very act of putting forward a theory of anything (including cognition) in an earnest, straightforward, and non-ironic manner is to make a claim that one’s theory is true (in some sense). Of course one could argue that Nietzsche is doing something other than making straightforward, earnest truth claims such as engaging in ironic play, but setting that possibility aside in the interest of taking him seriously as a philosopher engaged with the tradition of western philosophy, Nietzsche must, at least some of the time, employ a concept of truth that is consistent with his making truth claims. The rest of this section will explore what avenues along these lines are open to Nietzsche.<sup>43</sup>

Borrowing from Lanier Anderson, I will distinguish between two conceptions of truth, internal and external, which Nietzsche employs throughout his works.<sup>44</sup> The external conception of truth (truth<sub>E</sub>) Anderson equates with our “commonsense” understanding of truth. As such, truth<sub>E</sub> possesses four essential characteristics:

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false by employing them in this way, they would simply be using those concepts incorrectly. If Nietzsche is to be taken seriously in his objection to the theologians for reversing the concepts, then he at some points at least must use “true” and “false” to designate that which enhances and affirms life and that which is harmful to life respectively.

<sup>43</sup> Brian Leiter writes that

Nietzsche’s explicit *empiricism*—his view that ‘all evidence of truth comes only from the senses’ (BGE 134)—is impossible to reconcile with the Skeptical Reading [the view that Nietzsche is claiming that we do not have knowledge or that there is no truth]. For any *empiricist* critique necessarily presupposes that there exists some epistemically privileged class of claims about the world—those based on, or inferable from, sense experience. But a class of claims can only be *epistemically* privileged if it is possible for there to be *objective* truths about them and for us to have *objective* knowledge of those truths. Yet it is this possibility that the Skeptical Reading rules out. (Leiter 2002: 14)

However, Leiter fails to appreciate the possibility that there may be different senses of “truth” as well as “knowledge” that Nietzsche employs. Regarding Nietzsche’s empiricism, it need not be epistemically privileged in an absolute sense for Nietzsche to prefer it. All he needs is for it to be privileged within the context of a particular cognitive perspective, which implies no knowledge or epistemic privilege a-perspectively, for Nietzsche’s empiricism to be consistent with what Leiter calls the “Skeptical Reading.”

<sup>44</sup> See Anderson 1998: 14.

1. Bivalence—For any proposition  $x$ ,  $x$  is either true or false. There are only two possible truth-values.
2. Uniqueness—There is only one fact of the matter. For any proposition  $x$ , it is not the case that  $x$  is true and false.
3. Independence—The truth is dependent on the way the mind-independent world is, not on a cognizer's beliefs or level of epistemic justification.
4. Correspondence—Truth captures the way the world is. For any proposition  $x$ ,  $x$  is true if and only if it is the case that  $x$ .

Given Nietzsche's metaphysical agnosticism that we have already discussed, it is clear that cognizers such as ourselves can never know if something is true<sub>E</sub>. It is, strictly speaking, possible that some of our beliefs are true<sub>E</sub>, but this would be, from an epistemological perspective, entirely an accident.

For Nietzsche's internal conception of truth (truth<sub>I</sub>), truth is relative to "norms and standards drawn from within a circle of our cognitive practices."<sup>45</sup> Each distinct cognitive perspective has its own standards of rationality, what counts as good evidence, and conditions under which something counts as true. A proposition is true<sub>I</sub> only in the context of a given perspective. Nietzsche, for example, employs this concept of truth in his discussion of synthetic *a priori* judgments. Contra Kant, he claims that such judgments are not logically necessary but rather necessary "for the preservation of creatures like ourselves." Epistemically, "we have no right to them, *in our mouths* they are nothing but false judgments" (BGE §11; emphasis mine). Given Nietzsche's metaphysical agnosticism, he cannot conclude that synthetic *a priori* judgments are false<sub>E</sub> because that would mean having cognitive access to the way the world is in itself. However, employing a different conception

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<sup>45</sup> Anderson 1998: 14. This may seem like a utilitarian conception of truth, but as Cox (1999: 36) shows, Nietzsche clearly rejects pragmatic conceptions of truth and observes that truth and utility of are often at odds with one another. Indeed Nietzsche must hold this if he is to consistently hold that false judgments are at least sometimes the ones that improve chances of survival and flourishing.

of truth, a conception of truth with conditions that are tied to the cognitive perspective of the cognizing subject, Nietzsche can claim that such judgments are false “in our mouths,” i.e.  $\text{false}_I$ . This internal concept of truth is the sense of truth Nietzsche employs (if he is to be consistent) when making his own positive claims. He is free to reject that anyone is justified in claiming that any judgment  $\text{true}_E$ , and at the same time maintain that we sometimes are justified in making  $\text{true}_I$  claims.<sup>46</sup>

We are now in a position to understand Nietzsche’s famous “falsification thesis,” i.e. his claim that our cognitions of the world necessarily falsify the world.

And we are fundamentally inclined to claim that the falsest judgments (which include the synthetic judgments a priori) are the most indispensable for us; that without accepting the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the purely invented world of the unconditional and self-identical, without constant falsification of the world by means of numbers, man could not live—that renouncing false judgments would mean renouncing life. (BGE §4)

In this passage, Nietzsche seems to be claiming that our most subjectively certain (and thus  $\text{true}_I$ ) judgments (e.g. that things are self-identical and the laws of logic) are a “falsification of the world,” a clear violation of his position of metaphysical agnosticism. What I take Nietzsche to mean (drawing on the distinction between the two senses of truth Nietzsche employs) is that any time we claim that a proposition  $x$  is  $\text{true}_E$ , our claim is  $\text{false}_I$ . It is, of course, entirely possible that it is  $\text{true}_E$  that  $x$  is  $\text{true}_E$ , but Nietzsche would argue that we are never epistemically justified in making that claim. Any claim that something is  $\text{true}_E$  is unjustified from any human cognitive perspective, and so could never reach the status of the kind of truth we have access to ( $\text{truth}_I$ ). What gets falsified when we take our cognitions to

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<sup>46</sup> Given Nietzsche’s claim that we have already discussed that there are multiple distinct human perspectives, some of which may be incommensurate, this position seems to entail an unacceptable global relativism about truth. This serious charge will be the topic of Chapter Five.



be of the world as it is in itself are the very conditions under which human cognition is possible, and hence those cognitions falsify *our* world—the only world that can matter to us.

Nietzsche provides us with one further puzzle regarding his internal conception of truth:

Indeed, what forces us at all to suppose that there is an essential opposition of ‘true’ and ‘false’? Is it not sufficient to assume degrees of apparentness and, as it were, lighter and darker shadows and shades of appearance—different ‘values,’ to use the language of painters? Why couldn’t the world that concerns us—be a fiction? (BGE §34)

Here we have Nietzsche questioning our ability to use the distinction between true and false bivalently, by which I take Nietzsche to mean truth and falsity in the external sense. So far so good, but instead of contrasting this with an internal conception of truth, Nietzsche contrasts truth<sub>E</sub> with “degrees of apparentness” and “light and darker shadows and shades of appearance.” This seems to indicate that Nietzsche rejects absolute bivalence as an attribute of truth<sub>I</sub>. How are we to make sense of this? Recall that on this internal conception of truth, a proposition’s being true is tied to its being justified within a particular perspective, i.e. proposition  $x$  is true<sub>I</sub> if and only if it possesses the correct kind of epistemic fit with the cognitive perspective in question. Given that different perspectives may have different standards of what counts as a good enough epistemic fit for a proposition to count as true, there can be no non-perspectival answer to the question as to what counts as sufficient epistemic fit. Therefore, one cannot exclude that for some perspectives, there are degrees of such fitness, and so beliefs and propositions can be more or less true<sub>I</sub> and more or less false<sub>I</sub>. The property of bivalence is rejected for the kind of truth to which we have cognitive access.

Notice, however, that this passage does not commit Nietzsche to the view that truth<sub>I</sub> comes in degrees for all perspectives, and it might be more correct to say that Nietzsche, in this passage, considers doing away with truth talk altogether given that the “world that

concerns us” is a “fiction” and that we lack cognitive access to truth<sub>E</sub>, the commonsense understanding of truth. However, perhaps given the awkwardness of using the locution “it appears that...” for every claim, Nietzsche frequently makes truth claims using his internal conception of truth.

We are now in a position to analyze the *Nachlass* claim with which this section began: “There are many kinds of eyes. Even the sphinx has eyes—and consequently there are many kinds of ‘truths,’ and consequently there is no truth” (WP §540 1885). Utilizing the internal and external senses of truth, we can understand this claim as follows:

It is true<sub>I</sub> that (there are many kinds of ‘truths<sub>I</sub>’ and consequently there is no truth<sub>E</sub>).

Notice that Nietzsche cannot claim that it is true<sub>E</sub> that there is no truth<sub>E</sub> both for the epistemic reasons dictated by Nietzsche’s metaphysical agnosticism and because of the content of the very concept of truth<sub>E</sub>, i.e. bivalence, uniqueness, independence, and correspondence. However, this does not mean that Nietzsche is entitled to claim the contrary of this, that it is false<sub>E</sub> that there is no truth<sub>E</sub>. What does it mean that Nietzsche is entitled to neither of these claims about truth<sub>E</sub> and his positive claim that it is true<sub>I</sub> that there is no truth<sub>E</sub>? The totally perspectival character of human cognition dictates this seemingly strange position. For any possible human cognizer there is no truth<sub>E</sub> because given the constraints of having a perspective and no absolute view on what is the case, our judgments, experiences, and cognitions are completely tied to our cognitive position, and every possible claim we can make is relative to that position.

The only standpoint that matters then for Nietzsche is the finite, human one. Whatever there may be (if anything) beyond or apart from the finite cognitive perspective which is necessarily ours is of total indifference to us, not just from a practical perspective

but from an epistemological and methodological one as well. This leads Nietzsche to the seemingly absurd view that every philosophical position that we take, every claim that we make, and every cognition of the world that we have is necessarily for us and is not about the way things are in themselves. The straightforward external sense of truth with the familiar features of bivalence, uniqueness, independence, and correspondence cannot be squared with the limited, finite nature of our cognitive, experiential relationship to reality. This is not to say that we cannot make sense of claims that purport to be about perspective-independent reality; it is merely to say that such claims are always epistemically cut off from the reality they purport to be about. This seemingly paradoxical position is beset with philosophical problems, many self-referential in character. The rest of the chapter will deal with the problems of self-reference and outline responses that are available to Nietzsche.

#### *Some Philosophical Problems*

In the last section we dealt with one of the simplest of the self-referential difficulties with Nietzsche's position—his claim that (it is true that) there is no truth. If Nietzsche were using a single concept of truth in this assertion than his claim would be incoherent and necessarily false. We will call this the problem of self-referential inconsistency.<sup>47</sup> However, as we saw Nietzsche employs two distinct concepts of truth, one of which is tied to a cognitive perspective and the other being a more commonsense, traditional notion of truth. By

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<sup>47</sup> Reginster 2001 nicely summarizes the two main strategies for dealing with the problem of self-referential inconsistency in Nietzsche's perspectivism. He calls them the "two-level" solution and the "relativism" solution. The two-level solution holds that some of Nietzsche's claims (including the claim of perspectivism itself) are prior to and thus outside the scope of Nietzsche's perspectival theory of knowledge, i.e. they are true independent of one's cognitive perspective. This entirely diffuses the issue of perspectivism being self-referentially inconsistent. Hales and Welshon (2000) defend this view precisely because it diffuses the problem of inconsistency. However, the two-level solution substantially weakens the perspectivism thesis and also seems to go against Nietzsche's own admission that perspectivism itself is claimed from his own perspective. Additionally it seems ad hoc because there is no principled reason to make an exception to the claim that we can only know things in a perspective-relative way. The "relativist" approach claims that all of Nietzsche's theses including the claim of perspectivism are made only from his own perspective. I defend a version of the relativism solution here.

employing both of these concepts of truth (and not maintaining that there is one “correct” notion of truth), Nietzsche can consistently claim that from within a cognitive perspective there is no access to either cognizer-independent truth or to whether there is cognizer-independent truth at all.

This solution to the problem of self-referential inconsistency, while successful (if a second, internal conception of truth is granted), only leads to another self-referential problem for Nietzsche’s position. If judgments can only be true from an individual’s own cognitive perspective, then it follows that the theory of perspectivism itself is only true, i.e., true from within a cognitive perspective. This does not amount to a contradiction as the first problem of self-reference did, but if more cannot be said, Nietzsche’s theory of cognition leaves much to be desired because we are presumably interested in more than just what is true from Nietzsche’s own idiosyncratic perspective. The worry here is two-fold: first, if perspectivism is true only from a perspective (namely Nietzsche’s), then might not there be perspectives in which perspectivism is false? This seems like much too weak of a conclusion to suit Nietzsche, and it leaves open the obvious objection that given some other interpretive perspective (perhaps the reader’s own), many of their claims are true according to a traditional correspondence notion of truth and perspectivism is therefore false in an absolute sense.

Nietzsche does not intend to show that perspectivism is true in an absolute, perspective-independent sense or that perspectivism must be true from every possible perspective, because to do so would violate perspectivism’s claim that we cannot cognize anything outside of perspectives in which we are able to (at least hypothetically) place ourselves. Rather, Nietzsche intends for perspectivism to be true in a perspective-relative way given a broad, generic perspective that he thinks he shares with many of his

contemporaries (and presumably us, his future readers, as well). In other words, Nietzsche thinks he shares enough background assumptions and presuppositions with a certain (large) set of his intellectual contemporaries that he thinks they should be convinced by perspectivism, if they are to remain consistent (based on their own standards of consistency) to their own most basic set of philosophical/intellectual commitments. This does not undermine the scope that the theory of perspectivism is supposed to have. It is supposed to be a theory of all cognition, i.e. every cognizer inhabits a certain limited perspective and cannot get at perspective-independent truth. While the scope of the theory is universal, it is possible that there are those who may not be able to justifiably or honestly affirm it, and so from their particular perspectives it is false (in a perspective-relative sense). Nietzsche, however, believes that none of us, his readers, ultimately falls into that category if we are honest with ourselves.<sup>48</sup> Perspectivism then does not violate its own commitments, but still remains a theory about how cognition in general functions. Perspectivism—as a theory of cognition—is “merely” an interpretation, not a claim about the way things are in themselves, but it is a theory that Nietzsche thinks we cannot help but accept without changing some of our most basic philosophical and pre-philosophical commitments. Since we do not have direct control over whether or not we adopt at least most of those commitments, Nietzsche thinks we have no choice but to accept perspectivism.<sup>49</sup>

Nietzsche himself is not unaware of the self-referential nature of his position. In BGE §22 Nietzsche criticizes a particular interpretation of physics as “nature’s conformity to

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<sup>48</sup> In the next chapter I develop the notion of objectivity that’s implicit here and its relationship to self-honesty.

<sup>49</sup> This solution is similar to the one proposed by Anderson (1998: 8-10). It has the virtue of avoiding the *ad hoc* character of the two-level solution while at the same time maintaining the radical nature of perspectivism as a theory of truth and knowledge without succumbing to the self-referential problem. In effect this solution is an acceptance of the charge of self-reference but a denial that such a charge is pernicious for the theory because there exists a concept of justification that is broadly shared across human perspectives.

law.” Science describes the predictability of the course of natural events as the result of the existence of laws of nature, but in keeping with his perspectivism, this “is no matter of fact, no ‘text.’” Because of this, it follows that “somebody might come along who, with opposite intentions and modes of interpretation, could read out of the same ‘nature,’ and with regard to the same phenomena” an entirely different explanation and way of describing naturally occurring events. Nietzsche’s suggestion for such an alternative interpretation is to see nature as “the tyrannically inconsiderate and relentless enforcement of claims of power” rather than as obedience to laws. On a superficial reading of this passage, it may seem as though Nietzsche’s criticism of a “laws of nature” interpretation of natural events is that it is not a fact and is merely interpretation. However, it is not because it is an interpretation that such a view is to be rejected. It is to be rejected because it is ‘bad philology’ and an imposition of a certain set of values, namely naïve “humanitarian” ones that are the symptom of “the democratic instincts of the modern soul.” Nietzsche’s own suggestion for how to interpret natural events as the enforcement of claims of power is also acknowledged as a “mere” interpretation that does not get at some underlying absolute fact of the matter that is independent of the one cognizing it. Nietzsche anticipates this objection: “Supposing that this also is only interpretation—and you will be eager enough to make this objection?—well, so much the better.” Nietzsche’s alternative interpretation is not to be favored because it gets at the fact of the matter; no human interpretation can accomplish that. Rather, it is to be favored for other reasons, either because it coheres more fully with one’s broader cognitive perspective or because it expresses values that are to be favored over others. A full discussion of the reasons for favoring one interpretation over another will have to wait until Chapter Five.

Though the *Beyond Good and Evil* section just discussed does not deal explicitly with cognition or perspectivism, it does highlight how our conceptualization of the world is always an interpretation of a (metaphorical) text that is never given to us in itself, and it shows that Nietzsche recognizes the force of charges of self-reference as objections to his position and his willingness to accept the charge (see also WP §15 1887). He accepts that his theories are self-referential, but he denies that they are perniciously so. His insistence in GS §374 that “we cannot look around our own corner” and that the “human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself in its own perspectives, and *only* in these,” in addition to his willingness to acknowledge the self-referential nature of his views about the interpretive nature of all conceptualizations of reality, indicate that he would accept something like the solution I have outlined above, viz. that perspectivism is only true on an perspective-dependent notion of truth but such that the relevant perspective is shared by all to whom he addresses his philosophical writings.

This solution of presuming a shared cognitive perspective is also able to deal with the problem that Nietzsche’s position is epistemically self-defeating. Nietzsche claims that we do not and cannot know anything. If he is right, then we can never know that this very theory is correct.<sup>50</sup> In other words, Nietzsche’s own theory dictates that if the theory is true, we can never know that this is the case. I do not dispute (and nor would Nietzsche) that this objection hits its mark; Nietzsche’s perspectivism is something that we can never know to be the case in a perspective-independent way. However, this need not worry a defender of perspectivism because, as we have seen, Nietzsche is only concerned with what is

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<sup>50</sup> Conway 1997 identifies another self-referential problem in Nietzsche’s late works with the same formal structure as the objection that Nietzsche’s position is epistemically self-defeating. According to Conway, Nietzsche claims that modernity is lacking because of its extreme decadence, and Nietzsche claims he has access to this truth because he himself suffers from the same decadence. If decadence should undermine our faith in modernity, then should not it also undermine our trust in Nietzsche’s diagnosis of it, asks Conway.

inescapable given a cognitive perspective he presumes he shares with his contemporaries and interlocutors. We cannot know that we do not know anything in the sense of knowledge that is denied to human cognizers by perspectivism, viz., knowledge of the world as it is in itself, but we can know in the sense of what coheres with one's cognitive perspective and is consistent with a perspective's internal standards of rational acceptability. So to the opponent who would retort to Nietzsche that perspectivism, in its very statement, precludes our knowing that perspectivism is true, he would reply as he did to those who differ with him on how to interpret the physical necessity of nature: "Supposing that perspectivism also cannot be known—and you will be eager enough to make this objection?—well, so much the better."

*Nietzsche's Revaluation of the "Merely" Apparent*

Cognition, as we have seen, is for Nietzsche a practical activity of what one could call "world construction;" its aim being to promote the interests of a particular type of life and not to apprehend the world as it actually is. In order to make this claim Nietzsche must make use of the appearance/reality distinction. However, Nietzsche thinks, from a practical standpoint, this opposition must be reevaluated.<sup>51</sup> Traditionally that which is merely apparent has a degraded status relative to reality; appearance is worth less and is to be replaced, if possible, by apprehension of the way things really are. But when human cognizers are unable to apprehend reality in principle, as Nietzsche's perspectivism tells us is the case, then reality's elevated status relative to "mere" appearance is absurd. Nietzsche, therefore, argues that the value accorded to the "merely" apparent needs to be reconsidered, and the opposition between appearance and reality done away with for practical purposes.

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<sup>51</sup> Cox (1999: 38) in giving his anti-skeptical reading of Nietzsche's perspectivism argues that Nietzsche rejects the truth/appearance distinction altogether. However, without allowing for the legitimacy of that distinction Nietzsche cannot claim, as he does, that error has been a condition for human survival.



Recall our discussion of the “History of an Error” section of *Twilight of the Idols*. Nietzsche, using “True world” to designate reality as it is in itself, argues that since it is “unattainable” and hence unknowable, it is no longer “good for anything,” and hence it has “become useless and superfluous.” He then entreats his readers to “abolish” the true world because of its complete irrelevance. If the idea of the “true world” and all talk of it as well have been abolished, then it does not make any sense to speak of an “apparent world” either. If one abolishes the idea of the “true world,” then one abolishes the idea of a merely apparent one as well. Nietzsche is not claiming that there actually is no “true world,” and he is not claiming that we cannot make conceptual sense of the distinction between appearance and reality. He is claiming that the concept of a true world behind all appearances is *practically* meaningless and hence the distinction between appearance and reality is superfluous for us once we have understood this fact. Nietzsche makes a similar point in *Beyond Good and Evil*, claiming that the higher value given to attaining the truth relative to “mere appearance” is “no more than a moral prejudice,” a prejudice that is the “worst proved assumption there is in the world” (BGE §34).

Nietzsche connects this revaluation in favor of appearance to his critique of the will to truth in the preface to the second edition of *The Gay Science*. He applauds the Greeks (with the exception one may assume of Socrates and Plato) for being “superficial” “out of profundity.” The will to uncover the mysteries under the veils of appearance, i.e. the will to truth, is “bad taste.” For Nietzsche’s philosophers of the future, the “youthful madness in the love of truth [has] lost their charm,” and hyperbolically they “no longer believe truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn” (GS Preface §4). Nietzsche calls for artist-philosophers who will embrace the surface (i.e. the appearance) of things and affirm that which is apprehended, all in the service of an overflowing life. This preference for

appearances and surfaces is to be done rather than focusing on the truth that lies hidden beneath the surface because, as practical activity, cognition's role is to serve life and *not* to get at a truth, which cognition cannot obtain in principle anyway.

In this chapter I have shown how Nietzsche employs the metaphors of vision and textual interpretation to elucidate his theory of cognition. These metaphors show us that the world as it appears to us is actually only one possible interpretation among many made on the basis of our drives, needs, values, and desires. This, Nietzsche thinks, collapses the distinction Kant made between practical reason and theoretical reason, with what was once labeled as theoretical reason being a mere subset of ways we think that allow us to get along in the world either to survive and reproduce or flourish and exert our power. Nietzsche uses this picture to develop perspective-relative conceptions of truth and knowledge, which allow him to remain a skeptic about absolute, perspective-independent knowledge and also to make sense of the "truths" we "know" both in science and everyday discourse as well as the truth of perspectivism itself. All of these considerations with the addition of Nietzsche's commitment of affirming our lot in the world, i.e. affirming life, necessitate a reevaluation of the merely apparent and a rejection of the distinction between reality and the merely apparent for all practical purposes.

