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To Love a Tainted World: Nietzsche on Truth and Power

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines Friedrich Nietzsche's statements about truth and argues that he posits a coherent and consistent theory of truth that forms a central component of his philosophy. Nietzsche uses several definitions of truth and, once this is understood, the contradictions that seem to characterize his epistemological statements disappear.

According to Nietzsche, there is no true world and no absolute Truths that can tell us what is right and wrong, good and bad. This is the truth about Truth and forms the ultimate conclusion of Nietzsche's epistemology. In the absence of absolute Truths, Nietzsche argues that we must determine values on our own grounds and overcome our need for absolute Truth. Nietzsche cites the culture of the pre-Socratic Greeks as a healthy response to the truth about Truth. The thesis also examines an alternative response to the truth about Truth evident in the thought of Michel Foucault.

Acknowledgements

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents – Boyd and Betty Roach – for their love and support.

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

Works by Friedrich Nietzsche

References to Nietzsche's works are identified by an abbreviated version of the title followed by the section and/or aphorism number. The letter P is used to indicate a preface written by Nietzsche (this includes "Zarathustra's Prologue" to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*). Where possible, I have included references to Nietzsche's texts in the body of the thesis. In cases where there are several references, I have placed the information in a footnote.

AC *The Anti-Christ* (translated by Walter Kaufmann)

ASC "Attempt at a Self-Criticism" (translated by Walter Kaufmann)

BGE *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (translated by Walter Kaufmann)

BT *The Birth of Tragedy* (translated by Walter Kaufmann)

CW *The Case of Wagner* (translated by Walter Kaufmann)

DB *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* (translated by R.J. Hollingdale)

EH *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is* (translated by Walter Kaufmann)

GM *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic* (translated by Walter Kaufmann)

GS *The Gay Science* (translated by Walter Kaufmann)

HAH *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* – all references are to

Volume I unless otherwise noted (translated by R.J. Hollingdale)

OTL "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" (translated by Daniel Breazeale)

TI *Twilight of the Idols or How to Philosophize with a Hammer* (translated by

Walter Kaufmann)

UM *Untimely Meditations* (translated by R.J. Hollingdale)

WP *The Will to Power* (translated by Walter Kaufmann)

Z *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* (translated by Walter

Kaufmann)

Works by Michel Foucault

References to works by Michel Foucault are identified by an abbreviated version

of the title followed by the page number.

HS *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*

NGH "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"

PK *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*

WIE "What is Enlightenment"

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS TRUTH?

Can you give yourself your own evil and your own good and hang your own will over yourself as a law? Can you be your own judge and avenger of your law? Terrible it is to be alone with the judge and avenger of one's own law. Thus is a star thrown out into the void and into the icy breath of solitude. (Z I 17)

Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.
Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?

The Gospel According to John 18:37-38

The subject of this thesis is Friedrich Nietzsche's critique of, and contribution to, the quest for truth that animates the history of Western philosophy.[1] This "will to truth,"[2] however, continues – despite its status as the primal leitmotif of our intellectual tradition – to beg the question that Pilate asked

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[1] See, for example, Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?" in *Political Philosophy: Six Essays by Leo Strauss*. Edited by Hilail Gildin (New York: Pegasus, 1975), 5: "Philosophy is essentially not possession of the truth, but quest for truth"; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 993 b1–30 [Book 2.1]; G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Translated by T.M. Knox and A.V. Miller (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1985), 5: "The history of philosophy presents us with a gallery of noble spirits who have been driven by the boldness of their reason to penetrate into the nature of things, of man and God; they have unveiled for us the treasure of supreme knowledge"; Stanley Rosen, *Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), xiv: "philosophy seeks to replace opinions by truth"; Ruediger Hermann Grimm, *Nietzsche's Theory of Knowledge* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), xiv: "Any philosophical system which claims to be at all comprehensive must answer, or at least presuppose an answer to, an apparent question: What is there? While seeming to be rather simplistic, this question is without a doubt one of the fundamental questions with which philosophers have traditionally occupied themselves"; Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism (Essays: 1972–1980)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), xiv; Richard Rorty *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Essays, Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21: "The tradition in Western culture which centers around the quest for Truth, a tradition which runs from the Greek philosophers through the Enlightenment, is the clearest example of the attempt to find a sense of one's existence by turning away from solidarity to objectivity"; Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), 18. See also HAH 261, BGE 5, 25. The fact that Nietzsche questions the validity of this enterprise explains why he refers to himself as "dynamite" (EH XIII 1; see also EH XIII 2).