This view may seem to necessitate a global relativism, if not about absolute truth, then about what may be justifiably claimed. On the surface, Nietzsche's view that appearance is worth more than (or completely replaces) truth about the world as it is in itself would seem to indicate that he is content with such a global relativism, each individual or group being justified (from a practical perspective) in claiming whatever promotes their type of life. However, as we have seen Nietzsche thinks that there are some positions that *do* possess a certain kind of epistemic privilege, not just for an individual within their own

personal idiosyncratic perspective but also for, if not all individuals, then at least a significant set of Nietzsche's readership. How can Nietzsche continue to affirm his theory of perspectivism as the picture of human cognition and maintain that some positions are better than others, as he must for his position to be coherent? The task of the next chapter is determine the answer to this question, which amounts to answering how Nietzsche might respond to the charge that his position amounts to a global relativism about epistemic justification.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CRITERIA OF EVALUATION: OBJECTIVITY AND VALUE FOR LIFE

The hidden history of philosophy, the psychology of its great names: ‘How much truth can a spirit endure, how much truth does a spirit dare?’—this became for me the real standard of value. Error is cowardice—every achievement of knowledge is a consequence of courage, of severity toward oneself, of cleanliness toward oneself—Such an experimental philosophy as I live anticipates experimentally even the possibilities of the most fundamental nihilism; but this does not mean that it must halt at a negation, a No, a will to negation. It wants rather to cross over to the opposite of this—to a Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection—it wants the eternal circulation:--the same things, the same logic and illogic of entanglements. The highest state a philosopher can attain: to stand in a Dionysian relationship to existence—my formula for this is *amor fati*.

WP §1041 1888

#### *Introduction*

Nietzsche’s perspectivism, simply put, is the position that human cognition can never, in principle, adequately apprehend things as they are in themselves, and therefore no judgments regarding the world’s deep metaphysical structure are justified or count as knowledge (as knowledge and truth are traditionally understood). That which is cognized (how things appear) is determined by factors irreducibly relative to an individual, a cultural/linguistic group, or species. This entails that all of our judgments are grounded, so far as we can tell, not in the way things really are but in the way our cognitive faculties are conditioned by various factors, some of which are idiosyncratic while others are more or less broadly shared among humans in a given context or even humans in general as a species. This position, even if it is able to overcome the difficulties raised and responded to in the

previous chapter,<sup>1</sup> seems to entail an unacceptable form of global relativism about what may be justifiably claimed. As we have seen, this is not relativism regarding traditional notions of truth; such truths Nietzsche claims are simply not accessible to human cognizers.<sup>2</sup> However, given the sort of truth to which we do have access—the way things are from a particular cognizer’s perspective—relativism of an unacceptable variety seems explicitly built in to the theory itself.

The problem is this: if the only sorts of justification we possess and the only kind of truth to which we have access are relative to the way things seem to a cognizer, then how are we to evaluate competing claims without simply giving up and admitting that things seem one way to one person and a different way to another? Or to put it another way, given that  $x$  and not- $x$  cannot both be true at the same time (the law of non-contradiction), how are we to adjudicate between the claims “ $x$ ” and “not- $x$ ”, if all that determines what is justified or true (in Nietzsche’s perspective-relative sense of true) is determined by an individual’s perspective? What kinds of criteria of evaluation are available to make such adjudications? Guided by these questions, the purpose of this chapter is to explicate in what sense Nietzsche can speak of objectivity, to examine the various possible outcomes when alethic disagreement occurs, and to determine what kinds of standards are available for Nietzsche to decide between competing claims. This is a tall task given that according to Nietzsche’s perspectivism, each possible cognitive perspective contains its own standards of rationality and its own truth conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> To recap, these objections were that Nietzsche’s position is self-referentially incoherent, self-referentially weak, and epistemically self-defeating.

<sup>2</sup> Some, e.g. Cinelli (1993), have considered only the problem of whether Nietzsche is a relativist or not with regard to (perspective-independent) truth. Nietzsche, as I showed in the previous chapter, is not a relativist in this sense. In this chapter, I only need to deal with the problem of relativism with regard to epistemic justification/perspective-relative truth.

I argue in this chapter that Nietzsche develops two concepts of objectivity that allow him to claim that some positions are more epistemically justified than others and to adjudicate between competing truth claims—thus preventing his theory of cognition from succumbing to an “anything goes” relativism concerning justification and making Nietzsche’s own assertion of various truth claims grounded in something other than simply his idiosyncratic perspective. This is important because if we are to take Nietzsche’s position on cognition (or anything else for that matter) seriously in a philosophical way, we must be concerned about whether there is any robust sense in which someone could be justified in holding those positions. Over the course of explicating Nietzsche’s two concepts of objectivity, I show how Nietzsche’s theory can handle intersubjective disagreement despite ultimately concluding that Nietzsche, even though he is not an “anything goes” relativist, is committed to a robust form of relativism that may still be troubling to many readers.

One brief note before proceeding: one common (and misplaced) objection to any subject-relative theory of truth or justification is that it allows for someone to believe whatever he or she wants. While this may certainly be a good objection to some forms of relativism, it does not touch Nietzsche’s version. Even though how the world is cognized is determined by “subjective” factors, these are not factors within the scope of a human cognizer’s control. The implication of Nietzsche’s views is that we do not choose our cognitive perspective (although we can provisionally take other perspectives on in order to understand them), and we cannot choose what it is we believe. An anti-relativist will argue that the (subject-independent) world impinges on our faculties. The Nietzschean counters

that while the world *may* impinge on our faculties, it also may not at all.<sup>3</sup> In either case it is not up to us what perspectives we take on the world.

Nietzsche does not directly claim that it is not up to us what perspectives we take on the world, but this is implied by his views on the nature of conscious thinking. He claims that “by far the greater part of conscious thinking must still be included among instinctive activities” (BGE §3) and that “[understanding] is actually nothing but a *certain behavior of the instincts toward one another*” (GS §333). Thus not only does Nietzsche hold that cognition cannot have any ultimately rational foundation, it cannot have a conscious foundation either. Our perspectives on the world have their root in drives that are outside of our conscious control. This may seem to contradict his claim in GM III, §12 that:

There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective ‘knowing’; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity,’ be.

Here it seems that Nietzsche is claiming that we can “allow” affects to speak about a thing, i.e., we exercise some degree of control over the perspectives we adopt. This is certainly true for Nietzsche, and it will be especially important for one of the senses of objectivity available to him that I discuss in this chapter. However, I take it that in this passage Nietzsche is describing taking on perspectives that are additional to the original one the thinker initially occupies, the one he or she is born into. So while a philosopher can train him or herself to adopt new perspectives in order see things with “more eyes,” the original, unreflective

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<sup>3</sup> We have to leave room for this possibility given that Nietzsche’s position is metaphysically agnostic (as described in Chapter Three). Since for any claim about the way the world really is, Nietzsche must remain agnostic. This includes claims about realism vs. anti-realism, realism vs. idealism, and the extent to which the outside world impinges itself on our cognitive faculties. In other words, we cannot tell, from our limited finite human perspective, the extent to which what we cognize is determined by active processes within the cognizing subject or passive affectations from outside the subject.

cognitive perspective that one has and which shapes how one thinks about everything else is determined by instinctual factors outside the thinker's control.

We simply are not in a position to tell the difference between being affected passively from the outside or actively from the inside as the source of the content of our cognition. What we do know though, according to Nietzsche, is that we conceptualize the world differently depending on the unconscious background conditions of values, needs, desires, and drives. Therefore, the problem of relativism that needs to be addressed is not that Nietzsche's perspectivism allows us to believe whatever we want to believe. What needs to be addressed is whether Nietzsche's perspectivism has the resources to evaluate the merits of competing truth claims and to claim that some positions are more or less epistemically justified than other positions. I argue that perspectivism does have the resources to make such evaluations—despite being a kind of relativism about both (perspective-relative)-truth and epistemic justification.

Lest we lose the forest for the trees in this purely epistemic debate about objectivity and relativism, this chapter also serves another important function. In showing how Nietzsche overcomes some of the charges leveled against his epistemology, we can also see what the absolute limits of rational inquiry are for Nietzsche and the furthest one can go in such an inquiry while being faithful to the will to truth. As we saw in the first two chapters, while Nietzsche does not completely reject the will to truth, he does not believe it should be pursued unconditionally or for its own sake. Truth, when it is pursued, is to be pursued for other ends, and sometimes other values, when they are at odds with truth, are to take precedence over truth. We will see in this chapter that some of the most intractable disagreements that arise in intellectual discourse cannot be resolved through rational inquiry



because the positions in question are rooted in such different value sets that there are no relevant shared standards of rationality to which to appeal. These are the cases where Nietzsche must appeal to some other standard besides truth to determine which position is the best. This takes us right to the heart of the Nietzschean project, which I argued in Chapter Two is about overcoming nihilism and affirming life, values which are, needless to say, not truth. How Nietzsche's theory of cognition directly contributes to this project will have to wait for Chapter Six, but this chapter shows us how values other than truth (such as Nietzschean affirmation of life) are used to evaluate the relative merit of competing theoretical positions.

*The Problem of Global Relativism*

One of the most interesting attempts that has been made to deal with this problem of relativism is a solution inherent in Leiter and Clark's views, which I have already dealt with at length. According to their interpretation of Nietzsche, truth and justification are not relative to individual perspectives but to some idealized best possible human perspective (what our best theories would tell). This approach is faithful to Nietzsche's denial that we can have an absolute view on reality from nowhere. However, it cannot be a successful solution because it is not faithful to Nietzsche's insistence that even what we think would constitute the best theory is itself perspective-bound, i.e. the standards of what counts as a better theory than another are determined by one's cognitive perspective, which as we have seen can differ from individual to individual. Because such a theory is necessarily perspective bound, there always may be competing views—views from other perspectives—among which there are no common criteria to adjudicate which is better, even about what constitutes a best possible theory. Even with this oversight, the Clark/Leiter view gets

something very important right regarding how Nietzsche can avoid relativism, but what needs to be shown is how it is consistent with what I have already argued is a better interpretation of Nietzsche's broader theory of cognition, which I spelled out in the previous chapter.

Given that there has been a glaring lack of scholarly engagement with the problem I address in this chapter, what I aim to show in what follows requires a bit of a preliminary explanation. I argue that in some very important sense Nietzsche is a relativist about human justification and perspective-dependent truth. This is a bullet that I believe any interpreter of Nietzsche must bite. However, I argue that this relativism does not entail that there are no criteria, in given concrete circumstances, to determine which claims are better than others.<sup>4</sup> Too often those who bite the relativism bullet and who agree with me that there are still criteria of evaluation for claims, fail to specify just what those criteria are, how they function, and what their status is both normatively and epistemologically.<sup>5</sup> I argue in what follows that alethic disagreement comes in two distinct kinds, one of which occurs when there is a relevant shared cognitive perspective and one when there is no such shared perspective. These disagreements turn into matters of who is playing the truth game better (according to the shared perspective) and axiological disagreements respectively. In what follows, I will make clear what this means and what its implications are.

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<sup>4</sup> My solution is similar to Anderson's (1998). He claims that perspectivism is justified but only from within particular perspectives. According to Anderson, a claim can be true (in a perspective-relative sense) or justified only based on standards that are internal to a given perspective, and this applies to perspectivism itself as well as any other positive claims Nietzsche endorses.

<sup>5</sup> Here I am especially thinking of Nehamas (1985) who claims that there are criteria for determining which positions are epistemically better. However, Nehamas, in saying what those criteria are, only goes so far as to metaphorically gesture toward literary interpretation as a model for how epistemic justification works in a Nietzschean system.

*Two Concepts of Objectivity*

Given that we cannot “look around our own corner” as Nietzsche puts it, there can be no absolute or a-perspectival concept of objectivity available to us to apply to our judgments and reasoning methods. Even if there were to exist (*per impossible*) a god’s eye view, i.e., a non-perspectival view,<sup>6</sup> from which one could survey the world as it really is in itself, such a view would be in principle inaccessible to us as human cognizers. So, such a view is not able to function even as a goal to be approached (even if not attained) in the course of inquiry. However, this fact does not preclude the possibility that Nietzsche has a concept of objectivity that is relative to a particular cognitive perspective. As we will see in this section, Nietzsche, in various texts, develops two different perspective-relative notions of objectivity, each serving very different functions in evaluating philosophical, scientific, and other theoretical inquiries.

The notion of objectivity Nietzsche employs that most resembles the familiar realist or commonsense sort of objectivity, which he rejects, I will call, “shared perspective objectivity.” It is clear that Nietzsche thinks that there are some elements of cognitive perspective that are more or less broadly shared. Some examples of perspectival commitments that Nietzsche thinks are broadly shared include the following:

- In “On Truth and Lies,” Nietzsche claims that all human sensibility takes on a spatial-temporal form (§1).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche thinks that the idea of a “view from nowhere” is logically impossible, as it is a contradiction in terms. (see GM III §12)

<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche indicates in “On Truth and Lies” that human cognition *must* take spatial-temporal form in the Kantian sense of a necessary condition for all possible experience. In his later works, Nietzsche seems to modify this position somewhat and instead claim that while as a matter of contingent fact all human cognition is in the forms of space and time, this is not a *necessary* condition for all possible experience, and there may exist cognizing beings for whom these forms are radically different. See GS §374 for Nietzsche’s discussion about the possibility of there existing perspectives other than those held by human beings. Ultimately, while Nietzsche grants the possibility of such non-human perspectives, because he is interested in human valuing and

- The various sciences share more or less common perspectives in virtue of their methodological commitments. This can be seen in *The Gay Science*: “We see that science also rests on a faith; there simply is no science ‘without presuppositions’” (GS §344).<sup>8</sup>
- Those who speak a common natural language adopt many of the same general conceptual commitments (see e.g., BGE §20).<sup>9</sup>
- And finally, only the most ascetic of human perspectives do not take for granted the reality of the physical world (see GM III §12).

Given these (and other) broadly shared cognitive commitments, within a field of inquiry or when making everyday sorts of empirical judgments, those toward whom one’s assertions are directed are usually persons with whom we share certain perspectives.<sup>10</sup> We, at least sometimes, share these perspectives to the extent that the truth conditions for most of our claims will be the same for all involved in the discussion. For example, if a scientist claims that the gravitational constant is some value  $x$  while communicating with other

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what humans actually have access to, speculation about what non-human perspectives might be like is idle and uninformative.

<sup>8</sup> This same spirit is expressed in another GS passage:

Mathematics.—Let us introduce the refinement and rigor of mathematics into all sciences as far as this is at all possible, not in the faith that this will lead us to know things but in order to determine our human relation to things. Mathematics is merely the means for general and ultimate knowledge of man. (GS §246)

Here we see that the mathematizing of the sciences, i.e. introducing mathematics as a methodological commitment in the sciences, does not get one closer to the truth but rather introduces rigor in the sense of unifying various branches of inquiry under a shared perspective. Ultimately, what mathematics, like any other method or field of inquiry, does is illuminate the human relationship to things and not the things themselves.

<sup>9</sup> This section is worth quoting at length:

The strange family resemblance of all Indian, Greek, and German philosophizing is explained easily enough. Where there is affinity of languages, it cannot fail, owing to the common philosophy of grammar—I mean, owing to the unconscious domination and guidance by similar grammatical functions—that everything is prepared at the outset for similar development and sequence of philosophical systems; just as the way seems barred against certain other possibilities of world-interpretation. (BGE §20)

<sup>10</sup> It is to this sense of shared-perspective objectivity that Owen (2007: 72) implicitly invokes when he claims that Nietzsche’s GM is an internal critique of competing perspectives rather than merely a statement of his own views that does not touch on competing ones, as some scholars have claimed (see e.g. Leiter (2002)).

scientists, then given shared commitments about scientific concepts and methodology, the truth conditions for the claim that the gravitational constant has that particular value will be shared within that community. Of course, an individual could have a radically different concept of what science is or how it should work and so have radically different conceptual and methodological commitments such that the truth conditions for the claim would be different for that individual than those for the broader scientific community. This does not raise the problem of relativism within the domain of a particular science because from the standpoint of the larger community of science, the individual with an idiosyncratic conception of science is simply not cognizing from within a properly scientific perspective; he or she has changed the topic entirely by applying a different set of concepts or methodologies to the question at hand.

Central to Nietzsche's shared-perspective notions of objectivity is that it happens to be the case that many, if not most, people share, at one level of generality or another, cognitive perspectives with one another. This need not have been the case, but the human species and its cultures have evolved such that it is. That many cognitive perspectives are broadly shared allows for a perspective-relative notion of objectivity, i.e., an objectivity that is judged based on the background of shared assumptions within a perspective instead of some absolute perspective-independent set of standards.

Before I distinguish this shared perspective notion of objectivity from traditional notions of objectivity, it will be helpful to clarify what exactly is commonly meant by objectivity. For an act of cognition to be objective from a common-sense or realist perspective this act must bear some sort of discernable relation to what is actually the case and must not be based on the incidental states of the one cognizing, e.g. scientific inquiry is

objective because its methods eliminate as far as possible the biases and inclinations of the scientist, and its data comes from the outside, as it were, i.e. from the object that is to be studied. At the other extreme, to assert as true whatever one wishes were the case contains no data from the object of inquiry and does not eliminate the biases and inclinations of the one cognizing and so is non-objective. Distinguishing between objective and non-objective inquiry in this way is not available to Nietzsche. This is because the cognizer only has access to what is purely phenomenal (how things appear from his or her perspective), and according to perspectivism one cannot distinguish—in a non-question-begging way—between basic conceptual commitments that are merely subjective (i.e., merely perspective-dependent) and those that somehow map onto reality. Metaphysical agnosticism precludes making such a distinction, and Nietzsche's observation that how reality is conceived is different depending on one's value commitments and drives indicates that subjective factors are ineliminable in how we conceptualize reality.

However, if one takes for granted or agrees upon a shared perspective with an interlocutor or set of interlocutors, e.g. the methodological presuppositions of one of the sciences or academic disciplines, one can be more or less "objective" in relation to that particular set of conceptual commitments. The question as to the absolute objectivity of the method itself remains open indefinitely, as it must if it is to be consistent with perspectivism's metaphysical agnosticism. However, the objectivity of the method relative to an even broader shared perspective can be determined if such a broader shared perspective exists. That broader cognitive perspective will determine what counts as good reasoning, good inferences, and good methodology, so that the objectivity of the more narrow perspective in question can be judged in relation to the broader perspective's commitments.

Why think that Nietzsche held that this sort of objectivity is available to us, as he never explicitly discusses it—at least in these terms? Consider that in BGE §6 Nietzsche, as we have seen, argues that philosophy is “the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir,” which reflects “the moral (or immoral) intentions” of the philosopher. This is certainly as far as one can get from anything that would be traditionally considered objectivity, as objectivity consists precisely in *not* having such “moral (or immoral) intentions.” Contrasting the scholar, the practitioner of “*Wissenschaft*,” with the philosopher, Nietzsche writes:

To be sure: among scholars who are really scientific men, things may be different—‘better,’ if you like—there you may really find something like a drive for knowledge, some small, independent clockwork that, once well wound, works on vigorously without any essential participation from all the other drives of the scholar. The real ‘interests’ of the scholar therefore lie usually somewhere else—say, his family, or in making money, or in politics. Indeed, it is almost a matter of total indifference whether his little machine is placed at this or that spot in science, and whether the ‘promising’ young worker turns himself into a good philologist or an expert on fungi or a chemist: it does not characterize him that he becomes this or that. (BGE §6)

The scholar, in contrast with the philosopher, does not create methodologies or delineate areas of inquiry. The scholar instead applies methodologies and theories that have already been developed to new instances within the domain. For example, the expert on fungi takes for granted the discipline of mycology and its theoretical commitments. He or she applies its methodology to the study of new types of fungi. Likewise, the literary scholar applies a method of interpretation to texts to which it has never been applied. The chemist applies accepted analytic methodologies to substances to which they have never been applied. A scholarly labor is required to identify a new chemical substance or translate a previously untranslated text. However, a philosophical breakthrough is needed to develop new theories and new methods in a given field because this involves altering that field’s

perspective rather than applying the accepted perspective in ways that others in the field would immediately accept.

The philosopher is different from the scholar. The philosopher does not simply take an accepted methodology, i.e., an already delineated cognitive perspective, and apply it to different cases as the scholar does. The philosopher instead devotes him or herself to creating entirely new ways of looking at the world, new ways of “[creating] a world in [his or her] own image” and reading his or her unconscious drives and affects onto the world. Once these ways of seeing the world have been developed by the philosopher with sufficient specificity that the standards of what counts as good inquiry are explicit, it is open to others—the scholars—to apply the method. Of course, something will have to happen to allow one such perspective to gain ascendancy in order for it to be accepted by a large enough community to gain the status of a *Wissenschaft*, but once this occurs, the philosopher’s work is done and the scholar’s work comes to the fore.

Unlike the philosopher, the scholar, according to Nietzsche, has non-interested reasons for being committed to the method of his or her discipline, and so his or her commitment to and application of the method may be “objective” in the perspective-relative sense I have discussed. But this does not mean that the inquiry as a whole is absolutely objective because the creation and justification of the method itself, falling under the auspices of philosophy, is tied to a set of non-objective, non-shared (or at least not necessarily shared), perspective-dependent factors, factors that reflect the values and unconscious affects of the philosophers who developed it. The method employed by the scholar was originally developed by someone who was doing more than mere scholarship; to create a method is to do philosophy, and according to Nietzsche to do something that



cannot be objective because it is a reading one's own values into the nature of things.

Therefore, from the standpoint of a particular discipline, a scholar may be intellectually neutral and honest enough to produce results that would be accepted by anyone who shares that particular perspective. An example may help elucidate how this works. According to the framework I am describing, an everyday neurobiologist working in a lab who is attempting to discover a correlation between particular brain events and certain behavior is simply applying the standards of what counts as good science and good methodology in his or her field. The results of such an inquiry are objective insofar as they embody the ideals of that science, i.e. the shared cognitive perspective in question. This is objectivity only relative to this shared perspective, but when one takes the shared perspective for granted, the results can be accepted by anyone who shares this perspective. The methodology itself, in this case the methods and theories of contemporary neurobiology, is itself not objective because it is not based, so far as we can tell, on the way the world is, but is rather based on the needs, values, and desires of those who developed it.

In order to talk about the objectivity of a particular method itself, one would have to appeal to a more basic shared perspective.<sup>11</sup> Those who attempt to theorize without presuppositions, namely philosophers dealing with the most fundamental theoretical questions, cannot have objectivity of this kind because for these sorts of questions there is no accepted, shared perspective to which to appeal (see e.g., BGE §5). Presumably for many everyday sorts of claims with which we are pragmatically interested (but not philosophically

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<sup>11</sup> Some (including Janaway (2007: 215) have argued that the passage under consideration (BGE §6) means that there can be "affect neutral" or disinterested cognition. This is not correct without a major qualification. As I argue, one can be affect neutral or disinterested in relation to a given shared perspectival framework, but the overall framework is based on interests and affects that are not and cannot be neutral. So (contra Janaway) even though the scholar discussed in BGE §6 is not cognizing based on his or her particular idiosyncratic set of drives, it is not as though this represents disinterested knowledge in some absolute sense. It is only disinterested relative to the standards of the *Wissenschaft* in question.

interested) like “This latte costs \$5,” “Chicago is a twenty minute drive from here” and the like, the relevant cognitive perspective will be shared by everyone with whom one might happen to converse. This does not mean that we have completely objective knowledge when we make these kinds of claims; it only means that since everyone shares the relevant cognitive perspectives, if our only interest is intersubjective utility (and not philosophy), we never need to question these shared background assumptions.

This concept of objectivity allows for us to conceive of something that I call “epistemic fit.” Something fits more or less within our epistemic framework depending on how many of our perspectival commitments it satisfies. A claim with the highest possible degree of epistemic fit will satisfy every perspective a particular individual or group actually employs in making judgments. So for example, presumably for anyone reading this dissertation, the law of synchronic self-identity ( $a=a$  at time  $t$ ) has this maximal degree of epistemic fit. No matter which of our perspectival cognitive commitments is question, the law of synchronic self-identity will hold. A claim can have a smaller degree of epistemic fit if it satisfies some, but not all, of our perspectival commitments. So for example, the judgment that the desk in front of me is an impenetrable material object satisfies the perspective of everyday empirical judgments, but it does not satisfy the perspective of the understanding of material objects according to today’s best physics, which conceives of the desk as being made up of a great deal of empty space through which many small particles (e.g. neutrinos) can and do pass. This notion of relative epistemic fit will be useful in my analysis of different kinds of disagreements later in the chapter.

What implications does shared-perspective objectivity have? For many areas of inquiry and for many sorts of judgments, Nietzsche’s theory of shared-perspective

objectivity will make very little difference in how we go about reasoning and making judgments. When disagreements arise in a particular situation we can usually appeal to relevant shared standards and come to a relatively objective answer to the question at hand. For example, if two people disagree about how many apples are on the table, presumably they share enough perspectival commitments to agree that the way to objectively settle the dispute is to count them one by one. This, to be sure, does not reveal some deep perspective-independent truth of the matter, but given each of their cognitive commitments the answer will be epistemically satisfying; it will have a highest degree of epistemic fit possible for that particular question.

Granted, however, that a disagreement about how many medium size objects are in front of one is not the kind of question a philosopher is interested in, let us consider the possibility of a case where both the answer to the question and the best method to use to settle it are under dispute. In such a case, one can still come to a perspective-relative objective answer if there is a broader shared perspective from which to judge which method to use. From this meta-perspective one can determine which of the two methods in the dispute better expresses the cognitive commitments of all involved. However, not all disagreements will be so simple and clear cut. Some disagreements are intractable even upon appeal to more and more broadly shared and abstract perspectival commitments. The rest of this chapter is concerned with these more interesting and, for Nietzsche, more important sorts of disagreements. But before turning to an analysis of the different ways disagreements can be resolved in Nietzsche's perspectivism, I turn to the other kind of objectivity Nietzsche discusses, what I call "multiple perspective" objectivity.

Shared-perspective objectivity, while it bears a great deal of similarity to realist and commonsense notions of objectivity that Nietzsche rejects and are usefully employed all of the time, does not deal with the problems with which Nietzsche is particularly interested, problems of value, life-affirmation, and nihilism. In order to deal with the sorts of disagreement that are related to these problems, Nietzsche uses his theory of perspectivism to develop another concept of objectivity. As we will see, this kind of objectivity can be brought to bear on disagreements that are not solvable by appealing to shared perspectives. In the GM III passages where Nietzsche presents his theory of perspectivism, he writes:

To want to see differently, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its future ‘objectivity’—the latter understood as ‘contemplation without interest’ (which is a nonsensical absurdity), but as the ability to control one’s Pro and Con and to dispose of them, so that one knows how to employ a variety of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge... The more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity,’ be. (GM III §12)

As we have seen, according to perspectivism we cognize things according to the relevant values we hold (“one’s Pro and Con”). While we cannot know how things are in themselves, a thing for us is how it appears from a given perspective, which can be different if an individual has relevantly different values, i.e., sees with “different eyes.” Accordingly, we can have a better (human) understanding of a thing if we are able to cognize it from not only our own perspective but from other perspectives as well, so, as Nietzsche writes, “the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity,’ be.” To be more objective in this sense is to see things from more possible perspectives. Of course, since there are potentially an infinite number of possible perspectives one could take on an object, one could never attain absolute multiple-perspective objectivity regarding something. However, one can be

more or less objective in this sense by possessing the ability to see things from more or fewer cognitive perspectives.<sup>12</sup>

With this new perspectival concept of objectivity Nietzsche is able to develop a new perspectival concept of objects. Of course, given the commitment to perspectivism, Nietzsche must remain completely agnostic regarding how best to conceptualize objects as they might be in themselves. Additionally each relevantly different perspective has its own way of conceptualizing objects according to its own cognitive commitments. However, Nietzsche's perspectival concept of objects is unique to the meta-perspective of perspectivism itself. In a late *Nachlass* fragment Nietzsche argues that if we accept that "the question 'what is that?' is an imposition of meaning from some other viewpoint," then "the 'essential nature' [of a thing] is something perspective [sic] and already presupposes a multiplicity... A thing would be defined once all creatures had asked 'what is that?' and had answered their question" (WP §556 1885-1886). He goes on to claim that when we think of objects in this way, as long as there are possible interpretations or perspectives on a thing missing from our understanding, our concept of the object is incomplete. Just like Nietzsche's multiple-perspective concept of objectivity, this concept of objects is something that we can never completely attain because of the infinite number of perspectives that can possibly be taken on an object. Even if we were to only consider the perspectives actually taken on an object by actually existing cognizing beings, it is unlikely that we could ever be able to accumulate knowledge of all of them. This concept of objects can, however, serve a regulative function that we can always strive to approach. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in detail the consequences of utilizing this perspectival concept of

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<sup>12</sup> Anderson 1998, Berry 2011 and Leiter 1994 make this point about objectivity and the addition of cognitive perspectives.

objects,<sup>13</sup> but in the next chapter I will outline what kind of metaphysics is possible given Nietzsche's perspectivism and how we are to understand the results of such a metaphysical inquiry in light of Nietzsche's metaphysical agnosticism.

Returning to the discussion of perspectival-objectivity, an example will help elucidate what Nietzsche is proposing in GM III §12. Three radically different perspectives on human psychology include (but are not limited to) folk psychology (which may differ from culture to culture), psychoanalysis, and biological/neurological accounts. According to realist concepts of objectivity, one and only one of these (assuming that they come to mutually exclusive conclusions) perspectives can be the correct view or closer to being the correct view of how human psychology functions. When one of these views is determined to be more objective than the others, the others can be excluded from consideration for further rational inquiry. If, however, one applies Nietzsche's multiple-perspective concept of objectivity to inquiry into human psychology, instead of determining which way of thinking about the problem is closest to being correct, one will attempt to understand human psychology from all of the perspectives that are taken on it, including the ones listed above and any others that are available to the researcher. Nietzsche would claim that insofar as there actually are multiple perspectives taken on something like human psychology, one is more objective in that field of inquiry if one is able to set aside one's own biases and consider the problem from as many possible perspectives on that thing as possible, even though he or she cannot take a bias-free perspective on it.

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<sup>13</sup> For discussions of Nietzsche's perspectival concept of objects, see Poellner 1995. In the next and final chapter I will discuss how Nietzsche can have a metaphysics that is compatible with his perspectivism and metaphysical agnosticism.

Of what use is this multiple-perspective concept of objectivity? It will be of relatively little use for the scientist, who will be applying the concepts proper to the perspective of the scientific discipline within which he or she is working. The scientist will therefore employ the shared-perspective concept of objectivity rather than Nietzsche's multiple-perspective objectivity. Although Nietzsche does not discuss this issue, it seems clear that the multiple-perspective concept of objectivity will only be of use to the philosopher—or to be more precise, Nietzsche's philosopher of the future, i.e. the philosopher concerned with bringing about Nietzsche's envisioned revaluation of values that will overcome nihilism. Here is where we begin to see the connection between truth and Nietzsche's larger project of overcoming nihilism and a revaluation of values. When one is able to see things from multiple possible perspectives, i.e., attain a degree of multiple-perspective objectivity, one does not get at something closer to the "fact of the matter" about the thing in question.

What then does the philosopher who attains this sort of objectivity gain? Recall from our previous discussion in Chapter Four that different perspectives are determined by differing values. This means that what explains the differences between two human cognitive perspectives are the different values at stake in cognizing the thing in question. Given this fact about perspectivism, when a philosopher is able to see things from perspectives other than his or her own, he or she is able to grasp the connection between a set of values (which may be different than his or her own) and the way a particular object is cognized or problem is approached.

Given that what is at stake for Nietzsche (and for his philosophers of the future) are competing values, some of which are more life-affirming or life-negating than others, the

consequences of possessing certain kinds of values for cognition will be of utmost importance. At an even more fundamental level, these differences in values have their origin in the bodies of the philosopher. “Behind the highest value judgments that have hitherto guided the history of thought, there are concealed misunderstandings of the physical constitution” (GS Preface, §2).<sup>14</sup> The philosopher who is able to attain a higher degree of multiple-perspective objectivity will be better able to see what kinds of values are invested in various ways of seeing the world and how this relates to the health and physical constitution of the thinker. This means that one who sees things from multiple perspectives will be better able to go about the business of affecting how people value, how this relates to physical health and decadence, and how people cognize according to those values.

Nietzsche makes explicit the connection he thinks exists between thinking and valuing in *Daybreak* §103, “We have to *learn to think differently*—in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more: *to feel differently*.”<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche is claiming that changes in thought are accompanied by changes in how one is affected by the world, which in turn would change what is explicitly valued. This explains why Nietzsche would concern himself with doing philosophy and formulating an epistemological system despite his critique of the will to truth, viz., truth’s frequent ineffectiveness in making life better, especially for the healthy and affirmative types Nietzsche wants to promote. What is clear from this passage in

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<sup>14</sup> The picture of thought developed here is that cognitions are symptoms of values, which are themselves symptoms of bodily constitutions. In this dissertation I have focused on the fact that values relate to how the world is cognized. For more on how values are symptoms of bodily constitution see Conway 1997, especially Chapter Two of that work.

<sup>15</sup> The German translated here as “learn to think differently” is *umzulernen*, which would be more literally translated as relearn. The German translated as “to feel differently” is *umzufühlen*, which literally means to “re-feel” or “change-feeling.” So we can re-express what Nietzsche is claiming in this passage as “We have to relearn in order to change-feeling.” This, I think, highlights the connection Nietzsche is drawing between cognition and affect here. I discuss this passage at greater length in Chapter Six.



*Daybreak* as well as the first part of BGE and the entirety of GM is that thought—how the world is conceived—and values are inextricably tied together. If someone sharing Nietzsche’s aims is going to be successful in changing the values of individuals and entire cultures, then one must understand how theoretical problems and objects are thought about differently from the various cognitive perspectives that are associated with different value sets.<sup>16</sup>

As we go on to analyze how Nietzsche can conceive of fundamental disagreements, it will become clear how the connection between cognition and evaluation functions and how Nietzsche’s philosopher of the future can use the ability to see things from other perspectives to be better able to affect the change necessary to affirm life and overcome nihilism. But before turning to an analysis of disagreements, I will briefly discuss how Nietzsche’s two concepts of objectivity relate to the philosophical positions of naturalism and empiricism, positions that many scholars have attributed to Nietzsche.

Many commentators have claimed that Nietzsche’s primary philosophical methodological commitment is either empiricism<sup>17</sup> or naturalism.<sup>18</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to evaluate these claims or comment on to what extent Nietzsche is committed to either a form of empiricism or a form of naturalism. However, it is important to situate Nietzsche’s clear affinity to these positions in the context of the epistemological system I

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<sup>16</sup> I discuss D §103 and its implications for Nietzsche’s larger project at greater length and in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>17</sup> See WP §488 (1883-1886): “We have no categories at all that permit us to distinguish a ‘world in itself’ from a ‘world of appearance.’ All our categories of reason are of sensual origin: derived from the empirical world.” Clark 1990 argues that Nietzsche’s truth claims are justified only empirically.

<sup>18</sup> For more on Nietzsche’s naturalism and empiricism in relation to perspectivism see Coker 2002, Berry 2011, Leiter 1994, and Conway 1997. For the purposes of this dissertation I am less concerned with exactly what Nietzsche’s naturalism consists in and more what the status of that naturalism is vis-à-vis his perspectivism.

attribute to him in this dissertation. Let us take it as given that Nietzsche often relies on broadly scientific (methodologically naturalistic) and empirical perspectives in order to ground his truth claims and criticisms of other positions, especially those of transcendent metaphysics.

Perhaps the most important passage for understanding Nietzsche's commitment to some kind of naturalism is BGE §230, worth quoting at length:

To translate man back into nature, to become master over the many vain and overly enthusiastic interpretations and connotations that have so far been scrawled and painted over that eternal basic text of *homo natura*; to see to it that man henceforth stands before man as even today, hardened in the discipline of science, he stands before the rest of nature, with intrepid Oedipus eyes and sealed Odysseus ears, deaf to the siren songs of old metaphysical bird catchers who have been piping at him all too long. (BGE §230)

Here Nietzsche excludes “vain and overly enthusiastic interpretations” of the “text of *homo natura*” as candidates for understanding human beings and their place in nature. What kinds of interpretations is he thus excluding?—the “siren songs of old metaphysical bird catchers.” The contrast that Nietzsche sets up here is between “[translating] man back into nature” and metaphysical understandings of human beings. By metaphysics Nietzsche means those interpretations of what it is to be human that separates human beings from the rest of nature, that makes humans into something more or different from the natural order that we are acquainted with in experience.<sup>19</sup> That Nietzsche rejects seeing human nature as metaphysical and transcending the rest of the natural world should not be surprising to even the most casual reader, but this passage hints at something even more interesting and, for

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<sup>19</sup> See HH §9 for a critique of belief in a metaphysical world, i.e. a world that transcends the world of mundane appearance. Nietzsche's point is not that there is not a metaphysical world, a “beyond.” Rather, Nietzsche's point is that we can never have access to such a world to know whether it exists or not or to have it affect our lives.

our purposes, more useful. Notice that he is writing about “interpretations” of man.

Nietzsche is not interested in what human beings are in themselves—he cannot be if I am correct about his metaphysical agnosticism. He is, however, committed to understanding human beings in a way that is “hardened in the discipline of science” as a part of nature, and insofar as he is willing to follow the methodological constraints of the natural sciences when making inquiries into a given subject area, in this case the human, Nietzsche can be considered a naturalist.

What are we to conclude from this commitment? There are two possibilities here: 1. It could mean that for a certain set of problems, problems that science has the tools to answer, a methodological naturalism has an epistemic superiority that other perspectives lack, and so one ought to be naturalistic for any problem on which a commitment to naturalism can be brought to bear. Or 2. It could mean that a naturalistic perspective is simply one that Nietzsche, for whatever contingent set of reasons, holds, and it is no better or worse in itself than any other competing perspective. The latter option seems to be more in keeping with Nietzsche’s perspectivism given that it does not commit Nietzsche to holding that naturalism is an absolutely objective method of inquiry. However, I do not think that the two horns of the disjunction above are mutually exclusive. Certainly, if I am correct about the implications of Nietzsche’s perspectivism, then no methodology, naturalism included, is better in an absolute sense. However, it seems clear that given the way science and scientific methodologies function and their relationship to the way at least

most humans function cognitively, naturalism has a privileged place in the way we, at least in the last several centuries, cognize the world.<sup>20</sup>

It seems that what we must say is that Nietzsche is committed to naturalism because of his contingent place and time, and naturalism can be seen as a privileged cognitive perspective because not only is it one Nietzsche is committed to, it is also one that he shares with most if not all of his contemporaries (at least implicitly). I am arguing that even if we grant that Nietzsche is committed to methodological naturalism and a kind of empiricism (and I do), these commitments are to be understood as subordinate to Nietzsche's perspectivism. Contrary to this, Lanier Anderson seems to indicate a priority for Nietzsche's empiricism over perspectivism when he argues that Nietzsche's epistemology demands that we obtain "cognitive perspectives that are truer, or cognitively superior, in a sense specified via empirical adequacy plus defensibility across the broadest possible range of perspectives."<sup>21</sup> In other words, empiricism should be a key component of *any* inquiry regardless of the perspective. I agree that Nietzsche is committed to positions that are

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<sup>20</sup> Berry (2011) holds that Nietzsche's naturalism amounts to a commitment to a methodology rather than an ontological thesis about what kinds of beings exist, namely only natural entities described by the natural sciences exist, because holding the ontological thesis would violate his skepticism. This, she claims, explains the privilege Nietzsche grants to the natural sciences because their methodologies affirm only that which is apparent. The status of the claims of the natural sciences, properly understood, is of a kind with the status Nietzsche's own positive claims, viz., they are claims that are apparent. This cannot be correct because, as Nietzsche claims elsewhere, "there simply is no science 'without presuppositions' (GS §344). In other words, science does not merely affirm that which is apparent. Even when the conclusions of the sciences are not given a thick metaphysical interpretation, their methodologies commit them to make claims that others would not grant are apparent, and this is true of other cognitive perspectives as well, meaning that there is nothing that is merely apparent full-stop, only things that are merely apparent from within a contingent cognitive perspective. Thus Nietzsche insofar as he is a naturalist is committed to something more robust than affirming that which is apparent even if he is not affirming an ontological thesis.

<sup>21</sup> Anderson 2005: 207.

empirically adequate, but this is not because there is some absolute privilege to be granted to naturalism or empirical adequacy.<sup>22</sup>

If my argument is correct, then “empirical adequacy” is already built into “defensibility across the broadest possible range of perspectives.” This is because all (or at least most) human perspectives are in agreement as to what counts as empirically adequate and grant that empirical adequacy is among the criteria that must be met for a position to count as true. This is because the information each of us gets from our senses is relatively the same across human subjects because of the similarity among human nervous and sensory systems. Thus Nietzsche can claim:

Heraclitus too did the senses an injustice. They lie neither in the way the Eleatics believed, nor as he believed—they do not lie at all. What we make of their testimony, that alone introduces lies; for example, the lie of unity, the lie of thinghood, of substance, of permanence. ‘Reason’ is the cause of our falsification of the testimony of the senses. Insofar as the senses show becoming, passing away, and change, they do not lie. But Heraclitus will remain eternally right with his assertion that being is an empty fiction. The ‘apparent’ world is the only one: the ‘true’ world is merely added by a lie. (TI “Reasons” §2)

The senses do not lie not because they inadequately represent reality as it is in itself; this would violate Nietzsche’s metaphysical agnosticism. Rather, relative to one’s interaction with other human beings, what our senses tell us is remarkably consistent. Disagreement comes from reason’s “falsification,” which is a falsification because it is always an imposition of values and unconscious desires on the data of the senses, values and desires that are not universally shared among human cognizers. Therefore, it is correct to say that Nietzsche is

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<sup>22</sup> Robert B. Pippin (2010) argues that we cannot see Nietzsche as a straightforward naturalist because of his commitment to not looking behind every appearance. See for example GS Preface, §4: “This bad taste, this will to truth, to ‘truth at any price,’ this youthful madness in the love of truth, have lost their charm for us; for that we are too experienced, too serious, too merry, too burned, too profound.” In the final chapter I will discuss those cases where Nietzsche might want to avoid “looking behind every appearance.”

committed to a kind of empiricism, but not in a way that makes empiricism superior to or outside of his perspectival theory of knowledge, i.e., it is Nietzsche's commitment to perspectivism that drives his empiricism and not vice versa. The next section on intersubjective disagreement will make clear how we are to understand those who disagree with Nietzsche and who reject a commitment to naturalism on questions to which it can be brought to bear.

### *Intersubjective Disagreement and Perspectivism*

In this section, my goal is to explore the implications of Nietzsche's perspectivism for the phenomenon of intersubjective disagreement. As we will see there are three distinct possible scenarios that exhaust the possibilities for types of disagreements that can arise. How each of these types of disagreements are decided, i.e. the criteria of evaluation that determines which side of the disagreement is the "better" position, takes us right to the heart of Nietzsche's larger project of revaluation and its connection to problems of cognition and epistemology. However, before proceeding I must offer two caveats. First, Nietzsche does not directly address the issues of relativism and intersubjective disagreement directly. What follows, then, is less Nietzsche's own solution to these problems and is more a solution that is philosophically available to him, given his broader position, which I have outlined in previous chapters. Second, as we will see, Nietzsche cannot be very sanguine about the possibility of *actually* resolving all intersubjective disagreements, at least those that are significant in nature.

For Kant, non-transcendental metaphysics was condemned to argue for two conflicting antinomies that could never be reconciled (without recourse to transcendental

idealism),<sup>23</sup> likewise for Nietzsche, philosophers are unlikely to ever reach agreement regarding philosophy's most important problems. The difference between Kant and Nietzsche here is that while Kant saw a way out of the endless disagreements of metaphysicians through his own philosophical system, Nietzsche regarded his truths as being for himself alone (and perhaps a select few, his "philosophers of the future"):

Are these coming philosophers new friends of 'truth?' That is probable enough, for all philosophers so far have loved their truths. But they will certainly not be dogmatists. It must offend their pride, also their taste, if their truth is supposed to be truth for everyman—which has so far been the secret wish and hidden meaning of all dogmatic aspirations. 'My judgment is my judgment': no one else is easily entitled to it—that is what such a philosopher of the future may perhaps say to himself. One must shed the bad taste of wanting to agree with many. (BGE §43)

Even though Nietzsche is not necessarily concerned with convincing others of "his truths" and does not possess the "bad taste" of wanting others to agree with him, he has the resources to show that some claims are better than others in terms of their epistemic justification and so overcome the charge of an unacceptable global ("anything goes") relativism. This is important for us, his readers, even if it was not important for him because presumably we are reading Nietzsche as philosophers, and as philosophers we are interested whether he has something important and philosophically valid for us.