[2] See, for example, GS 344; Z II 12; BGE 1; GM III 24; WP 585.

Jesus: "What is truth?"[3] Notwithstanding the seemingly endless layers of meaning that have been superimposed upon the term,[4] it is both possible and necessary to exhume two answers to Pilate's question of particular importance to the exegesis of Nietzsche's epistemology that I present in this thesis and to the practice of political philosophy in general. The first and most basic definition holds truth to be equivalent to, or an account of, the actual state of affairs. A true statement, it follows, is one that accurately depicts the way things are.[5] To avoid confusion, I will hereafter refer to this definition as "rudimentary truth."[6]

A second and more ambitious response to Pilate's question is the argument that there is a normative reality, a moral law, that is independent of human volition and, in turn, a non-human source of value and meaning (i.e., something other than the prejudice of tradition, an Act of Parliament, personal

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[3] Nietzsche refers to Pilate's question in HAH Vol. II, Part I 8 and AC 46.

[4] See Alfred Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth" in *Semantics and the Philosophy of Language: A Collection of Readings.* Edited by Leonard Linsky (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952), 14: "The word 'true', like other words from our everyday language, is certainly not unambiguous. And it does seem to me that the philosophers who have discussed this concept have helped to diminish its ambiguity. In works and discussions of philosophers we meet many different conceptions of truth and falsity, and we must indicate which conception will be the basis of our discussion."

[5] See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Volume 2. Edited by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1011 b25-27 [Book 4.7]: "To say of what is that it is not, or to say of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true...." See also Tarski, 15.

[6] Hilary Putnam notes that "views of truth can be divided into two kinds: 'realist' views, which interpret truth as some kind of correspondence to what is the case, and 'verificationist' views, which interpret truth as, for example, what would be *verified* under ideal conditions of inquiry" (*Meaning and the Moral Sciences* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 1). Because both positions claim that true statements correspond to the actual state of affairs in one way or the other, we can extract from these disparate theories a common definition of truth that – to some degree at least – agrees with the layman's intuitive association of truth with "the way things are." Even the coherence theory of truth can be seen to presuppose the rudimentary definition of truth. According to the coherence theory, a statement is true if it coheres with a body of accepted statements. This claim, however, does not dispose of the

choice, etc.). This conception of truth will hereafter be referred to as "normative truth" or "Truth" with an initial capital. Normative truth presupposes the definition of rudimentary truth outlined above, but includes among the actual state of affairs something extra-human – be it Nature, the Good, God, the Absolute, Being, etc. – that can and should decide *for us* what is right and wrong, noble and base, normal and abnormal, *episteme* (genuine knowledge) and *doxa* (mere opinion).[7]

The importance of distinguishing between these two types of truth is rooted in the fact that it is normative rather than rudimentary truth that has come to be seen by many as a lie and, in turn, as having lost much of its former luster and authority. This is intimated by the following passage from Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind:*

> There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative. If this belief is put to the test, one can count on the students' reaction: they will be uncomprehending. That

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connection between truth and the actual state of affairs, but rather, changes the domain occupied the phrase from "the facts" to "what are held to be the facts."

[7] Perhaps the most famous philosophical example of normative truth (God would be the most famous religious example) is Plato's idea of the Good (*tagathon*): "...the greatest of all studies concerns the idea of the good. It is the one and indispensable source of what is useful and excellent in justice and the other virtues. Now, I am almost certain that you know what I was going to say and that I would add, as well, that we know too little about it – and that however much we may know about other things will avail us nothing if we had not possession of the good" (*The Republic*. Translated by Richard W. Sterling and William C. Scott (New York: Norton, 1985), 505a). Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 256: "From time immemorial, philosophy has associated truth and Being [*Sein*]." Heidegger even goes so far as to define truth as "the manifestness of the essent [*Sein*]. To know is accordingly the ability to stand {stehen} in the manifestness of the essent, to endure {bestehen} it. Merely to have information, however abundant, is not to know" (*An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Translated by Ralph Manheim (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1961), 17). In keeping with this tradition, Eric Voegelin describes philosophy as "man's loving endeavor to perceive the order of being and attune himself to it" (*Science, Politics and Gnosticism: Two Essays* (Chicago: Gateway, 1968), 42). Similarly, Leo Strauss defines political philosophy as "the attempt truly to know the nature of political things [rudimentary truth] and the right, or the good, political order [normative truth]" ("What is Political Philosophy?" 6).