Given the "shared-perspective" objectivity discussed above, a disagreement may arise in the context of a perspective shared by all of those involved in the disagreement. Such a shared perspective can be appealed to in order to resolve the disagreement. I will discuss these kinds of shared-perspective disagreements first before moving on to discuss disagreements that arise when there are conflicting perspectives involved, and there is no relevant shared perspective to which to appeal. When there is a relevant shared perspective

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<sup>23</sup> See Kant. "The Antinomy of Pure Reason" In *Critique of Pure Reason*, A427/B455.

to which to appeal, there exists a “fact of the matter” relative to that shared perspective. Resolving the disagreement is simply a matter of successfully showing that the problem has a particular solution and showing how everyone’s prior intellectual commitments demand that this answer be accepted. These sorts of disagreements can arise either because one of the parties makes some kind of mistake in applying his or her own standards or because one of the parties is being dishonest for the sake of advancing a position he or she knows is not consistent with his or her own intellectual commitments and standards.

In the next section, I will return to each of these types of shared-perspective disagreements to discuss them more fully and show what Nietzsche might have to say about them. If there is no shared perspective for a given disagreement to which to appeal, the disagreement is explained by the fact that there are inconsistent cognitive perspectives involved. In such a situation, short of some more general shared perspective to which to appeal, such a disagreement is rationally intractable; it cannot be decided by rational means, and there are no objective criteria of evaluation to determine which is the better side. Understanding this type of disagreement depends on what the explanation is for each individual possessing differing perspectives. Recall that in Chapter Four we explored many of the factors that can individuate cognitive perspectives for Nietzsche. We may subdivide this category of disagreements into various kinds according to the factors that individuate perspectives we discussed there.

To summarize, there are three main types of intersubjective cognitive disagreements that can arise if we take as given Nietzsche’s theory of perspectivism. They are:

1. Disagreements that arise due to one party making a mistake in applying the standards of a relevant shared perspective. I call this kind of disagreement a “Cognitive Weakness” disagreement.



2. Disagreements that arise due to one party being dishonest about how the standards of relevant shared perspective apply to the problem. I call this kind of disagreement a disagreement of “Intellectual Dishonesty.”

3. Disagreements that arise when the relevant perspectives are not shared and come into conflict with one another. This conflict between perspectives is often the result of differing sets of values, and so such disagreements I call “Conflict of Values” disagreements.

In the following sections I will discuss how Nietzsche conceives of each disagreement, how they can be resolved, and the importance they play in Nietzsche’s broader project. We will begin with Cognitive Weakness disagreements.

### *Cognitive Weakness*

“Cognitive Weakness” disagreements are those that arise when one party fails to correctly apply the standards of the perspectives relevant to the problem. I call such disagreements the result of cognitive weakness because they are the result of a failure of one’s cognitive functioning to apply one’s own standards of rationality—surely a form of weakness. Such disagreements are perhaps the easiest of the three to resolve because it may be possible to show someone that he or she is not correctly applying one’s own perspective, and thereby get one to change one’s position. Cognitive weakness can have at least two possible causes. The first cause is the rather mundane case of simply making a mistake; perhaps one is tired, distracted, or the like. Some examples include making a miscalculation in arithmetic, misestimating the size of a distant object, and drawing a fallacious inference (e.g. affirming the antecedent) to name only a few. Nietzsche does not seem to be particularly interested in such cases as they are easily remedied in the case of intersubjective disagreement, and examining them does very little if anything to shed light on Nietzsche’s larger evaluative project. However, the second type of cognitive weakness takes us right to the heart of his critique of the will to truth and the revaluation of values.

The second type of cognitive weakness occurs when one does not apply one's own (relevant) cognitive perspective to a problem or question because to recognize the truth (or what appears to be the case from one's own perspective) would be too difficult for one to bear.

Indeed, it might be a basic characteristic of existence that those who would know it completely would perish, in which case the strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the 'truth' one could still barely endure—or to put it more clearly, to what degree one would require it to be thinned down, shrouded, sweetened, blunted, falsified. (BGE §39)

Nietzsche here asks whether human beings could handle knowing the absolute, most basic truths about the world. I take it he does not mean something metaphysical, i.e., something about the deep structure of reality because this is something that is unattainable for human cognizers anyway. It seems rather more likely that Nietzsche means something about the tragic character of human existence that he describes in *The Birth of Tragedy* and I discussed in Chapter Two. This is exemplified by the so-called wisdom of Silenus. “What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best for you is—to die soon” (BT §3). Even if (most?) humans cannot handle this “basic character of existence,” Nietzsche holds that an individual's strength is a function of how much truth (in the perspective-relative sense to which we have access) one can endure, i.e., how squarely we can look this truth in the eye and accept it without living in an illusion.

Nietzsche thinks that religious interpretations of the world might be among those that represent a weakness of this kind, a need to blind oneself to the reality of what the ultimate consequences of one's perspective are:

It is the profound, suspicious fear of an incurable pessimism that forces whole millennia to bury their teeth in and cling to a religious interpretation of existence: the fear of that instinct which senses that one might get a hold of the truth too soon, before man has become strong enough, hard enough,

artist enough. Piety, the 'life in God,' seen in this way, would appear as the subtlest and final offspring of the fear of truth, as an artist's worship and intoxication before the most consistent of all falsifications, as the will to the inversion of truth, to untruth at any price. (BGE §59)

It is interesting that religion is both the source of the pathological, unconditional will to truth (see the discussion in Chapter Two) and also the source of falsifications of truth out of fear as this passage describes.<sup>24</sup> Here Nietzsche attributes this fear of truth and “untruth at any price” to an “incurable pessimism.” Pessimism here is the opposite of the Nietzschean ideal of life affirmation; it is the judgment that life, as it is, is not worth living. Human existence is falsified through religious interpretations in order to make those unpalatable elements easier to deal with or to take them as completely illusory. Take, e.g., the Greek strategy of inventing the Olympian gods to cope with the “terror and horror of existence” (BT §3); from the standpoint of some shared cognitive perspective, the invention of Greek gods is epistemically unjustified; it is a “falsification” of reality. The general point is that we often lie to ourselves, or more precisely, involuntarily turn away from the truth in order to see the world in a way that we can handle.

Notice Nietzsche discusses in BGE §59 that the fear is of the possibility that “one might get a hold of the truth too soon, before man has become strong enough, hard enough, artist enough.” This implies that there is a time for which attaining the truth is appropriate and that it takes time to become ready for the truth about existence. The fear that one could get at the truth too soon is what gives rise to religious interpretations that ameliorate the suffering that looking at the truth induces. In order to get at the truth at the right time (and

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<sup>24</sup> It is not difficult to see how a thoroughgoing unconditional valuing of truth is consistent with “falsifying” the world when one considers that the falsification described here is involuntary and done out of weakness. One can be too weak to handle the truth and still think that the truth is the most valuable thing to attain. In this case, one is just simply wrong about what the consequences of one's cognitive perspective are. I discuss Nietzsche's understanding of art and artists in this passage in the final chapter.

thereby avoid the need of lying to oneself to ward of the truth's negative effects), one must be "strong," "hard," and an "artist." Nietzsche's point is that to prepare oneself to look on existence as it is in an affirmative way requires the discipline to be strong enough to handle the difficulty of the truth, hard enough to not undergo ill effects from the suffering it will necessarily cause, and perhaps most importantly an artist to recast the difficult truth into something beautiful that one is able to affirm without thereby lying to oneself.<sup>25</sup> When one is not ready for the truth in this way, one's weakness gives way to conceptualizing the world in a way that may not be in line with one's deepest held rational commitments, which then can give rise to certain kinds of disagreements about matters of truth.

Disagreements that arise out of this kind of weakness are, more than likely, much more difficult to resolve than more mundane types of Cognitive Weakness disagreements because the false/unjustified belief serves the purpose of protecting the believer from some kind of psychological harm. Preventing this emotional harm may, in many cases, be more important than maintaining consistency with one's own intellectual commitments and so lead one to hold on to the irrational belief come what may, at least as long as the supposed threat remains. This is where alethic disagreement turns into something outside of rational discourse for Nietzsche because the way to resolve this kind of disagreement depends less on showing the inconsistency of the position within a given shared perspective (although it cannot dispense with this) than on alleviating the source of the supposed harm or (what is probably better from a Nietzschean standpoint) strengthening the individual so that he or she no longer needs the irrational ways of thinking in order to protect themselves.

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<sup>25</sup> I discuss the role that being an artist plays in how we conceptualize the world in the next chapter.

When an alethic disagreement comes about because one party is lying to make reality more palatable, one must make a choice between which is valued more, the truth and the ability to handle it or the comfort, happiness, and/or protection that the accepted fiction affords—remember that sometimes we must love errors because they are a condition for life (either life in general or a particular kind of life) (BGE §24). An ascetic scientific outlook would prescribe wiping away all illusions in favor of attaining the truth in all cases (“truth at any price” (GS Preface §4), but as we see from Nietzsche’s critique of the will to truth discussed in Chapter Two, there may be ends more important than truth and means to those ends that remain on the side of error and unjustified beliefs.

As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* for us, and art furnishes us with eyes and hands and above all the good conscience to be *able* to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon. At times we need a rest from ourselves by looking upon, by looking *down* upon, ourselves and, from an artistic distance, laughing *over* ourselves or weeping *over* ourselves. We must discover the *hero* no less than the *fool* in our passion for knowledge; we must occasionally find pleasure in our folly, or we cannot continue to find pleasure in our wisdom. (GS §107)

Here Nietzsche is saying that we have to take an artist’s falsifying view of things and find our search for wisdom and knowledge as folly in order to make existence bearable. This takes us back to the discussion of being superficial out of profundity from Chapter One. We must balance our search for truth with seeing the world artistically in order to thrive. Once we are in a position to make this choice we are no longer blindly adopting a lie out of weakness. Instead, we are in the realm of a certain kind of intellectual dishonesty, the topic of the next section.

#### *(Dis)honesty and Intellectual Conscience*

For Nietzsche, any attempt to think of the world beyond the merely apparent and posit a “true” world underlying those appearances is a mistake. This mistake could be of the

kind mentioned in the previous section, a fiction believed out of some sort of cognitive weakness, or it could be mendaciously dishonest. As Eric Blondel writes, commenting on the way discourses can be intentionally deceptive, “Fictions [such as freedom or justice] are ways in which one can reach a goal by confusing understanding.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, one can dishonestly claim something is true in order to attain non-theoretical goals just as the slave class in GM I used concepts such as libertarian freedom to undermine the moral position of the masters in order to gain power over them.

Nietzsche uses the language of intellectual conscience and honesty to characterize being true to one’s cognitive perspective and intellectual commitments.

If we had not welcomed the arts and invented this kind of cult of the untrue, then the realization of the general untruth and mendaciousness that now comes to us through science—the realization that delusion and error are conditions of human knowledge and sensation—would be utterly unbearable. *Honesty* would lead to nausea and suicide. But now there is a counterforce against our honesty that helps us to avoid such consequences: art as the good will to appearance. (GS §107)

Here Nietzsche contrasts honesty [*Redlichkeit*]<sup>27</sup> and “art as the good will to appearance” [*die Kunst, als den guten Willen zum Scheine*]. The honesty perspective gives us the “realization that delusions and error are conditions of human knowledge and sensation.” If we are honest, i.e., true to the cognitive perspective that we find ourselves in, we will come to the realization that we are trapped in error and are forever cut off from knowledge of the world as it is in itself. Nietzsche’s suggestion that art will save us from the “nausea and suicide” this realization induces is tantalizing, but a discussion of art as the good will to appearance will have to wait for the final chapter. For now, what is important to take from this section is

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<sup>26</sup> Blondel 1991: 167.

<sup>27</sup> This German word could also be translated “integrity.”

that honesty leads us to accept Nietzsche's perspectivism and metaphysical agnosticism.

If we share basic intellectual commitments, i.e., a cognitive perspective, with Nietzsche, then we will be led to similar conclusions. Implied by this is that to not come to these conclusions is to be dishonest, either with oneself or one's interlocutor.

A few sections later Nietzsche turns to a discussion of pre-Socratic philosophers, some of the first to value and search for truth in a way that Nietzsche associates with Plato and Christianity.

They [the earliest Greek philosophers] had to misapprehend the nature of the knower; they had to deny the role of the impulses in knowledge; and quite generally they had to conceive of reason as completely free and spontaneous activity. They shut their eyes to the fact that they, too, had arrived at their propositions through opposition to common sense, or owing to a desire for tranquility, for sole possession, or for dominion. The subtler development of honesty and skepticism eventually made these people, too, impossible. (GS §110)

The position that Nietzsche attributes to these philosophers is a denial of his own perspectivism. They "deny the role of the impulses in knowledge" and they see "reason as completely free and spontaneous activity," i.e., independent of distorting factors. Most importantly these philosophers had to avoid seeing the true motivation behind their philosophizing, which was not to attain truth, but rather for "domination;" far from being disinterested searchers for truth, these philosophers were motivated by things that are, if not at odds with truth, certainly hindrances in the apprehension of truth. Nietzsche here thinks that "honesty and skepticism" made this kind of position untenable. Honesty is connected here with an acceptance of some kind of skepticism and a rejection of a non-perspectival understanding of human cognition. Again, we see that being honest with oneself about the demands of one's intellectual commitments leads one to Nietzsche's own view about our cognitive situation; to reject it is to merely be dishonest.

Honesty does not only get us Nietzsche's perspectivism. Being honest with one's intellectual commitments also should lead us, even "compel us," to accept the conclusions of the natural sciences. "Therefore: long live physics! And even more so that which *compels* us to turn to physics—our honesty" (GS §335)! Notice Nietzsche's use of the word "our" here. It is honesty in the sense of being faithful to what our cognitive perspectives share that leads us to turn to physics for explanations. It is not as though accepting the natural sciences gets us closer to the fact of the matter about the world as it is independent of our perspective on it. Rather, to not accept the sciences requires that we dishonestly ignore the dictates of our own perspective-bound, rational commitments.

Nietzsche uses the language of "intellectual conscience" [*Das intellektuale Gewissen*] in much the same way as he uses "honesty" [*Redlichkeit*].

The great majority of people lacks an intellectual conscience... The great majority of people does not consider it contemptible to believe this or that and to live accordingly, without first having given themselves an account of the final and most certain reasons pro and con... Among some pious people I found a hatred of reason and was well disposed to them for that; for this at least betrayed their bad intellectual conscience" (GS §2)

Having bad intellectual conscience means not giving oneself an "account of the final reasons pro and con" for the position in question. We lack an intellectual conscience when we do not take a chain of reasoning to its ultimate consequences, ignore those consequences, or when we do not consider the ultimate reasons for adopting a position to see whether it is consistent with those aspects of one's cognitive perspective to which one is already committed. When one has a good intellectual conscience, one will honestly pursue and accept the dictates of his or her (perspective-relative) reason.



Honesty and the related concept of intellectual conscience function for Nietzsche in a substantive way;<sup>28</sup> they are not merely the trivial proscriptions against being intellectually dishonest.<sup>29</sup> Poor reasoning that is interesting consists of more than just making mistakes for Nietzsche; it takes the form of lying. In order to attain perspective-relative truth, we must be honest with ourselves about the ultimate consequences of our reason. We have to look the world (as it appears to us) squarely in the eye and employ and apply our concepts consistently (by our perspective's own standards of consistency). This ability to be honest with oneself about what one sees is something Nietzsche values and finds lacking in most who search after knowledge. What is also clear from these passages, however, is that we cannot help but not be honest with ourselves at times. We lie to ourselves all the time. This is why, as we see in the GS §110 quotation that skepticism is the result of the most thoroughgoing honesty we can muster; because we cannot help but lie to ourselves sometimes, we must leave all questions ultimately open, even if we also must offer our provisional answers to them.

If we cannot always be honest and must sometimes lie, what is the character of these lies? It is important to make a distinction between two types of lying in Nietzsche's writings.

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<sup>28</sup> Anderson (2005) sees honesty as substantially contributing to Nietzsche's epistemology. However, he understands it such that it comes into conflict with Nietzsche's positive assessment of the artistic nature of our thinking. This has less to do with his understanding of Nietzschean honesty (which is quite close to mine) and more to do with his opposing artistry to honesty. For my understanding of the link between cognition and being an artist, see my discussion in the next chapter. Berry 2011 recognizes the substantive contribution honesty and intellectual conscience play in Nietzsche's picture of cognition. She sees honesty leading directly to skepticism, such that honesty just is resisting the pull to believe anything. I agree that honesty does lead to skepticism but not directly. Honesty leads us to draw out the ultimate implications of one's own cognitive perspective. This leads to skepticism and the other implications of perspectivism, but other things as well including, e.g., a commitment to scientific explanations when available.

<sup>29</sup> Clark (1990) is among those who underestimate the importance of honesty/intellectual conscience for Nietzsche's epistemology. All of her discussions of these terms take them in a non-substantive way such that all Nietzsche is claiming is that not deceiving oneself and having good epistemic practices are necessary for attaining truth. As I have claimed, there is much more to these concepts, and they provide substantive additions for Nietzsche's theory of cognition.

There are the lies that are more or less intentional, which go against one's own cognitive perspective and we use for some non-philosophical end (such as gaining power or dealing with the horror of existence), and there are the lies that all of us believe in accordance with our perspective, the lies that just are our perspectival view of the world. The latter are lies in the sense that they are not of the world as it really is in itself, and we all must tell them because we do not have access to cognizer-independent facts of the matter. The world is covered over in these lies by our drives, desires, values, and the like as I described in Chapter Four. This is what Nietzsche has in mind when he writes:

We make up the major part of the experience and can scarcely be forced not to contemplate some event as its 'inventors.' All this means: basically and from time immemorial we are—accustomed to lying. Or to put it more virtuously and hypocritically, in short, more pleasantly: one is much more of an artist than one knows. (BGE §192)

In this passage Nietzsche is clearly writing about “lies” in the latter sense, lies that we all tell ourselves and cannot but help tell ourselves, e.g., “that there are equal things; that there are things, substances, bodies; that a thing is what it appears to be; that our will is free; that what is good for me is also good in itself” (GS §110). As artists of a sort, we cannot help but construct artistic falsifications as pictures of reality simply in order to get around in the world. The world is not given for us; we have to “paint” it as an artist would.<sup>30</sup>

This kind of universal lying that is a result of the human cognitive situation is contrasted with Nietzsche's use of the notion of lying in the following passage:

The most fateful act of two thousand years of discipline for truth that in the end forbids itself the lie in faith in God. You see what it was that really triumphed over the Christian god: Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness that was understood even more rigorously, the father confessor's

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<sup>30</sup> This is the root of the idea of an artistic metaphysics or metaphysics of appearance, which I will discuss at length in the next chapter.

refinement of the Christian conscience, translated and sublimated into a scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price. (GS §357)

Lies that are about particular facts (e.g., “faith in God”) are different from the lies that we all must tell ourselves, which are a result of the perspective-dependence of all of our cognizing. In other words, there are the lies that accompany the global nature of perspectivism, and there are lies that we dishonestly employ to further our own ends. In the passage above, Nietzsche is talking about lies of the latter sort. He contrasts such lies with the will to truth, “scientific conscience,” and “intellectual cleanliness.” In order to reach the goal of perspective-relative truth and maximal intersubjective agreement, these intellectual virtues and ends must be pursued. Without pursuing these virtues, one is not just detached from the way things are in themselves as we all must be, one is also cut off from the ultimate alethic consequences of one’s own deepest held cognitive perspectives.<sup>31</sup>

Nietzsche’s pronouncements of the falsity of Christianity and other positions, especially in his very latest works, have been especially troubling to commentators (see the discussion in Chapter One) because they do not seem to square with the skeptical bent of perspectivism. This has led Clark and Leiter, for example, to think that Nietzsche’s positions on truth and knowledge changed in his last productive years. However, Nietzsche need not be taken to claim that these positions are false in an absolute sense (as opposed to his own “true” views). Rather he is claiming that those who hold such positions are being dishonest with themselves about the ultimate implications of their perspectives and the

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<sup>31</sup> The inevitability of lying and the distinction between lies we can avoid and lies we cannot avoid has interesting parallels with Scott’s (1998 and 2006) understanding of decadence in Nietzsche. She argues that decadence is inevitable for all individuals and cultures and that one can either be a strong decadent or a weak decadent. I discuss Scott’s position in more detail in Chapter Six, but it seems as though her strong decadents only lie in the inevitable way (just as they are decadents in the inevitable way that all are decadents) and it is the class of weak decadents who succumb to lying both in the inevitable way and in the way that covers over one’s own perspectival commitments.

world they see from those perspectives. So in the *Antichrist* Nietzsche writes, “Whoever has theologians’ blood in his veins, sees all things in a distorted and dishonest perspective to begin with” (A §9). The problem with the Christian perspective in terms of truth is not that it does not get as close to the absolute, mind-independent truth as other perspectives; the problem is that the perspective (or perhaps more precisely, those who employ the perspective) are not honest with themselves about the implications of their own more basic rational commitments. Indeed, Nietzsche must think that this is the sense in which Christianity is false when he declares it to be false, given his metaphysical agnosticism—Nietzsche can only *know* Christianity to be false in a perspective-relative sense. He is only able to claim that Christians themselves are dishonest if he believes that they share the relevant perspective that would lead to the same conclusion about its truth that he has reached.

Nietzsche thinks that dishonesty of this kind is so rampant in almost everyone’s judgments and inquiries that honesty and possessing a good intellectual conscience are among the primary virtues necessary in the pursuit of truth. The second section of *The Gay Science* is an extended critique of failing to develop such a conscience, making it clear that Nietzsche thinks that possessing an intellectual conscience is an essential feature of the kind of joyful *Wissenschaft* he is advocating. He thinks that “the great majority of people lacks an intellectual conscience.” Without such a desire to this kind of honesty, rigorous inquiry (*Wissenschaft*) cannot get off the ground, and all intersubjective disagreements become intractable because if one is not true to the rational standards of one’s own cognitive perspective, then there are no standards to which to appeal.

The reasons for a lack of a good intellectual conscience are not all that different than the reasons for some types of cognitive weakness. Consider the following passage:

How much truth does a spirit *endure*, how much truth does it *dare*? More and more that became for me the real measure of value. Error (faith in the ideal) is not blindness, error is *cowardice*. Every attainment, every step forward in knowledge, follows from *courage*, from hardness against oneself, from cleanliness in relation to oneself. (EH Preface §3)

It is a form of weakness or cowardice that accounts for an individual not following through with the ultimate consequences of his or her cognitive perspective and believing the perspective-relative truth, no matter how difficult it is to bear. This is because, as we have seen, Nietzsche thinks the (perspective-relative) truth about the world is difficult, namely that suffering and tragedy are endemic to human existence, and there is no transcendent meaning to this suffering nor transcendent amelioration for it. Not following through with the ultimate consequences of one's perspective could take the form of unconsciously betraying one's own perspective and thus sincerely believing the lie, or it could take the form of consciously ignoring evidence or the consequences of one's cognitive perspective. In the former case, one is merely being weak in not being able to face up to the difficult truth. In the latter case, one is being dishonest with oneself and others. Possessing an intellectual conscience is therefore a kind of strength, an act of courage. It requires the willingness to follow one's reason even to places where one would not like to go, i.e., even when it gives us a picture of the world that is difficult to bear or precludes the existence of that which once gave comfort (e.g., the existence of a just god or an afterlife that ameliorates this-worldly suffering).

Nietzsche makes this point forcefully in GM III §24, arguing that “a strong faith that makes blessed raises suspicion against that which is believed; it does not establish ‘truth,’ it

establishes a certain probability—of *deception*.” In other words, if believing something “makes blessed,” i.e., ameliorates some kind of suffering or makes the believer happier, then one has the right to be suspicious. Although a belief’s making one blessed is not sufficient to undermine the justification for the belief, the fact that it does should give us pause and force us to ask whether it is believed because it coheres with one’s deepest held perspectival commitments or merely because it helps someone deal with what is difficult about existence.

In the Seventh Chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil* entitled “Our Virtues,” Nietzsche advocates the virtue of honesty as “the only [virtue] left us” (BGE §227). Here he is addressing his philosophers of the future, those he hopes would carry on his philosophical legacy and bring about the revaluation of values. Two sections later, Nietzsche declares that:

The seeker after knowledge forces his spirit to recognize things against the inclination of his spirit, and often enough also against the wishes of his heart—by way of saying No where he would like to say Yes, love, and adore—and thus acts as an artist and transfigurer of cruelty. (BGE §229)

In other words, in order to be honest and consistent with one’s cognitive perspective, one must deny the inclination to see the world as one wishes it to be. This requires that we be cruel to ourselves because it is easier and less painful not to seek the truth regarding that which is difficult to bear. What could Nietzsche mean here by claiming that the seeker of knowledge “acts as an artist”? There is a sense in which all cognition is artistry because of its dependence on the forms and concepts we impose upon that which is experienced, just as the artist imposes forms of color and line on the artistic medium. No matter whether one is cognizing in concert with one’s most fundamental cognitive perspective or whether one is lying out of weakness or dishonesty, one is still being an artist in one’s thinking about the world. But what is the unique sense in which the one who maintains fidelity to his or her most basic cognitive perspectives, the seeker after knowledge, is an artist?

A complete answer to these questions will have to wait for the next chapter, but in the section following the one cited above, Nietzsche claims that there is a “basic will of the spirit...”

to simplify the manifold, and to overlook or repulse whatever is totally contradictory—just as it involuntarily emphasizes certain features and lines in what is foreign, in every piece of the ‘external world,’ retouching and falsifying the whole to suit itself. (BGE §230)

This “simplification” and “retouching” is done in order that “the spirit” is able to “be master in and around its own house.” When we look at the world in all its complexity and chaos, we must add and subtract things in order just to get along in it, both cognitively and emotionally/psychologically. These “falsifications” create a will to superficiality and appearance that are seemingly at odds with the seeker after knowledge’s will to get at the deep truth of the matter. Nietzsche’s point is that even though all cognition occurs from a particular human perspective and so never gets to the way things are in themselves, there is a conflict between sticking with our immediate, unreflective cognition of the “surface” of things and our cognition that is faithful to the deepest held intellectual commitments of our cognitive perspectives. To recognize the surface as surface and see what is not immediately apparent as the deeper truth about a thing requires a certain kind of artistry.

An example may be of help here: the desk in front of me appears, without any further reflection to be completely solid and impenetrable. However, if I am committed to my most deeply held intellectual commitments, which include acceptance of what contemporary science tells us about the constitution of physical objects, I am forced to admit that, despite the desk’s superficial appearance of solidity and impenetrability, the centers of mass that compose the desk do not come into immediate contact with each other,

and by far most of the area that counts as desk is empty space.<sup>32</sup> To “see” the truth of this claim despite immediate appearances to the contrary requires creativity on my part; it requires that I be a sort of artist. Of course seeing the desk in this way may require some artistry on my part, but it certainly does not require me to be cruel to myself, but regarding questions that relate to our fundamental values, needs, and desires going beneath the immediate surface appearance may well require courage as well as creativity.

Nietzsche addresses deception and lying in GM III §25 as he attempts to show what can overcome the ascetic ideal. Having just rejected science as a proper antidote to that ideal because it still has faith in truth and in fact “a depreciation of the ascetic ideal unavoidably involves a depreciation of science” (GM III §25), Nietzsche claims that art “in which precisely the lie is sanctified and the will to deception has a good conscience, is much more fundamentally opposed to the ascetic ideal than is science.” He calls “Plato versus Homer...the complete, the genuine antagonism.” This brings us to a crucial limitation of the value Nietzsche places on honesty in terms of not lying to oneself. Science, when properly practiced, reaches the pinnacle of epistemic honesty, but Nietzsche also diagnoses science as being ascetic because it places too much faith in truth. Art is a possible remedy to this ideal because unlike science it sanctifies the lie. Does this undermine my claim that honesty is a standard by which we can adjudicate disagreements? I do not believe it does because I only claim that honesty functions as an epistemic criterion, not an absolute one. Once we go beyond where truth ought to be desired, to the space where the will to truth is no longer operative, honesty is no longer the superlative virtue. There the creativity and good

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<sup>32</sup> This example may seem rather mundane, especially for Nietzsche, but Stack (1991) shows that Nietzsche had a serious interest in how the discoveries of theoretical physics undermined our commonsense, everyday perception of material objects and the world and what the epistemic consequences of this are.



conscience of the life-affirmative artist take the forefront; a discussion of this role for the artist must wait until Chapter Six.

*Conflict of Values/Conflict of Perspectives*

If a disagreement cannot be accounted for by one party's lack of fidelity to a relevant shared perspective (whether because of cognitive weakness or dishonesty), one must conclude that there are conflicting, incommensurate perspectives in play. As we saw in Chapter Four, many factors go into individuating perspectives—values, needs, desires, etc. Among these, conflicting values and the conflicting perspectives they engender are especially important for Nietzsche's larger project of the revaluation of values and overcoming nihilism. So, according to Nietzsche's theory of perspectivism, disagreements can arise when conflicting perspectives rooted in conflicting value sets are brought to bear on theoretical questions. In these cases, since a shared perspective does not exist to be appealed to, how is one to decide which is the "better" position?<sup>33</sup> Or, if there is no way to decide which is the better position, is this a case, rare as it might be, where there is no way to decide between the competing positions and an "anything goes" relativism takes over?

Given the inaccessibility of the perspective-independent fact of the matter for all human cognizers and the dependence on a shared perspective to determine objectivity, there is no way to determine which is the better position in terms of alethic or epistemic value in such cases. Where there is no relevant shared perspective, rational dialogue must come to an end. In these cases, each individual's position is correct according to the conditions for

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<sup>33</sup> Peter Poellner (1995) writes, "Individuals with different 'ruling drives' will find it difficult, perhaps impossible, to convince one another of what each regards as the falsity or indeed 'irrationality' of the other's beliefs" (180). Poellner is correct here, and I am arguing that this is because individuals with different ruling drives have different cognitive perspectives with different conditions for what counts as true and what counts as rigorous, rational inquiry.

correctness and rationality within each particular cognitive perspective, and since as far as we can tell we are cut off from the fact of the matter, there is nothing to guarantee that such perspectives will be in agreement. Since there is no way to determine which position is more rationally justified (the only way to do so would be to appeal to a relevant shared perspective, which is lacking in this case), all that remains to evaluate the disagreement is to turn to that which differentiates the competing perspectives, namely the conflicting values, needs, desires, or drives that determine them.

Even if it cannot be determined which position is better justified epistemically or alethically, we can perhaps determine which perspective (and the positions that go with it) is better given the values it expresses; we can determine the better position normatively/ethically. To some this will certainly seem like a slip into an unacceptable relativism, and for one with such a concern, there is perhaps no adequate response. However, this relativism does not amount to an “anything goes” relativism because, for Nietzsche at least, some perspectives are better than others because they express a superior set of values, values that he wants to promote. The rest of this section will explore what criteria Nietzsche employs for selecting better perspectives in terms of the values and drives they represent.

Even if one accepts the general Kantian framework that I attribute to Nietzsche, viz., that we cognize a world as it appears to us (human cognizers) according to concepts and categories that we bring to experience, one might make the Kantian objection that there is no reason to think that there are ultimately conflicting perspectives, at least among human beings because the way we cognize the world is necessary given the kinds of beings that we

are. Nietzsche demurs because, unlike in the Kantian framework, for Nietzsche there is no necessity to the ways in which we cognize, and in fact:

To understand one another, it is not enough that one use the same words; one also has to use the same words for the same species of inner experiences; in the end one has to have one's experience in common. Therefore the human beings of one people understand one another better than those belonging to different peoples even if they employ the same language; or rather when human beings have long lived together under similar conditions (of climate, soil, danger, needs, and work), what results from this is people who 'understand one another'—a people. (BGE §268)

Two people living in sufficiently different conditions (and so with sufficiently different needs, desires, and values) could have different enough experiences such that the cognitive perspective that each employs might yield conflicting judgments for some questions. If there is no necessity to there being a shared perspective for all cognizers, then it is an empirical question about whether perspectives ultimately come into conflict or not.<sup>34</sup> We have to examine each case of intractable disagreement to see if the disagreement arose because of conflicting perspectives in this way. As I have claimed, one must always be open to the possibility that there are ultimately conflicting perspectives for any disagreement. This is because, as I have shown, we use the concepts we do not out of any logical or metaphysical necessity, but because of the conditions for survival and flourishing in which we find ourselves. Which perspective turns out to be the better one is to be determined by the type of life each expresses.

Nietzsche is no axiological or ethical realist—there is no fact of the matter about ethical and other evaluative claims,<sup>35</sup> but he still has a normative system that is able to

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<sup>34</sup> Anderson 1998 makes this point.

<sup>35</sup> It is beyond the scope of this work to discuss Nietzsche's normative/evaluative anti-realism. For an in-depth discussion of what I take to be a decisive argument in favor of Nietzsche's being an evaluative anti-realist see

determine the relative worth of various types of lives and the evaluative systems that accompany them. The most important factor for Nietzsche when answering the normative question is “What type of life is being promoted?” In the 1887 preface (§2) to *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche frames the problem in terms of truth claims standing as symptoms for a type of person.<sup>36</sup> Nietzsche first describes philosophy as an “interpretation” and “misunderstanding of the body,” in the sense that the answers to philosophical questions “may always be considered first of all as the symptoms of certain bodies.” As such, study of the history of philosophy is “more valuable for the historian and psychologist as hints or symptoms of the body, of its success or failure, its plenitude, power, and autocracy in history, or of its frustrations, weariness, impoverishment, its premonitions of the end, its will to the end” than it is for science.<sup>37</sup> He then writes:

I am still waiting for a philosophical physician in the exceptional sense of that word—one who has to pursue the problem of the total health of a people, time, race, or of humanity—to muster the courage to push my suspicion to its limits and to risk the proposition: what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all ‘truth’ but something else—let us say, health, future, growth, power, life. (GS Preface §2)

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Leiter (2002). Richardson (1996) disagrees with this picture of Nietzsche’s normative philosophy and sees Nietzsche’s normative values as rationally grounded and valid for all subjects. In Chapter One I pointed to my disagreement about the status of Nietzsche’s skepticism relative to any metaphysics he develops. Throughout this study I have argued that, contra Richardson, Nietzsche’s skepticism is primary in relation to any metaphysical system developed. Since, for Richardson, the objectivity of Nietzsche’s normative claims rests on the truth of his metaphysics, if I am right about Nietzsche’s skepticism we must be skeptical about the objectivity of norms as well.

<sup>36</sup> For more on philosophical positions being symptoms of the philosopher see Chapter Two and also Conway 1997.

<sup>37</sup> See Coker 2002 for more on the role the body plays in cognition for Nietzsche. As Coker notes, this role for the body is not emphasized enough by most commentators. It is the body, as the locus of unconscious drives and affects, that moves us to think of the world as we do. These ways that the unconscious body move us to think, as I have already noted, are sensitive to the demands of survival and flourishing for our particular time and not sensitive to truth.

Here we see a striking indication of the consequences of Nietzsche's critique of the absolute will to truth. Truth is not as important as the kind of life being promoted, and since we cannot get at the absolute perspective-independent truth, we should promote those ways of seeing the world that produce better results and promote the most valuable (healthiest, most powerful) types of human life.

What are the criteria for determining which life is better and what is healthier?

Nietzsche puts his normative position the most simply and crudely in the *Antichrist*. "What is good? Everything that heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself. What is bad? Everything that is born of weakness" (A §2). Taking this passage alone we can see that a perspective that comes from a type of life characterized by strength will be better than one characterized by weakness. A more sophisticated version of his criterion of evaluation can be found in *The Gay Science*. "Regarding all aesthetic values I now avail myself of this main distinction: I ask in every instance, 'is it hunger or superabundance that has here become creative'" (GS §370)?<sup>38</sup> A philosophy or theory created out of a lack is less indicative of a healthy, robust life than what is created out of an overflowing abundance. A cognitive perspective, like any other human creation, can be evaluated in these terms, and Nietzsche certainly favors those perspectives that represent this kind of overflowing, healthy life.

In Chapter Two, I sided with those who argue (e.g. Reginster) that the fundamental problem that Nietzsche's philosophy addresses is the problem of nihilism and the physiological decadence that underlies it.<sup>39</sup> In other words, health, strength, and affirmation are all interrelated for Nietzsche, and one of the primary goals of his entire philosophical

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<sup>38</sup> I discuss this section and the criteria of evaluation it indicates Nietzsche endorses in the final chapter.

<sup>39</sup> I discuss Nietzsche's concept of decadence at greater length in Chapter Six.

project is to produce (or perhaps find) individuals who are capable (both psychologically and physiologically) of a complete affirmation of life, a life that as we saw in *The Birth of Tragedy* necessarily includes suffering. The problem then is how to move from the wisdom of Silenus to life affirmation. Nietzsche's ultimate, non-aesthetic criteria of evaluation is whatever enhances the health of an individual (or society/culture) in the sense that its power and ability to affirm life as it is are enhanced.<sup>40</sup>

It follows then that in cases of disagreement where the most fundamental cognitive perspectives are in conflict such that there is no shared perspective to which to appeal, the position that is expressive of or promotes a healthier, more overflowing type of life, one that is better able to affirm itself, is the better position—the position one ought to adopt. However, in light of Nietzsche's critique of the absolute will to truth, it is not entirely clear that positions that promote life should be favored only as a last resort when all other ways of evaluating disagreements in terms of perspective-relative truth have been exhausted. As we saw in Chapter Two, overvaluing truth and making it the sole standard of evaluation is science's mistake and what makes it ultimately ascetic and nihilistic for Nietzsche. The first question for Nietzsche is not always "What is true relative to our deepest, most fundamental cognitive perspectives?" but is often "What position should we adopt given our commitment to promoting a healthy, flourishing life?" This brings us full circle to what was discussed in Chapter Two. Truth should not have an absolute value, and the will to truth (even truth in a

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<sup>40</sup> David Owen (2007: 35-46) proposes that Nietzsche's primary criterion of evaluation is whether something provides the individual with more power, i.e. greater agency (given that Owen equates agency and power for Nietzsche). I find it surprising that given the importance of both Nietzsche's critique of nihilism and his obvious desire to promote life-affirmation that Owen does not indicate the relationship between power (or agency) enhancement and life-affirmation. While it is difficult to be sure which is the crucial term for Nietzsche, life-affirmation or power-enhancement, it is clear that the two hang together in ways that can be specified.

perspective-relative sense) should be subordinated to other ends, ends that are in the service of promoting health and the affirmation of life.<sup>41</sup>

Given what we have seen in this section, Nietzsche's philosophers of the future are not only to examine the world to tease out its secrets, but they are also to legislate new systems of values that in some cases will dispense with truth in order to create the conditions that favor a better, healthier, more creatively overflowing humanity. Truth as well as fictions, artistry, and lies will be put in the service of creating the conditions under which human beings can thrive. In the final chapter of this work, I look at how Nietzsche, despite his metaphysical agnosticism and the austerity of his theory of perspectivism balances the virtues of intellectual conscience, honesty, and skepticism with promoting his ends of overcoming nihilism and affirming life, as they pertain to metaphysics. I argue that in addition to his skeptical bent, one that leads to his metaphysical agnosticism, Nietzsche also has a speculative bent that is consistent with the epistemological positions I've described in the preceding chapters.

Those concerned with Nietzsche's larger philosophical project will perhaps be disappointed with what I have accomplished in this chapter, but it was a necessary detour. It was necessary to show the extent to which Nietzsche is philosophically respectable by mainstream standards, and this required that I show the extent to which he avoids the charge of global, "anything goes" relativism about truth and epistemic justification. The fact that Nietzsche's system can deal with intersubjective disagreement about mundane cases, may

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<sup>41</sup> In a relatively short space I have mentioned the following positive values for Nietzsche: power enhancement, health, overflowing and abundance, life-affirmation, and health. Showing how these relate to one another is beyond the scope of this dissertation and would require its own book-length treatment. However, in the next chapter I will go a little further in clarifying how conceptualizing the world relates to values Nietzsche regards as positive. Also, recall from Chapter Two that I am following Reginster in conceiving of the affirmation of life and its correlate of overcoming nihilism as the primary aim of Nietzsche's philosophy.

perhaps allow us to follow him to where his thought becomes more controversial. I have shown in this chapter that Nietzsche, while indeed ultimately a relativist with regard to epistemic justification, cannot be said to offer an “anything goes” version of relativism. I have shown the furthest extent to which Nietzsche’s perspective-relative standards of truth and knowledge can go in resolving disagreement. Along the way, I showed how many of the positions Nietzsche rejects, others hold out of weakness and an inability to bear the truth about the world. And finally, when pushed as far as perspective-relative truth can go, I showed that disagreements that cannot be resolved by appeal to a shared perspective bring us to the heart of Nietzsche’s project of overcoming nihilism, a conflict of values, some of which are in the service of an overflowing life and others in the service of descending, sickly, decadent life.



## CHAPTER SIX

### METAPHYSICS OF APPEARANCE

Any distinction between a ‘true’ and an ‘apparent’ world—whether in the Christian manner or in the manner of Kant (in the end, an underhanded Christian)—is only a suggestion of decadence, a symptom of the decline of life. That the artist esteems appearance higher than reality is no objection to this proposition. For ‘appearance’ in this case means reality, once more, only by way of selection, reinforcement, and correction. The tragic artist is no pessimist: he is precisely the one who says Yes to everything questionable, even to the terrible—he is Dionysian.

TI “Reasons” §6

#### *Introduction*

I hope by this point I have described and evaluated with sufficient detail the nature of perspectivism and its relationship to Nietzsche’s larger project of overcoming nihilism to draw some further conclusions and propose further avenues of inquiry. I take it that I have shown and explained, among other things, the following:

1. Nietzsche’s understanding of the limits of human knowledge and the way human cognition functions follows directly from his critique of the will to truth.
2. Nietzsche is a radical skeptic, i.e. he thinks that we do not have knowledge, on traditional understandings of the concepts of truth and knowledge.
3. Nietzsche employs new senses of the concepts of truth and knowledge such that it can be said we do possess knowledge, but the truths that we know are always relative to a cognitive perspective and are not absolute or unconditional.
4. Even though the knowledge that we can be said to possess is relative to more or less idiosyncratic cognitive perspectives, Nietzsche has the resources to claim that some positions are epistemically better or worse, namely many of his own.

Thus far I have sought to show that these and other corollary positions are indeed Nietzsche's own, and I have reconstructed the reasons he gives for holding them and responded to the most significant philosophical objections that have been made against them. This chapter moves in a different direction. Nietzsche is not only or even primarily concerned with establishing the limits of rational cognition. Despite his metaphysical agnosticism and skepticism, he has views about how the world is and what the excellent life consists of. The task of this chapter will be to show how Nietzsche can have a metaphysics given his metaphysical agnosticism and to show how this connects to his larger, evaluative project of affirming life and overcoming nihilism, components that are essential in his view to living an excellent life. I argue that if we understand Nietzsche's forays into metaphysics as a metaphysics of appearance, inspired by the practice of the artist, there is no contradiction with his skepticism. I also argue that creating such a metaphysics of appearance is an integral component of Nietzsche's positive project of overcoming nihilism and creating the conditions under which life can be affirmed.

Why think that a metaphysics, from a thinker who problematizes the discipline of metaphysics as much as Nietzsche does, is an integral component to leading a good life? A hint at an answer that will take this entire concluding chapter to begin to unravel comes from a section in an oft-neglected middle work, *Daybreak*. I briefly touched on this passage in the last chapter, but I will discuss it here at greater length before turning to a discussion of metaphysics' relationship to art.

Recall that in Chapter Four I showed how Nietzsche undermines the distinction between the theoretical employment of thought and the practical employment of thought. So far I have only showed how thought's nature as inherently practical activity affects what

we normally think of as theory, i.e. I have shown that we cannot understand any particular theoretical position unless we understand how it is rooted in practical, evaluative, and affective processes. What about the converse? How does collapsing the theoretical into the practical affect how we live and value? What use or importance is theoretical cognition to living an excellent life? D §103 gives us the resources to begin to answer this question.

D §103 is situated toward the beginning of Book II of *Daybreak* in the middle of a discussion of morality, a discussion that calls traditional moral claims into question. Even in this so-called middle work of Nietzsche's, he is making connections between morality and cognitive judgments that he thinks undermine the positive epistemic status of those judgments, an insight that will characterize the epistemic position of his mature works. Just before D §103 he writes, "*Wherein we are all irrational.*—We still draw the conclusions of judgments we consider false, of teachings in which we no longer believe—our feelings make us do it" (D §99). Non-cognitive, proto-evaluative states (our "feelings") cause us to come to the conclusions we do, whether or not those conclusions are rationally justified.