anyone should regard the proposition as not self-evident astonishes them, as though he were calling into question 2+2=4.[8]

The fact that the students acknowledge a rudimentary truth like 2+2=4 suggests that it is normative rather than rudimentary truth that they believe to be relative and, by implication, an inaccurate description of the actual state of affairs (in so far as it claims to be universal, dominant, etc.). Normative truth is reduced to a conceit and, in turn, stripped of its traditional authority. Rudimentary truth, on the other hand, remains on solid ontological ground. This is not to suggest that rudimentary truth has escaped the corrosive gaze of epistemological skeptics unscathed, but rather, to point out that most philosophers, even the most radical, do not deny that we can make statements that – to some degree at least – get things the way they are. Regardless of the limits placed on rudimentary truth, very few serious thinkers completely reject it.

Also of importance is the fact that it is normative truth – not rudimentary truth – that has been used to legitimize the moral, political and spiritual institutions that form the pith of Western civilization. The American *Declaration of Independence,* for example, begins with an appeal to "the Laws of Nature and Nature's God" and goes on to assert that all men are "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." These rights are products of what Aristotle refers to as natural rather than conventional justice.[9] The facts are important (Jefferson makes sure to note the offences committed by the King against the Colonies), but it is the claim that the actions taken by the Colonies

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[8] New York: Touchstone, 1987, 25.
[9] *Nichomachean Ethics,* 1134 b18-1135 a15 [Book 5.7].

and the arguments that underpin them are in accordance with, and sanctioned by, an objective standard (in this case Nature and Nature's God) of what is and what ought to be that grants the document, and the political tradition it helped engender, their intellectual and moral appeal.

People tend to claim that they have God or some other form of Truth on their side and shun arguments based solely on expediency or human preference; they crave the justification of a higher standard. Criminals are sent to prison, not because their behaviour creates an inconvenience for others that has to be punished to maintain order, but because what they did was "wrong," "unjust" or "sinful." Even those who denounce basing political and moral decisions on ideal standards as impractical or out of whack with what really motivates people (Machiavelli comes to mind), usually point out the tendency of people to judge things – at least in public – based on whether or not they measure up to the dictates of normative truth:

> For morality [a form of normative truth] has from of old been master of every diabolical nuance of the art of persuasion: there is no orator, even today, who does not have recourse to its assistance (listen, for example, even to our anarchists: how morally they speak when they want to persuade! In the end they even go so far as to call themselves 'the good and the just'.) For as long as there has been speech and persuasion on earth, morality has shown itself to be the greatest of all mistresses of seduction [and] the actual *Circe of the philosophers.* (DB P3)

Normative truth permeates our lives. We pray to it, argue over it, even die for it; we teach it to our children, and in a host of other ways arrange our lives around it. It follows, that if normative truth is not what it claims to be, not only philosophy but also an important human tendency is called into question. If Allan Bloom's observation is accurate, it points to a new and significant trend in Western thought: the appeal to Truth evident in the *Declaration of*

Independence is no longer taken for granted in the way that it was for thousands of years. Whether you see this trend as something to be stemmed or encouraged, the devaluation of Truth (see GM III 24) that is its cause forms a crucial element of contemporary political philosophy and the social regimes it is able to influence. At the centre of this "crisis" stands the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche.

According to Nietzsche, Truth is a sham, an illusion, a product of the human imagination.[10] Whatever truth is, it is *not* normative. What I argue in the body of the thesis is that Nietzsche's views on the constitution of rudimentary truth and the problem of knowledge in general furnish the essential under girding of his infamous "sounding-out" (TI P) of normative truth. His epistemological arguments form, in other words, the springboard from which he undercuts the impassioned search for normative truth – "the rub-a-dub of justice, wisdom, holiness, virtue" (GS 359) – that he claims leads to – among other things – the impasse of nihilism[11] and the glorification of an ascetic denial of life that he hopes to see overcome (see, for example, GM III). Nietzsche's epistemology is, although interesting on its own, important because of the strategic role[12] it plays in his attempt to demonstrate that Truth "is no more than a *moral-optical* illusion" (TI III 6) – a by-product of "passion, error, and self-deception" (HAH 9) that can and should be discarded. In this way, Nietzsche

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[10] See, for example, Z III 11.2: "This is my way; where is yours?" – thus I answered those who asked me "the way." For *the* way – that does not exist; DB 108, 484; HAH P 3; HAH Vol. II, Part I 179; GS 301, 355; Z I 15, 17; BGE 5, 211; TI IX 19; AC 11.

[11] See, for example, BT 15; HAH 109; WP 1, 3, 12.

[12] Albert Camus refers to the strategic character of Nietzsche's thought in *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 65.

endeavours to remove the sanction of Truth from value judgements and, by so doing, help us to "learn to think differently – in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more, to learn to feel differently" (DB 103) about the ontological status of our convictions and evaluations. We must learn to love our choices in the absence of Truth; we must stop appealing to Truth to reify our political and spiritual lives and do it ourselves. His point is that we – not the actual state of affairs – are the authors and defenders of value.

The aim of this thesis is, therefore, three-fold: (1) to provide an account of Nietzsche's basic epistemology; (2) to explain his claim that normative truth is an illusion; and (3) to examine Nietzsche's *response* to the implications of his epistemology as well as an alternative response suggested by the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault is instructive because he agrees with Nietzsche's epistemological assumptions, but parts company with him when it comes to how one should *react* to them.

The Problem

Have I been understood? (EH XIII 7-9)

...(I obviously do everything to be "hard to understand" myself) – and one should be cordially grateful for the goodwill to some subtlety of interpretation.[13]

The problem is that Nietzsche seems to campaign both for and against the existence of truth. This Janus-faced approach threatens to split his epistemology into two mutually exclusive halves and, in the process, seriously

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[13] BGE 27. Cf. GS 381: One does not only wish to be understood when one writes; one wishes as surely *not* to be understood; DB P 5; Z I 7; GM P 8.

undermine the rest of his thought.[14] In response to this objection, I argue that a more careful examination of Nietzsche's theory of truth reveals that its two "halves" reinforce rather than contradict one another. However, even if it can be shown that Nietzsche posits a theory of truth that – despite its complexity, tumultuousness, poetic presentation and progressive expansion – is consistent with itself, it remains to be shown that the other aspects of his thought live up to the epistemological standards inherent in that theory. It has, for example, been argued that Nietzsche's habit of making statements about the nature of reality (e.g., his claims regarding the ontological omnipresence of will to power) runs roughshod over his epistemologically grounded critique of metaphysics.[15] If this is the case, it would follow that there is a serious conflict in Nietzsche's thought between theory and practice.[16] In order to counter this objection, I

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[14] The claim that Nietzsche's theory of truth fails to reconcile its seemingly incongruous elements is a common one in the literature. Mary Warnock, for example, argues that "it must be admitted at the outset that to speak of Nietzsche's *theory of truth* is probably misleading. For...he is not consistent; and this inconsistency springs not so much from the gradual development of a view in which the earlier stages are contradicted or overtaken by the later, but from a tension in his attitude towards truth" ("Nietzsche's Conception of Truth" in *Nietzsche, Imagery and Thought, A Collection of Essays.* Edited by Malcolm Pasley (London: Methuen, 1978), 33-34, 51). In keeping with this, John Wilcox claims that a tension in Nietzsche's thought is created by two different theories of truth and can only be resolved by demonstrating that one theory is dominant over the other *(Truth and Value in Nietzsche: A Study of his Metaethics and Epistemology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974), 98). Maudemarie Clark, on the other hand, contends that "Nietzsche's position [on truth is] contradictory in its early and middle formulations, but [progresses] toward and finally [arrives] at a coherent and defensible position in the works of his final two years" *(Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), ix, 1, 22). Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche. Volume I: The Will to Power as Knowledge.* Translated by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), I 54. Walter Kaufmann goes so far as to say that "Nietzsche was not at his best with [epistemological problems]: he never worked out an entirely satisfactory theory of knowledge, and most of the relevant material remained in his notebooks and did not find its way into a more coherent presentation in his published works" *(Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist,* Fourth Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 204-205, 453). See also Kaufmann's "Forward" to Wilcox, viii.