D §103 continues the discussion of morality. Nietzsche claims that "there are two kinds of deniers of morality." The first way that one can deny morality is to "deny that moral motives which men *claim* have inspired their actions really have done so." When one takes this route, one does not deny that there are moral motives; it is just to say that people are dishonest or mistaken about their true motivations, but it does not preclude the possibility that there exists a true morality. The second way that one can deny morality is "to deny that moral judgments are based on truths." This is the more radical critique of morality because it amounts to the position that moral judgments are errors in thinking. Though earlier in his philosophical career, especially in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche made the first kind of

denial of morality, his mature view, first expressed in *Daybreak*, is the second way of denial, that morality is a series of errors.

Thus I deny morality as I deny alchemy, that is, I deny their premises: but I do *not* deny that there have been alchemists who believed in these premises and acted in accordance with them.—I also deny immorality: *not* that countless people *feel* themselves to be immoral, but there is any *true* reason so to feel. It goes without saying that I do not deny—unless I am a fool—that many actions called immoral ought to be avoided and resisted, or that many called moral ought to be done and encouraged—but I think the one should be encouraged and the other avoided *for other reasons than hitherto*. We have to *learn to think differently*—in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more: *to feel differently*. (D §103)

Moral judgments are false, i.e., there is no unconditional right or wrong—such judgments are based on error. This does not preclude the fact that sometimes that which a particular morality encourages or discourages ought to be encouraged or discouraged for other, non-moral reasons. Thus we have two kinds of questions: what is to be done? What should be encouraged and discouraged? These are the practical questions. We can also ask, how should we think about what is to be done? What kinds of justifications can we give for what we do and avoid doing? These are the theoretical questions, the questions of rational inquiry.

Of course for Nietzsche the solutions we give for theoretical questions, such as whether there is a fact of the matter about morality, have their roots in the way our unconscious drives and affects interact with one another. Pure, disinterested rationality is an illusion, and what seems to be the objective fact of the matter is in reality the way the world appears to us given the values and desires we happen to have. This insight of Nietzsche's motivates his skepticism and the metaphysical agnosticism I have attributed to him. D §103 adds another wrinkle to this picture.

We have already seen how Nietzsche thinks the practical questions affect how we answer the theoretical questions. Our evaluative and affective modes of being influence (and

perhaps are the greatest influences on) the ways in which we think about the world and the kinds of judgments that we make. Here in D §103 Nietzsche asserts that the causation also goes the other way.<sup>1</sup> From what we have already discussed in the preceding chapters Nietzsche might well have said, “If we want to think differently, we have to learn to feel differently,” and for Nietzsche this is certainly the case. However in this passage he claims that “We have to *learn to think differently*—in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more: *to feel differently*.” The way we think about things, i.e., the answers we come to on theoretical questions, can affect the way we feel. How does this work?

It is well beyond the scope of this dissertation to unravel Nietzsche’s complex writings about the workings of the human soul,<sup>2</sup> but his basic picture is the following: the human soul is not a unitary will. It is a “subjective multiplicity” and a “social structure of the drives and affects” (BGE §12). Each of these drives vies for control with the other drives, and the ruling drives put the other drives in their service. “Our body is but a social structure composed of many souls...what happens here is what happens in every well-constructed and happy commonwealth; namely, the governing class identifies itself with the successes of the commonwealth” (BGE §19). The way we think about the world, the beliefs we have, and the concepts we employ are among the things that organize the structure of these competing drives and affects. There is no one thing that provides some sort of organizing principle for

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<sup>1</sup> Janaway (2007) argues that because our theoretical stances come not just from our current affective states but from affects inherited from past generations as well, through a process of self-examination we can separate the extent to which it is institutions and culture that affect our beliefs and the extent to which it is our own unconscious affects. Making this separation gives us more control over both what we believe and how we feel.

<sup>2</sup> For a thorough account of Nietzsche’s understanding of the human soul see Parkes 1994. Also see Reginster’s (2006) chapter on the will to power (103-147).

the soul, but our thoughts and employment of concepts are among the factors that account for the order found in any particular soul.<sup>3</sup>

If our primary concern is how one lives one's life, living an excellent life, then we should be concerned about how we think about the world because how we think about the world has an effect on how life is lived and the health of one's soul. In the rest of this chapter I explore how this connection between thought and feeling, theory and practice, and how Nietzsche thinks we should conceive of the world in order to achieve his end of overcoming nihilism and affirming life. I conclude that the Nietzschean philosopher must balance the will to truth and the need for error in such a way that one is able to create a metaphysics of appearance that affirms existence. Such a metaphysics is consistent with Nietzsche's metaphysical agnosticism and is conceived of as a kind of work of art.

*Art as the Good Will to Appearance*

If how we think about and conceptualize the world matters as much for leading a good life as I think D §103 indicates, and our best methods of discovering the truth about the world do not get us that truth, then how are we to think about metaphysics for Nietzsche? His agnosticism prohibits coming to conclusions about the cognizer-independent structure of reality (if there is one), and even if (*per impossible*) we could get at such truths, it would not necessarily be good if we did, given Nietzsche's repudiation of the unconditional will to truth. At this point, it is clear that if Nietzsche were to have a metaphysics, it would be very different from the inquiry of that discipline as it is traditionally conceived. But given the above considerations, why think Nietzsche has a metaphysics at all?

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<sup>3</sup> Certainly how we think about the world is not the only thing that accounts for the organization of a soul. Nietzsche in *Ecce Homo* "Why I am so Clever" points to things like diet and climate for how he was able to overcome the decadence of his time. Concern with how we conceptualize the world should be one part of an overall physiological and psychological strategy for living an excellent life.

Besides the numerous metaphysical interpretations of Nietzsche's philosophy, with Heidegger's being the most famous and notorious,<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche seems to indicate that thinking in a metaphysical way or drawing metaphysical conclusions is inevitable for human beings, even though such thinking is cut off from cognizer-independent reality. Consider this deeply skeptical passage from GS:

*Life* [is] *no argument* [for the truth of a judgment].—We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we can live—by positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content; without these articles of faith nobody now could endure life. But that does not prove them. Life is no argument. The conditions of life might include error. (GS §121)

What strikes one first about this section is its skeptical implications, which at this point should not surprise us. The line of reasoning is familiar: we may not think about the world in the way we do because that is how the world is; our thought may be the way it is because we need to think that way in order to survive or flourish. Thinking as we do may be among our “conditions of life.”

However, this section does not just tell us something about the limits of our thought in attaining knowledge; it also tells us something about us. “Without these articles of faith nobody now could endure life.” We have to arrange “for ourselves a world in which we can live,” and this includes positing various metaphysical entities, e.g. “bodies, lines, planes, cause and effect, motion and rest, form and content.” If Nietzsche is correct, then these

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<sup>4</sup> Interpreters have taken almost every imaginable position regarding whether Nietzsche has a metaphysics or not. Clark (1990) is among those who deny that Nietzsche has a metaphysics at all because she takes his denial of the existence of the thing in itself to be sufficient for the impossibility of having a metaphysics. Hales and Welshon (2000) claim that Nietzsche has a “perspectival metaphysics” but are explicitly undecided as to whether this metaphysics or his perspectival epistemology have priority. Poellner (1995) argues that Nietzsche is a metaphysical anti-realist thus eliminating the possibility of any other metaphysical doctrines. Richardson (1996) takes perspectivism to have ultimately metaphysical implications such that reality—its ultimate structure—is perspectival all the way down. My own view, as I show, is that Nietzsche's perspectivism as a theory of cognition has priority over any metaphysical doctrines he espouses, and the metaphysical agnosticism that follows from perspectivism determines the status of any metaphysical claims he makes or leaves room for making.

posits are, as far as we can tell, errors, but we must posit them nonetheless. We must posit them because given the sorts of beings we are, our ways of conceptualizing affect how we interact with the world, with some beliefs aiding the enhancement, survival, and flourishing of certain types more than other beliefs. For example, thinking in terms of cause and effect may help one notice and anticipate regularities better than someone who does not think in terms of cause and effect, giving the types of people who think in that way an advantage in manipulating their environment. Even though our thoughts about the world do not get at its true, deep structure, we must apply metaphysical concepts to the world. Everyone has a metaphysics in virtue of the fact that he or she needs to live, and the conditions of that life include thinking metaphysically. The difference for the Nietzschean (and any other skeptic) is that they are aware that such thinking is not knowledge (as knowledge is traditionally understood).

So if we must think metaphysically, and such thinking is cut off from the cognizer-independent fact of the matter, then how does Nietzsche conceive of it? Notice in GS §121 the activity Nietzsche associates with the thinker—“We have *arranged*...” Instead of passively discovering or reading off the truth of reality, we are creative with respect to how we conceive of the world. Granted that when we go about our day-to-day lives, such active creativity happens below the level of reflective consciousness, but when we are engaged in higher level theorizing, this activity is such that we can reflect upon it. This creative aspect of our cognition leads Nietzsche to think of our cognition of the world as art and the act of cognizing as artistic activity. In the rest of this section, I will examine this connection between artistic activity and metaphysical cognition.



The casual reader of Nietzsche is aware of his avowed affinity for art and the artist, and indeed his best writings may be considered works of art in their own right.<sup>5</sup> However, Nietzsche is not unqualifiedly enthusiastic about art and artists; he is critical of them as well. In order to understand how Nietzschean metaphysics is like art, it is important to understand these qualifications to Nietzsche's generally positive remarks on the artist. The dangers associated with art are also dangers for the Nietzschean metaphysician, even the metaphysician who recognizes that his or her metaphysical cognition does not get at the cognizer-independent truth.

Nietzsche begins the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* by asking, "What is the meaning of ascetic ideals?" And immediately he concludes that "in the case of artists [ascetic ideals] mean nothing or too many things" (GM III §1). But why come to this conclusion? What does it mean that for artists ascetic ideals either mean nothing or too many things?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The literature on Nietzsche's understanding of art and artists is much too vast to thoroughly cover in this dissertation. Nehamas (1985) argues that the central theme of Nietzsche's work is that one should "give style" to one's character (GS §290). In other words, the goal for the Nietzschean is to make themselves into a work of art. Given that the objectivity and validity of moral values are called into question by Nietzsche's philosophy, Nehamas thinks that aesthetic values have the possibility of taking their place in developing an *ethos*. Young's (1992) book length study of Nietzsche's philosophy of art provides a useful overview of Nietzsche's writings on the topic. He argues that Nietzsche's understanding of art shifts over time but that by the end of his philosophical career he returns to the view that he held in BT. In these two periods, he argues that Nietzsche holds a pessimistic view, influenced by Schopenhauer, that life, as it is, is not worth living and that art can act as an adequate, life-affirming response to that pessimistic view of life. Ridley (2007) also highlights the importance of creating a work of art out of one's life, but also interestingly discusses the way in which art, in addition to science and metaphysics, can give us (a necessarily mediated) picture of reality. Ridley argues that even though we cannot get at the unmediated, absolute nature of things, we can access some sort of truth through the mediation of the artistic. This is particularly interesting given the claim that I make in this chapter that a properly Nietzschean metaphysics is inextricably connected to art and artistic creation.

<sup>6</sup> Janaway (2007: 188) focuses on the extent to which Wagner over-identified with his ascetic hero and was too influenced by Schopenhauer to be taken seriously as a clue about the meaning of ascetic ideals. If Janaway is correct and Nietzsche is really focused on Wagner here, there is the possibility that what Nietzsche says about all artists in the beginning of Part III of GM really only applies to artists who are too much like Wagner. I am sympathetic to this because I think there is room for a philosopher-artist who not only creates art but also creates his or her own values as well. Owen (2007: 114) makes even less of Nietzsche's dismissal of the artist as an indication of the meaning of ascetic ideals. This cursory treatment of the artist's place at the beginning of Part III is surprising and disappointing because of the importance art plays for Nietzsche. For my own part, I wonder if Nietzsche's focus on Wagner here might point to Wagner's being the last of the artists who were merely "valets of some morality, philosophy, or religion." Perhaps a move to the modern period of art could

After an analysis of the case of Wagner's turn to ascetic ideals, Nietzsche argues that "one does best to separate an artist from his work, not taking him as seriously as his work" (GM III §4). This is because the artist must necessarily be of a different psychological type than the characters depicted in the art, so "a Homer would not have created an Achilles nor a Goethe a Faust if Homer had been an Achilles or Goethe a Faust" (GM III §4). Insofar as one is interested in what the work of art is, then one should set aside the artist entirely.

Granted that Homer was not nor could have been an Achilles, but why set the artist aside? Nietzsche's answer is that "they do not stand nearly independently enough in the world and *against* the world for their changing valuations to deserve attention *in themselves*" (GM III §5). Artists are "valets of some morality, philosophy, or religion" i.e. some system of values that they themselves did not create, and therefore "artists never stand apart" (GM III §5). So, if we are concerned with understanding and evaluating the values that a work of art represents, we should look at the source of those values, which Nietzsche thinks is rarely to be found in the artist him or herself.

Nietzsche's criticism of the artist in GM III is that he or she is not independent enough in his or her valuations. Given that Nietzsche's goal is a life organized by values that allow one to affirm life, to be Nietzschean one would need to be a creator of new values insofar as the values endemic in one's culture are nihilistic, as Nietzsche thinks they are in Western culture. If metaphysics is an artistic creative activity, then for Nietzsche it can be positive or negative depending on the values it instantiates, and the discussion of artists in GM III shows that art can instantiate whatever values the artist is dependent on. Merely creating is not enough; one must create in a way that affirms life. But before we can look at

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represent a shift in the role of the artist, but on this I can merely speculate as Nietzsche does not address this question.

how an artistic metaphysics can reflect life-affirmative values, we need to look at what it means for doing metaphysics to be like creating a work of art in general such that it can reflect values at all.<sup>7</sup>

Nietzsche first and foremost associates art with falsification. Art is artifice and a covering over of truth. Consider his description of the *homines religiosi* and philosophers in BGE §59, which he claims “might be included among the artists, as their highest rank.”

Nietzsche writes:

It is the profound, suspicious fear of an incurable pessimism that forces whole millennia to bury their teeth in and cling to a religious interpretation of existence: the fear of that instinct which senses that one might get a hold of the truth too soon, before man has become strong enough, hard enough, artist enough. Piety, the ‘life in God,’ seen in this way, would appear as the subtlest and final offspring of the fear of truth, as an artist’s worship and intoxication before the most consistent of all falsifications, as the will to the inversion of truth, to untruth at any price. (BGE §59)

Notice that art is invoked in two different ways in this passage. People “cling” to a falsifying religious worldview, in part, because they are not “artist enough.” At the same time, their construction of a religious metaphysics is not only a “fear of truth” and “untruth at any price;” it is also “an artist’s workshop.” There seems, on the surface, to be a tension here between Nietzsche’s two uses of “art” here, one with a strongly positive connotation, the other the object of Nietzsche’s reprobation.

This tension can be resolved when we remember what Nietzsche says about artists in GM III. They are not independent enough, *qua* artists, to have their own values; they merely express the values they have received from elsewhere in their art. So in this passage, the

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<sup>7</sup> Anderson 2005 recognizes the importance of artistry for Nietzsche’s thought on truth and metaphysics. However, he contrasts artistry with the positive epistemic virtue of honesty (see my discussion in Chapter Five). I argue that honesty and artistry are not opposed and that even when one is being honest, one is still creating a world as an artist, and in fact, honesty demands that we admit to ourselves that this is what we are doing. Nehamas 1985 argues that Nietzsche “looks at the world in general as if it were a sort of artwork; in particular, he looks at it as if it were a literary text,” and this is “at least part of the motivation for perspectivism” (3).

artist, i.e. the one giving an interpretation of existence, could suffer from “the profound, suspicious fear of an incurable pessimism.” I take it the incurable pessimism Nietzsche is referring to is a fear that life is not worth living and that the suffering it necessarily contains is unbearable and meaningless, i.e., nihilism. One suffering from such a fear will create something like a religious interpretation of existence. However, humanity could “become strong enough, hard enough” to create an interpretation that does not create out of such a fear, to create in a way that affirms life and can handle the suffering endemic to it. There is still another puzzle in this passage. The one giving a religious interpretation falsifies, inverts truth, and wills untruth at any price, and so he or she is an artist. However, the one who is strong and hard enough is also “artist enough” for truth. If art is the creation of a falsifying image, then why would someone have to be “artist enough” for the truth?

The answer to this question comes from Nietzsche’s understanding of truth. Recall in Chapter 4, I distinguished between perspective-independent truth, to which Nietzsche thinks we do not have cognitive access and perspective-relative truth, which are truths we can possibly attain. Also, recall that Nietzsche thinks that our perspective-relative truths are falsifications of the underlying truth to which we do not have access. With this structure in place, one is always an artist in the sense that one creates falsifications that cover over the cognizer-independent truth. But one can also be an artist in a second sense in that one covers over the cognizer-relative truth as well. The one who out of the “suspicious fear of an incurable pessimism” creates a religious interpretation of existence is a double artist in this sense, falsifying the world from their perspective in the way we all must constantly do and covering over the perspective-relative truth with further artistic falsifications. In BGE §59, it

seems that Nietzsche claims that the better artists are those who only practice one level of falsification and not two.<sup>8</sup>

The kind of artistry that all human beings are engaged in is described in the following passage:

We make up the major part of the experience and can scarcely be forced not to contemplate some event as its ‘inventors.’ All this means: basically and from time immemorial we are—accustomed to lying. Or to put it more virtuously and hypocritically, in short, more pleasantly: one is much more of an artist than one knows. (BGE §192)

This section restates the basic position on human cognition that I have been attributing to Nietzsche throughout this dissertation: our cognition comes not from the way things really are but from our own activity. What this passage tells us is that we can think of this creation of a world from our perspective as either lying or art, and we cannot help but create art in this sense. Being an artist in this sense is the condition of having experience at all; in fact, art-like creation is what constitutes experience. When pursued rigorously, this kind of creation is difficult.

Nietzsche says that the “seeker after knowledge forces his spirit to recognize things against the inclination of his spirit...[and] against the wishes of his heart.” This is because we often think about things in the way that we do in order to avoid the unpleasant and painful consequences that come from acknowledging the truth. Because of this “in all desire to know there is a drop of cruelty.” Such a knowledge-seeker, Nietzsche calls “an artist and transfigurer of cruelty” (BGE §229). This is consistent with my discussion of honesty in the last chapter. The truth is often difficult to bear, and one must be cruel and hard with oneself in order to uncover it. Such transfiguration must balance the honesty of accepting the truth

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<sup>8</sup> This recalls the distinction Nietzsche makes between the “honest” lie and the dishonest, mendacious lie in GM III §19.

with the “basic will of the spirit,” which in wanting to “be master in and around its own house... emphasizes certain features..., retouching and falsifying the whole to suit itself” (BGE §230). This is the artistic impulse, the impulse to surfaces, which seems opposed to the honesty of the seeker of truth, but in fact must be wedded to honesty if one is to seek truth and affirm life.

What kind of artists does Nietzsche want us to become? He certainly does not want us to be the dishonest artists who use their falsifications to cover over truths that we cannot handle because of fear and pessimism. But Nietzsche also rejects the unconditional will to truth, meaning that the Nietzschean task cannot simply be to examine the artistically created world of our cognitive perspective. Nietzsche also warns against the art of the distracting spectacle:

How maliciously we listen now to the big county-fair boom-boom with which the “educated” person and city dweller today permits art, books, and music to rape him and provide “spiritual pleasures”—with the aid of spirituous liquors! How the theatrical scream of passion now hurts our ears, how strange to our taste the whole romantic uproar and tumult of the senses have become, which the educated mob loves, and all its aspirations after the elevated, inflated, and exaggerated. (GS Preface §4)

Thus the purpose of art for Nietzsche is not to distract or elevate the feelings. We do not need an art that dulls our senses into submission. “Convalescents” need “a mocking, light, fleeting, divinely troubled art” (GS Preface §4). This art allows us to “forget well, and to be good at *not* knowing.” Art, unlike the spectacle Nietzsche derides, does not make us forget what is unpleasant. It transfigures reality itself, so that we become good at not knowing and “stop courageously at the surface” (GS Preface §4).

Indeed, Nietzsche writes, “If we had not welcomed the arts and invented this kind of cult of the untrue...honesty would lead to nausea and suicide” (GS §107). In this section, he says that “art as the good will to appearance” is “a counterforce against our honesty.” Thus

in our thought about the way the world is there must be, if we are to not be overcome by nausea, balance between honest inquiry and artistry. “We must discover the *hero* no less than the *fool* in our passion for knowledge; we must occasionally find pleasure in our folly, or we cannot continue to find pleasure in our wisdom” (GS §107). This requires that we “stand above” the morality embodied in the unconditional will to truth. Seeking knowledge requires acts of heroic honesty about what our own perspective shows about existence and its suffering, but such honesty must be accompanied by “exuberant, floating, dancing, mocking, childish, and blissful art.”

This passage tells us, or at least hints at, what kind of metaphysics we are to create. We must go beyond the honesty that our cognitive perspective demands of us. We must be creative with respect to what we passively receive from the affects, drives, and desires that are outside our control. We have to create a way of thinking about the world that is able to overcome the nausea we feel when we simply accept without modification the world that we encounter through science and everyday experience. It will take the rest of this chapter to explore what this looks like, and even then it will be a preliminary sketch. It is artistic insofar as we are active with regard to it as creators, and it is metaphysical insofar as it is a picture of reality that helps us make sense of it. However, it cannot be the kind of art that those who give a religious interpretation of existence create out of dishonesty. A metaphysics is honest by Nietzsche’s standards insofar as it coheres with (even if it goes beyond) the standards of one’s cognitive perspective and insofar as it sees itself as an artistic creation and not the truth about the deep structure of reality. Those who give a religious interpretation that Nietzsche is against are not honest with themselves about their status as the creators of their art, their view on the world. We have to take responsibility for the fact that we must be dishonest. We must be honest in our dishonesty and realistic about our status as artists.