[15] See, for example, Clark 4; Grimm, 61 and ff.

[16] Clark, 4.

present a reading of Nietzsche that suggests that his philosophy does not ignore his theory of truth, but instead, grows out of and exemplifies it. This reading will also demonstrate that interpretations of Nietzsche that argue that he denies truth altogether are incorrect.

Despite these and other occasional departures into the realm of critical analysis, the purpose of this thesis is to delineate Nietzsche's epistemology (and discuss some of its implications) rather than to present a sustained assessment of its validity as a philosophical doctrine. The observation that the same internally consistent theory of truth quickens Nietzsche's philosophy from start to finish (and that this theory retains a meaningful definition of rudimentary truth) is intended, in other words, to be a descriptive account rather than an endorsement of its content *vis-a-vis* competing theories.

One *prima facie* objection to the argument that Nietzsche's theory of truth is homogeneous that should be dismissed here at the outset is that it appears antithetical to the intellectual temperament of a man who writes *"Nur wer sich wandelt, bleibt mit mir verwandt."*[17] This objection, however, is refuted by the fact that Nietzsche's theory of truth does change. The homeostatic stability of his epistemology is not produced by the existence of a harmonious relationship between each and every remark about truth that can be found in his writings; it arises, rather, out of his repeated references to, and use of, a relatively small number of "dangerous maybes" (BGE 2) about the nature of truth. These dangerous maybes are the thread that holds the complex and occasionally

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[17] One has to change to stay akin to me (BGE "From High Mountains: Aftersong").

erratic intellectual tapestry that is Nietzsche's theory of truth together. Nietzsche's unwavering loyalty to this core set of premises enables him to refine, alter, and add to many of the things that he says about truth without significantly changing the core elements of his original theory.[18] The chameleon-like nature of Nietzsche's thought is not, in other words, challenged by the assertion that it is inspired by a view of truth that remains constant.

Another objection to my claim that Nietzsche's thought is based on a homogeneous theory of truth is raised by Nietzsche himself when he writes in *Twilight of the Idols* that a "will to a system is a lack of integrity" (I 26). Some critics have cited this statement to bolster the argument that Nietzsche's remarks on truth cannot be said to constitute a coherent whole.[19] A contempt for systems and systematisers, however, does not imply that Nietzsche's ideas on truth undermine one another or other aspects of his philosophy. What Nietzsche dislikes about systematisers is the restrictive and uncritical style of philosophical investigation he argues they are forced to adopt in order to achieve the closure and completeness demanded by a system:

> *Beware of systematisers!* – Systematisers practice a kind of play-acting: in as much as they want to fill out a system and round off its horizon, they have to try to present their weaker qualities in the same style as their stronger – they try to impersonate whole and uniformly strong natures. (DB 318; see also HAH Vol. II, Part I 31)

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[18] In contradistinction to Philippa Foot's argument that the unity of Nietzsche's philosophy is purely methodological (e.g., because of "his readiness to question everything"), it is my contention that the unity of this thought (on this as well as other matters) can be attributed to more than just his approach and includes the substance of what he has to say as well. See "Nietzsche's Immoralism" in *The New York Review of Books* June 3, 1991, 18.

[19] E.g., Warnock, 51; Wilcox, 6-7.

In order to leave room to explore new horizons and to allow different perspectives and thoughts to appear as the experiments and the "rendezvous...of questions and question marks" (BGE 1) that they are, Nietzsche does not force his ideas into the rigid confines of a system. The task at hand is to keep abreast with the pace and experimental quality of his thought rather than dismiss it as a series of autonomous and contradictory remarks.

Before delving into the substance and ramifications of Nietzsche's theory of truth, it is necessary to point out that "when Nietzsche speaks of 'truth' and 'knowledge', these terms do not have a single sense and reference in all their occurrences."[20] I argue that many of the apparent contradictions within Nietzsche's thought can be attributed to an unsatisfactory epistemological nomenclature (i.e., to a lack of terminological precision) rather than to mutually exclusive arguments or a gap between theory and practice. An account of the multiple significations that Nietzsche attaches to the word truth forms, therefore, an integral element of the arguments that I present.