It is important to get clear about what it is that separates the two kinds of artists. One has an overabundance of energy from the nexus of their various drives, the other is lacking such energy, and being in a state of decline suffers from life. The state of one's drives is one's unconscious physiological state. Such unconscious physiological states are expressed or reflected in conscious valuations, the most important of which for Nietzsche are nihilism (see the discussion in Chapter Two) and the affirmation of life. I take the superabundance of affective drive energy to be what Nietzsche calls a healthy physiology and the lack of energy, which signifies a state of decline, to be what he calls decadence. While there need not be a one to one correlation between an individual's physiological states and his or her modes of evaluation (life affirmative or nihilistic), Nietzsche sometimes associates the various guises of nihilism with a decadent constitution.<sup>9</sup> Thus we can say that one's basic evaluative attitude towards existence is a result of the underlying healthy or decadent condition of the body.<sup>10</sup> The relationship between bodily drives and conscious valuations is, of course, complex, but for my purposes we can think of decadence as the unconscious bodily correlate of nihilism and health as the unconscious bodily correlate of life affirmation. My contention is that the honesty required to affirm the conditions of existence in general and therefore the limits and abilities of our cognitive faculties requires a healthy set of drives. The artist who creates a

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<sup>9</sup> See for example this *Nachlass* fragment: "One confuses cause and effect: one fails to understand decadence as a physiological condition and mistakes its consequences for the real cause of the indisposition; example: all of religious morality" (WP §44). Here Nietzsche says that religious morality (a form of nihilism) is best understood as an effect of the physiological condition he calls decadence.

<sup>10</sup> Janaway (2007) holds a view similar to this that the psychological states, including cognitions, of an individual have their basis in the constitution of the body. However, he says of this bodily self that it is "an enduring, unchanging essence out of which [one's] many thoughts grow organically, like fruit from a tree" (20). As I have shown in my discussion of D §103, there is room for one's affective states (and hence bodily constitution) to be changed, albeit not by direct conscious control. Janaway offers a very helpful summary of what constitutes, in terms of the drives and affects, the sickness that is the bad conscience: "an instinctual drive to inflict cruelty, internalization of the instincts, and rationalization of self-cruelty by the invention of a theistic metaphysics" (121). Notice that the last condition is not in terms of the drives at all and is the conscious metaphysical correlate. The metaphysics is the art that deals with and expresses the internal bodily suffering.



metaphysics that affirms life will have such a set of drives. The decadent artist will have a constellation of drives such that he or she is incapable of honestly affirming and so will produce a nihilistic metaphysics.<sup>11</sup>

Even once we clarify what shape this artistic metaphysics takes in the following sections, we are still left with the problem raised by GM III. Artists are in the service of whatever values they take from their milieu; they are not independent enough to create values. So in our artistic creation of a metaphysics, we must be attentive to the values out of which we create and are reflected in our artwork. Nietzsche gives explicit criteria of evaluation to apply to our artistic and philosophical productions in GS §370. All art and philosophy, he claims, “may be viewed as a remedy and an aid in the service of growing and struggling life; they always presuppose suffering and sufferers.” The human condition necessarily includes suffering, and art and philosophy are among the human creations that are able to deal with that suffering. Not all individuals suffer in the same way, however.

There are two kinds of sufferers: first those who suffer from *over-fullness of life*—they want a Dionysian art and likewise a tragic view of life, a tragic insight—and those who suffer from the *impoverishment of life* and seek rest,

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<sup>11</sup> Scott (2006) argues that decadence for Nietzsche, because it is primarily a physiological phenomenon, cannot be avoided. This is because decadence expresses the disintegration of the relationships that the drives of the body have with one another, and all systems of drives dissolve over time. Scott maintains that given the inevitability of decadence, the problem for the philosopher is to create values that alter one’s expression of decadence from something life denying and nihilistic to an expression that is life affirming. I agree with Scott that decadence for individuals, and by extension for cultures, is something that cannot be avoided because all coordinated arrangements of drives must disintegrate eventually, and that the important task is to make sure one’s own (individual or cultural) expression of decadence is life-affirming and essentially healthy. It is important to note (as Scott does) that what separates a “positive” (what Scott calls strong) expression of decadence from a “negative” (or weak) expression is going to have its roots in the body and the complex interaction of drives that make it up. In other words, just as the decadence to which every organization is subject is a physiological category, the differing categories of decadence are also finer-grained physiological categories. Therefore, while all bodies (organic and political) are ultimately decadent as they age, we might say that some are essentially decadent insofar as they cannot express values that affirm life, and there are some bodies that are only incidentally decadent and essentially healthy insofar as they are capable of creating values that are anti-nihilistic and affirmative of life as it is. I do not take this distinction between essentially healthy and essentially decadent to be substantially different from the distinction Scott makes between strong and weak decadents. See also Scott 1998.

stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves through art or knowledge, or intoxication, convulsions, anesthesia, and madness... (GS §370)<sup>12</sup>

The distinction is between those who are rich and full of life and those who are impoverished. Each type produces and undergoes suffering, but what methods of amelioration each individual seeks out from within that suffering differs from type to type.<sup>13</sup>

Those who are “over-full” of life create out of the excess energy in their system of drives and thereby expend themselves in the process. He or she is able to stand “the sight of the terrible and questionable,” and what is more is able to act even when it requires “even the terrible deed and any luxury of destruction, decomposition, and negation.” Suffering is not so much a problem for this type because of the overabundance of life they possesses. “In his case, what is evil, absurd, and ugly seems, as it were, permissible, owing to an excess of procreating, fertilizing energies that can still turn any desert into lush farmland” (GS §370) So while the over-abundant type certainly suffers as all must suffer, the creation this suffering initiates is not meant to compensate for the suffering but rather flows out of the excess energies this type possesses, and perhaps as Nietzsche suggests in BGE §225 this suffering creates enhancement instead of leading to nausea. They do not create out of a need for something more or from a perceived a lack or depletion. Creation is for this type the necessary outpouring of their nature.

It is just the opposite for the type who are impoverished of life. They need “above all mildness, peacefulness, and goodness in thought as well as deed.” Every creation is an

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<sup>12</sup> Over-fullness translates *Ueberfülle*, which could also be translated as superabundance. “Impoverishment” translates *Verarmung*, which also could be translated as depletion or poverty.

<sup>13</sup> Conway 1997 argues that this passage is indicative of Nietzsche’s vitalism with each organism having a certain finite reserve of vital force or energy. I am resistant to this view, but it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to offer my objections here. It is sufficient to say that one can examine the symptoms of over-fullness and impoverishment without positing what internal cause of such conditions is. I will restrict my reading of this passage to these symptoms to avoid entering the debate about Nietzsche’s supposed vitalism.

attempt to produce the conditions they need to avoid the suffering that overwhelms them. Instead of a violent outpouring, they create salves to lessen suffering. Their art and their philosophy aim at “the conceptual understandability of existence—for logic calms and gives confidence” two traits that they naturally lack. Most of all, their creations are meant to “[keep] away fear and [enclose] one in optimistic horizons” (GS §370) Those who suffer from impoverishment need a falsified view on reality to hide its painful and disquieting tragic elements,<sup>14</sup> otherwise fear would paralyze and overwhelm.

It is clear that Nietzsche prefers the overabundant to the impoverished, but it is important to remember that this is not a moral preference. For it to be a moral preference, at least in the Kantian sense of moral, one would have to be able to choose between one or the other, but for Nietzsche the weak, no more than the strong, are not at all responsible for the type to which they belong or its conditions for survival and flourishing.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, insofar as the creations of one type or the other can be promoted as defining and enlivening a culture, Nietzsche will attempt to promote and entice his readers to promote healthy, overflowing types. If our conceptualization of the world, i.e. our metaphysics, is an artistic creation and artists are dependent on the values they inherit, the values one ought to take on in creating are those of an overfull life. Indeed, Nietzsche’s own criterion for evaluation is the distinction I have described above. “Regarding all aesthetic values I now avail myself of this main distinction: I ask in every instance, ‘is it hunger or superabundance that has here become creative’” (GS §370).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See my discussion of the tragic character of existence in the section on honesty in Chapter Five.

<sup>15</sup> See GM I §13 for Nietzsche’s claim that one is not responsible for the type that one is.

<sup>16</sup> One of the primary lessons Nietzsche gives us that this dissertation has focused on is that our conscious activity, both cognitions and valuations (“morality is a mere sign language, mere symptomatology” TI “Improvers” §1), are a result of unconscious bodily processes. So whether we are strong enough to embrace honestly the truth presented within our cognitive perspective or too weak and so must lyingly and dishonestly

Nietzsche clearly means for “art” to function as more than a mere metaphor in relation to creating a metaphysics. Instead of creating images in the medium of paint, we create views of reality in the medium of concepts. Both are primarily creative rather than intellectual endeavors and neither are a reading off of reality; human beings are active with respect to what is produced in both cases. Also, like all art, a metaphysics takes on the values in which its creator is embedded, and so we must be vigilant that our conceptions of reality are born out of health and abundance rather than need and lack. However, just as understanding painting requires more than just understanding art in general—we need to understand the specificity of the medium, metaphysics too requires that we understand what is specific to its artistic medium. In the case of metaphysics this medium is concepts. In the next section, I look at what Nietzsche has to say about the artistic medium of metaphysics. What are the status of metaphysical claims for Nietzsche? What are we doing when we conceptualize reality?<sup>17</sup>

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cover up that truth, whether we are able to create values that affirm life or nihilistically denigrate it, our underlying physiology, its composition of unconscious drives and affects, is at work. The question I have not answered is how can we affect ourselves to have a more healthy, affirmative life. I have already claimed that one strategy Nietzsche offers is to adjust our ways of thinking about the world in ways that can rearrange our underlying drives, but are not those very adjustments depended on the original configuration of unconscious affects? And if so, are not possible positive changes we can make already “programmed” into our physiology and so beyond our control? Nietzsche indicates this may be a false problem:

No one is responsible for man’s being there at all, for his being thus-and-such, or for being in these circumstances or in this environment. . . . One is necessary, one is a piece of fatefulness, one belongs to the whole, one is in the whole; there is nothing which could judge, measure, compare, or sentence our being, for that would mean judging, measuring, comparing, or sentencing the whole. But there is nothing besides the whole. That nobody is responsible anymore. . . .that alone is the great liberation; with this alone is the innocence of becoming restored. (II “Errors” §8)

We must let go of the need to feel as though we are in control of our mode of being and its development because such control is impossible. We must accept that we are “a piece of fatefulness.” (Paradoxically even such acceptance is also something outside our conscious control). Of course, this is not only a problem for Nietzsche; it is a problem for any philosopher who denies a robust sense of freedom of the will (e.g., Spinoza).<sup>17</sup> This is far from a complete discussion of Nietzsche’s understanding of art and artists and has been limited to that which pertains to my project of understanding how Nietzsche can have a metaphysics and how such a metaphysics should be conceived as art. For an overview of Nietzsche’s philosophy of art see Young 1992.

*Metaphysics of Appearance*

Having explored how metaphysical thinking is a kind of artistic creation, I now move to an examination of the passages that suggest that Nietzsche leaves room for a kind of metaphysics in his philosophy. But why think that Nietzsche has a metaphysics or leaves room for one? Indeed it seems as if I am committed to claiming that Nietzsche cannot have a metaphysics given that I attribute metaphysical agnosticism to him.<sup>18</sup> However, just as I showed that Nietzsche distinguishes between a perspective-independent truth to which we do not have access and a perspective-relative truth to which we can have access, the same distinction can be made for metaphysics. Even though Nietzsche is committed to refraining from believing anything with respect to the deep structure of reality, it is open to him to make claims about how reality appears from his cognitive perspective. Such claims would be metaphysical in the sense of describing the way reality is, but they would also avoid violating Nietzsche's skepticism because they only have the status of describing the world as it appears; no universality (for all cognizers) nor necessity need be attributed to such claims.

While it is clear that there is as much logical space for Nietzsche to have a kind of metaphysics as there is for him to assert a kind of truth, does Nietzsche actually have a metaphysics? And if he does have a metaphysics, does he describe it in the perspective-relative way I have indicated is available to him? As we will see, in many of the passages where he makes room for something like a Nietzschean metaphysics, he reaffirms his skepticism regarding knowledge of the deep structure of mind-independent reality,

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<sup>18</sup> I use metaphysics here in the contemporary sense of the term used in Anglophone philosophy and not in the sense Nietzsche uses as a pejorative. According to Conway, "Nietzsche views as 'metaphysical' any departure in theory or practice from the strict phenomenalism he champions. He identifies metaphysics with 'idealism,' which he describes as a 'flight from reality'" (Conway 1997: 191). "Metaphysics" in the sense I am employing the term is compatible with Nietzsche's "phenomenalism" (as Conway calls it—which is roughly equivalent to what I call metaphysical agnosticism). We can understand Nietzsche's injunctions against metaphysics to mean either a caution against dogmatism (thinking that we have access to perspective-independent truth) or an injunction against positing a transcendent reality beyond what is given as this-worldly.

highlighting the fact that one can think about the world metaphysically without violating Nietzsche's metaphysical agnosticism.

Maudmarie Clark argues that Nietzsche cannot have a metaphysics because "His denial of the thing-in-itself leaves no place into which a metaphysical theory could fit."<sup>19</sup> Thus she denies what I have just claimed, that there is a logical space for Nietzsche to have a metaphysics. It seems to me that the difference between Clark's view and my own is merely semantic because given her insistence that metaphysics is theorizing about things as they are in themselves, what I am calling a metaphysics of appearance would not count as metaphysics. However, I think that Clark's understanding of metaphysics is unnecessarily narrow. What else are we to call the ways in which we abstractly conceptualize reality, e.g. dividing it up into objects or positing relations of cause and effect, if not "metaphysics" even if we acknowledge that such conceptualization is only legitimate as "from one's perspective" and not regarding things as they are in themselves.

A concrete example from Nietzsche's corpus, one that Clark draws upon (and we discussed in Chapter Three) to show that BGE §36 is not an argument Nietzsche actually endorses, should show that Nietzsche indeed does metaphysics. Recall that one of the premises from BGE §36 is that the human will is perspicuous to us and is causally efficacious. Clark argues that Nietzsche denies both aspects of this premise. He denies that we are immediately acquainted with the will, and importantly for what I am arguing, he denies that the will is causally efficacious. This is a metaphysical claim, an abstract claim about the way the world is that is not under the auspices of the empirical sciences. Granted that Nietzsche denies that we can know about the will or anything as they are in themselves,

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<sup>19</sup> Clark 1990: 205.

but again I ask Clark, what else are we to call making such claims, perspective-relative though they are, other than metaphysics?

I have already discussed how in BGE §9 Nietzsche claims that the Stoics' conception of nature was a creation of a view of the world that stemmed from their values rather than a discovery of the way the world actually is. Nietzsche then generalizes this claim about the Stoics to all philosophy. "Philosophy is this tyrannical drive itself, the most spiritual will to power, to the 'creation of the world,' to the *causa prima*" (BGE §9). What one does when one philosophizes is "create a world." This is not an idealism where to be is to be perceived, nor is it claiming that each of us is a creating divinity in our own individual worlds. Rather it is the claim that to philosophize is to construct an experienced world.

What do I mean by "experienced world"? We can distinguish between the world qua independent, external reality and world qua what a perceiver experiences. With regard to the former, the world as it is in itself, Nietzsche denies that we can have any knowledge of it. The latter, however, is something by definition we have access to and is the only world that concerns us. It is not the rock flying toward one's head as it is in itself that matters; it is the experienced rock breaking one's skull that matters. Of course, the rock in itself may be a necessary condition for the experienced rock, but remember that Nietzsche's skepticism denies that we can know that this is the case, and so he remains agnostic as to its truth.

Each of us, whether one explicitly philosophizes or not, constructs an experienced world. The one who explicitly engages in philosophy is constructing a world in a more active sense because he or she is creating a new set of concepts with which to think about the world, and such concepts play a determining role in how the world is experienced. In other words, when one uses different notions to conceptualize reality, the world one experiences will be different. Nietzsche writes, "What things are called is incomparably more important

than what they are... it is enough to create new names and estimations and probabilities in order to create in the long run new 'things'" (GS §58). It is the philosopher who gives things new names. This occurs at the most abstract level, the level of metaphysics.

Everyone's world is constructed out of previous experiences. "As soon as we see a new image, we immediately construct it with the aid of all our previous experiences, depending on the degree of our honesty and justice. All experiences are moral experiences, even in the realm of sense perception" (GS §114). However, for the most part the past experiences and values that go into constructing one's experience of the world are received from other sources (e.g. one's upbringing, culture, religion, education, language, etc.). With the philosopher, because he or she creates new values and new concepts, new ways of constructing experience are created. Thus metaphysics amounts to creating a new world for Nietzsche.

What I propose we do with this conception of the philosopher when it is wedded with Nietzsche's metaphysical agnosticism is to conceive of a Nietzschean metaphysics of appearance. This is no mere description of what is apparent because as I just claimed above, what is experienced is itself constructed and actively so by the creation of concepts. Such a metaphysics of appearance would be honest with itself about what appears and would be amenable to intersubjective validation insofar as those in question shared a relevant common perspective. A metaphysics of appearance would also be creative because it would apply new concepts to the world and thus create a new experience of the world. A metaphysics of appearance would not violate Nietzsche's rejection of the unconditional will to truth because the philosopher who creates it would be self-conscious about its status as fiction, lie, and simplification. It would serve to some degree the desire for truth, but it would be in the



service of other values, and insofar as it is a Nietzschean metaphysics those values would be the promotion of a type able to affirm life.

I have already shown in Chapter Four that Nietzsche reevaluates the status of the appearance/reality distinction, and with the metaphysics of appearance we are now able to see the final fruits of Nietzsche's rejection of it.

What is appearance for me now? Certainly not the opposite of some essence: what could I say about any essence except to name the attributes of its appearance! Certainly not a dead mask that one could place on an unknown  $x$  or remove from it! Appearance is for me that which lives and is effective."  
(GS §54)

We constitute the world of appearance, and then as philosophers we name some aspects of appearance as essential. What is essential or ultimately real for us is something that we construct and create no less than appearance is. The difficult task for the philosopher is the balancing the will to truth, i.e. honestly applying the standards of one's cognitive perspective, with a creative, artistic expression that promotes life-affirming, health-inducing values. The caricature of Nietzsche is that he undermines the rigor required to do philosophy, but the task he gives philosophy in the place of what he undermines is no less difficult. It demands both rigor and an aesthetic taste.

The following passage from the late notebooks, while not the most systematically clear expression of how Nietzsche conceives of the philosophical project, shows us something of this dual character of creating a metaphysics of appearance:

Will to truth is a making firm, a making true and durable, an abolition of the false character of things, a reinterpretation of it into beings. 'Truth' is therefore not something there, that might be found or discovered—but something that must be created and that gives a name to a process, or rather to a will to overcome that has in itself no end—introducing truth, as a *processus in infinitum*, an active determining—not a becoming conscious of something that is in itself firm and determined. It is a word for the 'will to power.' (WP §552 1887)

This passage highlights how truth (the kind of truth to which we have access) is not something we read off the world “that might be found or discovered.” Truth is an active process initiated by the thinker. Notice that a consequence of this is that what metaphysics one is able to endorse depends on one’s values and cognitive perspective. This entails that contrary to the traditional aims of the discipline of metaphysics, there can be no claim to universality, and different types of thinkers necessarily will develop different metaphysical systems. This insight we have already encountered numerous times, but notice what Nietzsche says next. He asserts that truth is a will to overcome. By creating truth we place our own constraints on existence; we are the determining agents, and we seek truth out of this will to be in control, this will to overcome. Nietzsche names this will “the will to power,” which leads directly to the topic of the next section where I discuss Nietzsche’s metaphysics of the will to power.

#### *The Will to Power*

In Chapter Three I argued that BGE §36 is a skeptical argument reminiscent of Descartes’ *Meditations* and not an argument that the world as it is in itself is the will to power. Following Clark, I showed that the passage, due to its content and formal structure cannot be a straightforward argument that the world is will to power. However, I argued against Clark that this section is Nietzsche expressing his idiosyncratic perspective in which he reads his desires and values onto the world. My conclusion was that the primary purpose of BGE §36 is to induce a skepticism in the reader by showing them that they are not in position to tell whether the world is as it appears or the unfolding of a will to power which is the “intelligible character” of reality.

Without undermining that conclusion, I now ask why would Nietzsche choose the will to power as the competing possibility for the way the world is? While Nietzsche does

not argue that the world is will to power in §36, he did emphasize it as a possibility, and elsewhere he makes the will to power a key explanatory principle. It is well beyond the scope of this dissertation to give an exhaustive account of Nietzsche's concept of the will to power, and I will refrain from filling in much of the content of the concept.<sup>20</sup> My purpose in this section is to explore the possibility of the will to power as an example of a metaphysics of appearance, and as such I will explore the status of this concept in the context of Nietzsche's perspectivism. I leave it to future research to flesh out its substantive content.

BGE §36 is not the first section in *Beyond Good and Evil* where Nietzsche proposes the will to power as a metaphysical principle. In §36 it is proposed as a possibility for the "intelligible character" of existence behind appearances. In §22 it is proposed as an explanation for observed physical facts. He begins the section by calling "nature's conformity to law" as an explanation for physical events "bad 'philosophy.'"

It is no matter of fact, no 'text,' but rather only a naively humanitarian emendation and perversion of meaning, with which you make abundant concessions to the democratic instincts of the modern soul! 'Everywhere equality before the law; nature is no different in that respect, no better off than we are' (BGE §22)

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<sup>20</sup> For several attempts to give such an exhaustive account see the following: Conway 1997: "[Nietzsche's] hypothesis of will to power thus suggests an account of the world as an immeasurably dense, undifferentiated whole, which is not the sum of the constituent 'parts' inhabited (and hubristically 'explained') by human beings" (44). Kaufmann (1974) argues that the will to power is an empirical concept that is meant to explain psychological phenomena and which Nietzsche illegitimately generalized to the entire cosmos. Nehamas (1985) conceives of the will to power as a rejection of metaphysics in which things are the sum of their effects. This he claims eliminates the possibility of things as they are in themselves. Schacht (1983) claims that the will to power is Nietzsche's considered metaphysical account of this-worldly existence. Reginster (2006) argues that the will to power is best understood as a formal concept, viz. "the desire to overcome resistance" (146) rather than a substantive concept such as the desire to dominate other people. Clark (1990) rejects any interpretation that sees the will to power as a metaphysical doctrine, and instead sees it as Nietzsche self-consciously doing what all philosophers do, namely reading his values onto the world. Richardson (1996) reads the will to power as a perspectival metaphysics where reality consists in the perspectives taken on it. Anderson (1994) interprets the will to power as the underlying principle that Nietzsche thinks gives unity to the explanations of all the sciences. This far from exhausts the interpretations that have been given of the will to power, and it seems unlikely that any consensus will ever be reached as to how best to understand it. I am not concerned about this intractability as all I want to show is that Nietzsche could have thought of his concept of the will to power as a metaphysics of appearance.