In order to fill the expository vacuum that persists once it has been established that Nietzsche defines truth in more than one way, I also examine the relationship between the different types of truth active in his thought. The central issue here is the manner and degree to which his denial of some types of truth affects the types he affirms. How, for example, do his infamous claims that there are no facts (WP 481) and that man lacks "any organ for knowledge, for 'truth'" (GS 354) speak to his assertion that we should "value the little

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[20] Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 52. See also Wilcox, 155; Grimm, 29.

unpretentious truths which have been discovered by means of rigorous method more highly than the errors handed down by metaphysical and artistic ages and men" (HAH 3)? In response to these and similar questions, I outline the consanguinity that exists between the different definitions of truth Nietzsche employs. I attempt, in other words, to stress the sources of reconciliation that are active within the theoretical economy of Nietzsche's thought rather than impose a solution upon it from without. That these sources of reconciliation exist is the unique component of my reading of Nietzsche's works.

This streamlining of Nietzsche's position on truth does not, however, answer all of the questions it gives rise to, but instead, attempts the less lofty goal of outlining what those arguments are in order to demonstrate that they cannot be dismissed on the grounds that they contradict one another. The impetus for an exposition of this sort arises out of the need to reply to two common misperceptions about Nietzsche's theory of truth: (1) the claim that Nietzsche's comments on truth appear to be little more than a heap of incomprehensible mumbo jumbo[21] or, at best, in need of significant qualification; and (2) the conclusion supposedly inspired by Nietzsche, and dependent in large part on his status as a thinker for its current allure, that truth is not available in any form and, in turn, that the quest for truth native to *Wissenschaft* (scholarship and science in a broad sense)[22] should be replaced by "the liberated intellect playing joyfully with itself":

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[21] Cf. Grimm, 43.

[22] For a brief discussion of the meaning of *Wissenschaft* see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth: Selections From Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*. Edited and translated by Daniel Breazeale (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979) xxvi.

Many assume that Nietzsche has demonstrated that there are no facts and no truths, but "only interpretations," or "different perspectives" on reality. It is therefore apparently a mistake to give the correct interpretation of anything, including, if not especially, of Nietzsche's own philosophy. Only the misguided, it seems, will even take Nietzsche to be offering arguments or theories, since that would make him captive of the belief in truth that he rejected.[23]

What I will demonstrate is that Nietzsche's theory of truth does not imply the implosion of traditional types of inquiry any more than it rejects all types of truth.

What Nietzsche attempts to do is replace "dogmatic philosophy" (BGE P) and its desire to find solace in "the lap of Being" (BGE 2) with a philosophy of creation that "forces the will of millennia upon *new* tracks" (BGE 3). The point is to show that Nietzsche consciously continues man's quest for truth but only after he has first redefined what truth is and why we need it.

The Truth is dead! Long live the truth!

Perhaps no one yet has been truthful enough about what "truthfulness" is. (BGE 177)

According to Nietzsche there is no metaphysical ought, no answer to "the riddle of the universe" (DB 547; HAH 261), that can, once it has been discovered, act as the final arbiter of the validity of what we know and do. Whereas the ancients believed that "the standards of good were natural and

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[23] Clark, 2. Cf. David B. Allison, "Introduction" in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation.* Edited by David B. Allison (Cambridge: Dell Publishing, 1977), xvii; Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference.* Translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 292. Robert Gooding-Williams argues that the playfulness Nietzsche advocates and which has been taken up by so-called "postmodern" thinkers is offset by the fact that "one of Nietzsche's preeminent philosophical concerns is the *modernist* project of cultural renewal" ("Zarathustra's Three Metamorphoses" in *Nietzsche as Postmodernist: Essays Pro and Contra.* Edited by Clayton Koelb (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1990), 231).

thus, accessible, something to be understood and freely embraced,"[24] Nietzsche claims that "the wild and naked nature" (BT 10) that flows beneath "the lie of culture" (BT 8) does not present us with standards, but rather, reveals to us that the existence of such standards is an illusion. There is no eternal text, no true world of Ideas, against which to measure our world and the choices we make within it. Reality is not a standard but a frenzied and anarchical contesting of wills. There is no justice, no Karma, no *summum bonum*, no unconditional right and wrong, no categorical imperative, no universally best regime except insofar as they have been invented by human "artists":