This is the same insight we have seen before. Theorists (in this case physicists instead of philosophers) read their values onto the nature of things rather than discovering or uncovering some truth about mind-independent reality. In the case of understanding physical events as “nature’s conformity to law,” scientists read the democratic, egalitarian spirit of the age onto physical reality. This is bad philology for the same reasons reading the spirit of our age onto an Ancient Greek text would be; one cannot presume that a culture, much less the theoretical explanation for all the physical events of the universe, will operate according to the same values and standards as one’s own.

Given that this “bad philology” is “interpretation, not text:”

somebody might come along who, with opposite intentions and modes of interpretation, could read out of the same ‘nature,’ and with regard to the same phenomena, rather the tyrannically inconsiderate and relentless enforcement of claims of power. (BGE §22)

Such a theorist would be working with the same observations, namely that the world “has a ‘necessary’ and ‘calculable’ course,” but he or she would deny that this has anything to do with laws of nature. Instead, he or she would replace this “too human” metaphor with the position that “every power draws its ultimate consequences at every moment.” As I already discussed in Chapter Four, Nietzsche ends this section by acknowledging that this too is “merely” interpretation, but he accepts and even relishes the self-referential nature of his position that his own theoretical constructs are mere interpretations.

From BGE §22 and BGE §36, we get no straightforward assertions about the way the world is, not even ones that are qualified as merely about appearance. §36 takes the form of a hypothetical argument, and in §22, Nietzsche only claims that “somebody” could interpret the regularity of events in the universe as a consequence of the will to power. It seems to me there are two possible reasons for this caution. *Beyond Good and Evil* is not

meant to be a book about metaphysics or philosophy of science. Nietzsche is far more concerned about advancing the critical skepticism that I have called his metaphysical agnosticism than to put forward his own claims about the way the world appears from his cognitive perspective. The second reason he may not have advanced stronger theses about the will to power is that given his view that a metaphysics is an expression of the thinker's values and that he was attempting to create a readership who could create their own new values, he wanted to allow for that readership to create their own metaphysics of appearance out of their values and not Nietzsche's.

Nietzsche is much bolder with speculation about the nature of the will to power in his notebooks. "The will to power not a being, not a becoming, but a pathos—the most elemental fact from which a becoming and effecting first emerge" (WP §635 1888). This is a clearly metaphysical understanding of the will to power Nietzsche is advancing with the will to power being the reality that underlies the experience we have of becoming and causation. And in another notebook section Nietzsche advances as positive claims, positions he was only willing to put in hypothetical terms in BGE §36:

If we translate the concept 'cause' back to the only sphere known to us, from which we have derived it, we cannot imagine any change that does not involve a will to power. We do not know how to explain a change except as the encroachment of one power upon another power. (WP §689 1888)

Here will to power is that which explains all causation, which Nietzsche infers from the fact that it is the only kind of causation of which we have direct knowledge. This is because it is the kind of causation at work in our own affective desiring, and willing. And of course Nietzsche is at his least cautious in advancing the will to power as a metaphysical principle in the last fragment of posthumously compiled *The Will to Power*. There he claims that the world "to [him]" is "a monster of energy" and "a firm, iron magnitude of force."

Not a space that might be “empty” here or there, rather as force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces, at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there; a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and flow of its forms...this my *Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating... *This world is the will to power and nothing besides!* (WP §1067 1985)

I will not attempt to give an interpretation of the substance of the concept of the will to power described in this passage. For my purposes, what is important to note is how thoroughly metaphysical the concept of the will to power is that is being advanced here. It is an attempt to describe a fundamental feature of all reality. Nietzsche, even if it is only primarily in his notebooks, advances metaphysical theses, and as I have argued in this chapter, this is because he leaves room for a metaphysics of appearance that does not violate his commitment to skepticism and metaphysical agnosticism. Furthermore, possessing a metaphysical understanding of the world is something that beings such as ourselves cannot help. Given that the way we think about the world is inextricably tied to how we value and the kinds of drives and desires we have, it is important for Nietzsche to actively create a metaphysics that expresses a superior type rather than blindingly accept the various metaphysics of his day.

I want to suggest—and this certainly merits further study—that the will to power is Nietzsche’s not fully worked out attempt to create a metaphysics of appearance that is both in honest fidelity to his cognitive perspective and a creative outpouring of his psychological and physiological constitution and the values that go with them. That he is more circumscribed in his treatment of the will to power in his published works shows that he wanted to open up the space for the creation of new metaphysics of appearance by those who could initiate creative new values and the worldviews that would accompany them. If cognitive perspectives are as diverse as Nietzsche leaves room for, Nietzsche would have to

severely restrict his readership if he were to put forward a metaphysics of appearance that he wanted his readers to adopt. Leaving the possibility for such a metaphysics open, but not advancing one in the published works, leaves room for others to create and create out of new life-affirmative values.

Just as the metaphysics of Christianity and Platonism were expressions of the values of individual thinkers and cultures, any metaphysics Nietzsche could advance would be the expression of his own values. One of the advantages that Nietzsche sees in the declining influence of Christianity in European culture is that this allows for new possibilities for thought and inquiry.

Indeed, we philosophers and “free spirits” feel, when we hear the news that “the old god is dead,” as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an “open sea.” (GS §343)

One of the conditions for the possibility of such an “open sea” for the lover of knowledge is the lack of dogmatism that would limit the kinds of inquiry that are open. The last thing Nietzsche would want to do, on the eve of the kinds of changes in culture he hoped to make possible, would be to create a new metaphysics that would prevent his readers from inventing their own. The will to power remains undeveloped, at least as a metaphysical concept, in Nietzsche’s published works. This is fortuitous for us his readers because if Nietzsche is correct about the status of metaphysics and the need for new values and ways of thinking that accompany them, room is left for his readers to develop their own creative interpretations of reality.

*Metaphysics of Appearance and Nietzsche's Positive Philosophy*

As we have seen in previous chapters, thinking is a practical activity, and in fact there are no purely theoretical activities devoid of practical content, for Nietzsche. In previous chapters, I have focused on how Nietzsche's primary project of overcoming nihilism motivates his critique of the will to truth. This critique leads him to his views on human cognition, which have been the primary focus of this dissertation. In this section, I close the dissertation to show how these views on human cognition do not just arise out of his positive project, but also advance that project as well. How we conceive of the world contributes or detracts to our health, flourishing, and ability to affirm life just as much as any other activity. Recall our discussion of D §103 where Nietzsche establishes that thinking differently can induce us to feel differently, i.e. have different psychological affects. In the preceding sections we have seen how Nietzsche can conceive of a metaphysics of appearance akin to artistic creation rather than disinterested rational inquiry in a way that is consistent with his metaphysical agnosticism—the claim that we cannot have any knowledge about the deep structure of reality. I then analyzed a concrete example of such a metaphysics by examining Nietzsche's gestures toward a metaphysics of the will to power. In this final section, I will look at some of the ways Nietzsche's positive project has been understood and how the contributions this dissertation has made should affect how we see this project.

What exactly Nietzsche's positive project is goes far beyond the scope of this dissertation. Little scholarly consensus exists as to what exactly Nietzsche's goals are. For the purposes of this project to this point I have left the conception of Nietzsche's project open and have only gone so far as to describe it as an attempt to overcome nihilism and create the conditions for the possibility of affirming life. Without taking a further position on what exactly this consists in, I look at Lanier Anderson, Daniel Conway, and Alexander Nehamas'



understandings of Nietzsche's positive project and show how the conclusions I have reached about Nietzsche's theory of cognition and the possibility for doing metaphysics relate to these conceptions of Nietzsche's project. I have chosen these three commentators because they represent three very different takes on what Nietzsche wants to accomplish in his later works. While they certainly do not exhaust the possible ways Nietzsche's project can be interpreted, I think that if I am successful in showing how the theses advanced in this dissertation impact all three of these ways of understanding Nietzsche, then one can easily see how it would impact other interpretations of Nietzsche as well.

According to Lanier Anderson, in his paper "Nietzsche on Truth, Illusion, and Redemption," Nietzsche claims that "life aims at error and self-delusion" because the conditions favorable to our existence and flourishing often include believing that which is unjustified epistemically.<sup>21</sup> Anyone who attempts to always get to the truth of the matter therefore risks decadence and self-flagellation. Such truth seeking also denigrates the world as it is because this kind of unconditional valuing of truth amounts to the wish that the world were different, namely that our cognitive faculties (which aim for some kind of flourishing or promotion of a type) were in line with the way the world is, i.e. attuned to attain the truth of the matter. Given Anderson's reconstruction of Nietzsche's epistemology, which is rather close to my own as we have already seen, there exists a tension between living honestly in pursuit of truth and accepting and affirming the non-truth sensitivity of our cognition.

For Anderson's Nietzsche, a truly flourishing life is one of affirmation, i.e. one where one can clear-sightedly and without lying to oneself count one's life and the events in it as good as it was actually lived. Nietzsche uses the test of the eternal return (in its practical,

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<sup>21</sup> Anderson 2005: 192.

non-cosmological form) to determine whether each event is truly affirmed as good and as a joyful part of the life that one would be happy (and not just willing) to relive. This test allows one to determine if one's life has been lived consistently with the values one already espouses and so functions as a formal test of what a good life consists in, but it does not determine the content of such a life.<sup>22</sup>

The problem for Anderson is how to make sense of how this test for the good life, which requires that every event in life be affirmed, can be squared with the human condition, which inevitably includes regretful events and actions. This is done by not merely affirming each event in one's life singly, but creating a narrative out of one's whole life that redeems all of it, that shows each part, good and bad, to be essential to the whole in a necessary way. This narrative is the creative side, which is in tension with, but not opposed to, the truthful side of looking at one's own life honestly and clear-sightedly. Thus we learn to make things beautiful (GS §299) and thus be "grateful to my whole life" (EH untitled exergue) while at the same time instantiating a good intellectual conscience.

While there is surely more to the story, Anderson surely gets a great deal right about how Nietzsche conceives of the good life, affirming oneself in such a way that one's life is redeemed. What Anderson misses is that the good life includes not just affirming one's own individual existence, but the world as well. Just as telling a narrative that is both honest and creative is necessary for affirming the events in one's life, such a narrative, in the form of a metaphysics of appearance, is necessary for affirming existence as a whole. Such a narrative

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<sup>22</sup> It is interesting that the Nietzschean good life (at least as Anderson understands it) and Nietzsche's perspective-relative sense of truth share a similar logical structure. Both are determined by conditions internal to the subject (one's value set for the former and one's cognitive perspectives for the latter), and both obtain only when the internal standards of consistency in each case are met. Thus we live a good life when our life maximally corresponds with our own value standards, and we achieve perspective-relative truth when our cognition maximally corresponds with our own cognitive perspective. Actual truth conditions and conditions for the good life are empirically determined by the value standards (whether epistemic or ethical) that a person or a group actually has.

will be honest in that it does not violate the deepest held intellectual commitments of one's cognitive perspective. It will also be honest insofar as it understands itself to be limited by the suspicions of skepticism, such that we admit to ourselves that we cannot get at the nature of the deep structure of reality. Because such a metaphysics does not get at the deep structure of reality it must have creative input from the one who is philosophizing. It must tell a story of reality that allows the one telling it to affirm it. It is a work of art insofar as it goes beyond the limits of the will to truth and science in order to create a world, a world one can live in, flourish in and fully affirm and thereby redeem.

The question is what form will such a metaphysics take? Will it take the form of a metaphysics of the will to power? In some sense, if I am correct about the status of metaphysics within Nietzsche's theory of cognition, the specific form such a metaphysics takes depends in part on the values and psychological conditions for affirmation of the philosopher who creates it. So it would perhaps make more sense to ask what form such a metaphysics would take for a particular individual, e.g., Nietzsche. Or one might make the task of empirically studying what the conditions for affirming life and existence are for larger groups. In either case, such a project goes beyond the scope of this dissertation, but at least one can see what the success conditions for such a metaphysical project would be if Anderson is correct about the content of Nietzsche's positive project.

Daniel Conway, in his book *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game*, primarily conceives of Nietzsche as a physician of culture, a physician who diagnoses late-modernity as decadent. However, Conway argues that we must be careful in our appraisal of that diagnosis because Nietzsche is not only a physician; he is also a sick patient, a patient who suffers from the same disease that he is attempting to treat and diagnose. Further complicating matters is that the very source of the knowledge Nietzsche claims he has of modernity's decadence is the

fact that Nietzsche himself is a decadent. Conway argues that Nietzsche's best hope for overcoming what is wrong with modernity is the cultivation of future readers who will not share his decadence.

One of the goals of Nietzsche's later works is to "perfect the process of acculturation whereby the drives and impulses become fully civilized"<sup>23</sup> in a healthy manner rather than leave such an organization to chance. What is to be organized?—The individual or society's will to power. The will to power is "the ontological condition...of the possibility of all manifestations of individual agency,"<sup>24</sup> which is made visible in the individual or society's values and organizing instincts. Conway calls Nietzsche's late philosophy a politics because of the priority that societies have over individuals in terms of determining their relative health or decadence.

Conway is not optimistic about the prospects for Nietzsche to overcome the decadence of his age given that the very thing that gives him knowledge of decadence is his own decadent nature. However, Conway holds out some hope for a Nietzschean program to succeed if Nietzsche is able to produce through his writings the kind of readers who will bring about a revaluation of values, specifically "to prosecute...a successful campaign against Christian morality," and to "[found] a tragic age in which a thoroughgoing naturalism would supplant the anti-affective animus of Christian morality."<sup>25</sup> In order to make this possible, Nietzsche must create readers who are capable of throwing off Nietzsche's influence once they are ready so that they do not share in his decadence.

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<sup>23</sup> Conway 1997: 33.

<sup>24</sup> Conway 1997: 53.

<sup>25</sup> Conway 1997: 144.

If Nietzsche's primary task is to cultivate and attract readers to his task of creating a new culture with new non-decadent values, then a Nietzschean metaphysics must be attractive to the right sorts of readers. Such a metaphysics can perform a selection by appealing to those capable of carrying out Nietzsche's tasks but repelling those who are unsuitable. Such a metaphysics must be intellectually honest, or otherwise those who have a sufficiently rigorous intellectual conscience will be repelled. It also must not offer otherworldly or moralistic comforts, or otherwise decadent, unhealthy readers will be attracted. I want to suggest that some version of Nietzsche's will to power as a metaphysical system, as described in the last section, *could* be such a metaphysics. The will to power certainly has attracted readers, but the question is—one I must leave unanswered—has it attracted the right kind?

However, the will to power is certainly not the only possible metaphysical system that could accomplish Nietzsche's broader aims. If Conway is correct, and Nietzsche was too decadent to accomplish his goals, then perhaps a healthier, overflowing type who does not share in his decadence would create a more suitable way of conceptualizing the world that does not share the weaknesses of Nietzsche's way. What I want to emphasize is that given a plurality of types of individuals with different standards of what is rationally acceptable as well as different conditions under which they will survive and flourish, there are many possible metaphysics. Perhaps the will to power was the best for whatever psychological and physiological type Nietzsche happened to be, but if Conway is correct that Nietzsche's decadence undermines his effectiveness at fighting against nihilism, then a stronger, healthier type with a relevantly different metaphysics must be sought after. Since we live in a different age with different challenges from Nietzsche, different forms of decadence and nihilism, and different types to carry on Nietzsche's task, we, his

contemporary readers, can perhaps develop new, creative ways to create the world in our image.

The view of Nietzsche's project, which Alexander Nehamas presents in his book *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, is significantly more focused on the individual and less on political aims than Conway's. Nietzsche's goal, Nehamas argues, is for individuals to create themselves artistically by "giving style to one's character" (GS §290). This requires the discipline to create a consistency in one's character that is both aesthetically pleasing and able to affirm itself and its conditions for existence. There are no final answers to what counts as meeting these criteria for the good life because Nietzsche's perspectivism demands that such questions can only be answered from within one's more or less idiosyncratic perspective. Therefore, a part of one's artistic creation of the self is determining the very means of interpreting that life as a good work of art. We are, each of us, both our own creators and our own critics.

In Nehamas' view, the individual is directly analogous to an artistic creation, one that must be formed in such a way that the individual components must complement and harmonize with one another in the whole. I have argued in this chapter that Nietzsche thinks that we cannot help but think metaphysically, that we must construct a world in order to live. I have also argued that the world that we construct reflects the constitution of one's psychology and has the potential to change the organization of our drives, desires, and unconscious affects into more or less healthy arrangements. If I am correct about these two things, then if one accepts Nehamas' view of Nietzsche's project, then how one thinks about and conceptualizes the world, one's metaphysics, is an essential part of one's self-creation as a work of art. One cannot form oneself into a beautiful, life-affirming, harmonized whole without also integrating a way of looking at the world into that work. The fact that Nietzsche

allows for a plurality of perspectives with their own standards of value and rational acceptability means that we cannot say in advance what one's metaphysics should look like or that everyone should adopt the same way of looking at the world. However, we can say that one's metaphysics must be integrated into the whole and contribute to the organization of its drives, affects, etc. Therefore, if we take Nehamas' view of Nietzsche's positive project, one's goal must include thinking about the world in abstract, metaphysical ways in such a manner that this thinking, along with all of the other components that go into making a complete person, forms something harmonious and integrated.

### *Conclusion*

Nietzsche's views on cognition lead to a seemingly paradoxical position: we cannot know the deep structure of reality, but we must also create a conception of reality from our limited vantage point. Since we cannot help but think metaphysically because such thinking is a condition for the existence of beings such as ourselves, we should create a metaphysics that is both honest in that it coheres with our cognitive perspective and creative in that it is a beautiful expression of our values and drives. This conclusion takes us back to the critique of the unconditional will to truth I examined in Chapter Two. Knowing or attempting to know the fact of the matter is not always good if one values affirming life and overcoming nihilism. Thus we must lyingly create a world and at the same time be honest about its status as a lie.

Recall my discussion of the prefaces to *The Gay Science* and *Beyond Good and Evil* in Chapter One. In these prefaces Nietzsche compares truth to a woman and the philosopher's relationship to truth to that of a lover pursuing his beloved. In *The Gay Science* truth as a woman means that there some aspects to truth that it is indecent to see and that it is in bad taste to try to uncover these. We must, like a lover pursuing his beloved, respect her secrets

and keep our distance from some of what she could offer. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, truth as a woman means that truth is not indifferent to the passions and affects of the one pursuing it. The philosopher, traditionally thought of as the most objective and disinterested of inquirers, must, if he or she is to attain truth, allow his or her passions, desires, and needs to speak. Indeed there is nothing to the beloved truth without these apparent enemies to objectivity.

Truth as a woman in these two prefaces shows that Nietzsche's project, relative to truth, is in some ways remarkably anti-philosophical: there are some truths one ought not pursue, and when we do pursue truths, we should not do so coolly and objectively but rather with our passions. These are anti-philosophical until one sees, as I showed in Chapters Three, Four, and Five, that Nietzsche's understanding of human cognition radically changes the kind of truth and knowledge to which we have access. Certainly if it were possible for us to access the cognizer-independent truth, one would have to pursue that kind of truth coolly and objectively. But we do not have access to that kind of truth, and the kind of truth we have access to is constructed out of our needs, values, drives, and desires. Understanding that truth means seeing how we construct the world in a passionate, interested way.

It is not as though Nietzsche thinks the tradition is completely wrong in how it recommends we do philosophy. I showed in Chapter Three that Nietzsche, on some conceptions of truth, is a radical skeptic. We cannot know the mind-independent structure of reality, even to the extent that we cannot know if reality has a mind-independent structure or not.

Not only do we construct a world in a way that reflects our psychological and physiological makeup, our ways of conceptualizing can affect our psychology and physiology. In other words, if these are lacking, our metaphysics can be therapeutic in such a



way so as to make us healthier, stronger, and better able to affirm our existence and the conditions of that existence. From the three samples we saw in the last section, no matter how one conceives of Nietzsche's endgame, creating an honest and life-affirming way of conceptualizing reality as a metaphysics of appearance is part of a strategy in producing the kind of world or kinds of individuals Nietzsche hopes to create. Doing metaphysics certainly is not the only part of the strategy and by itself may not be sufficient for accomplishing Nietzsche's ends, but I believe that it is a necessary condition for doing so.

This dissertation leaves us with some important questions for further research. If Nietzsche had a metaphysics of the will to power, then how do we understand the content of that metaphysical doctrine? Is the will to power the best metaphysics to hold from truth-concerned perspective, i.e. does it maximally cohere with the standards of our cognitive perspective? Setting its truth aside, is the will to power the metaphysics most fitting to accomplish Nietzsche's ends? If I am correct that there are many possible metaphysics that could accomplish Nietzsche's ends depending on the constitution of the individual or society in question, what kind of metaphysics of appearance is best suited to our current age or to different types of individuals?

"We have to *learn to think differently*—in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more: *to feel differently*" (D §103). What I have shown in this dissertation is that one of the ways Nietzsche thinks we need to learn differently is in the realm of human cognition. We must come to learn the extent to which our own values, needs, desires, and affects dictate how we see the world. We must rid ourselves of the pretensions of dogmatism and disinterested rationality. We must remain agnostic about the way the world is apart from our perspective on it (including even whether it has a character apart from our perspective on it or not). Nevertheless we still must think, and we should think, clear-sightedly aware that we

are reading our values onto nature. Instead of seeing this as a limitation on our knowledge and a restriction of our cognition to the merely apparent, we must, for all future philosophizing, get rid of the appearance and reality distinction all together.

These realizations are not cause to be pessimistic at all, and indeed recognizing these facts are among the conditions for the possibility of a truly affirmative relationship to life as it is and for the “open sea” (GS §343) we lovers of knowledge long for. Those who have engaged in it have always thought of the pursuit of truth as a passion. Why then has philosophy over the course of its long history been turned into something so disengaged from that founding passion? Nietzsche’s point that we ought to search for truth and woo it just as we would woo the one with whom we are romantically in love recognizes this founding passion of philosophy and all inquiry. We must redefine rationality and all methods of inquiry to reflect the wellspring of the drive for truth, if we are to attain any kind of truth at all. The reality with which we have contact, the world that affects us and with which we must engage, is not just to be pursued by our desires; Nietzsche also claims that this world of appearance and surfaces is constituted by those very same desires. Therefore, it is only by letting our passions and our desires speak that we can even begin to do philosophy—the love of wisdom—at all.

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## VITA

Justin Marquis was born in Lafayette, Indiana and raised in West Lafayette, Indiana. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, he attended Purdue University, West Lafayette where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, History, and Religious Studies in 2004. He was named the Outstanding Senior in philosophy for his graduating class. He also earned a Master of Arts in Philosophy at Purdue University, West Lafayette in 2006.

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Currently, Justin is pursuing a career in academic philosophy. He lives in Chicago, Illinois.