> Whatever has *value* in our world does not have value in itself, according to its nature — nature is always value-less, but has been *given* value at some time, as a present — and it is *we* who gave and bestowed it. (GS 301; see also HAH 28)

Nietzsche's claim that "insight into the horrible truth" (BT 7; GS 107) refutes the argument that we can read standards in the text of nature[25] does not, however, preclude the introduction of a *deus ex machina* that is able to overcome the apparent groundlessness of the chaos of becoming[26] by providing those of us who are lucky enough to have been touched by the hand of Grace with "divine truth." Because of this, Nietzsche takes his iconoclasm a step further and announces not only the death of Truth as a standard written in nature or a true

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[24] Rainer Knopff, *Human Rights and Social Technology: The New War on Discrimination* (Ottawa: Carleton Univesity Press, 1989), 134. Cf. Thomas Pangle, "Nihilism and Democracy in the Thought of Nietzsche" in *The Crisis of Liberal Democracy: A Straussian Perspective*. Edited by Kenneth Deutsch and Walter Soffer (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1987), 189.

[25] See GS 344.

[26] See, for example, HAH 16; GS 109; Z III 4; GM III 11; WP 711, 715.

world but the death of God as well.[27] The most significant repercussion of Nietzsche's "murder" (see Z I 17) of normative truth is the answer to the questions "what ought to be the case?" and "what is good?" can make no reference to a higher authority.[28]

Nonetheless, much of what Nietzsche writes is intended to establish a body of observations that, while not true in a normative or absolute sense, constitute a more or less accurate description of the universe we know and live in. Nietzsche, moreover, realizes that his critique of Truth does not preclude saying something true about our reality. A key difference between Nietzsche's endorsement of a radically deflated subtype of rudimentary truth and the search for normative truth he criticizes is that it does not lead to the espousal of one set of values over another. Just as there is no transcendental "thou shalt" (GM I 17), there is no universally valid immanent "thou shalt" either. What we find out about our world does not provide us with the true standard of valuation any more than "the morality-and-ideal-swindle of the Socratic schools" (TI X 2). Values, in short, are human inventions. But, like any invention, they are constructed out of and, if they are to be successful, in accordance with already given forces and contingencies. The universe is not a blank tablet. Rudimentary truth is, therefore, useful to the extent that it can tell us what options are available and, hopefully, what the consequences of choosing one

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[27] For references to the death of God, see HAH Vol. II, Part I 225; WS 84; GS 125, 343, 344, 357; Z "Zarathustra's Prologue" 2, 3; GM III 27.

[28] David Walsh points out that one of the implications of the death of God is the conclusion that "[w]ithout a transcendent authorization, moral principles can only be validated by human choice" (After Ideology: Recovering the Spiritual Foundations of Freedom (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 22).

or the other option will be. Rudimentary truth, it follows, remains an important part of the philosophical puzzle.

In Chapter One, I present my reading of Nietzsche's epistemology. The chapter demonstrates that Nietzsche formulated a theory of truth at the outset of his career that remained a core element of the rest of his thought until his collapse, and subsequent end of his productive life, in 1889. I argue that it is a single theory, that it "makes sense," that it does not deny all types of truth and, finally, that it forms the foundation of the rest of his ideas. Chapter Two examines Nietzsche's argument that pre-Socratic Greek culture exemplifies a "healthy" and "life-affirming" *response* to the truth about Truth. The final chapter compares Nietzsche's *choices* in the face of a lack of Truth to those recommended by one of his most compelling students, Michel Foucault. In the Conclusion, I point to some of the limitations of these choices. I also suggest that Nietzsche's epistemology is not the final word on normative truth. Nonetheless, Nietzsche's critique of man's tendency to use normative truth as a crutch and/or club challenges those who continue to think that Truth exists; hopefully it may lead them to recognize that they are on less solid metaphysical ground than they originally thought.

This thesis starts with Nietzsche's answer to the question "What is truth?" but it does not stop there. It goes on to examine two of the main issues his answer raises: (1) what is the "best" (in Nietzsche's opinion) relationship between man and the deepest layers of his reality? and (2) if there is no normative truth, how do we react to this knowledge?

CHAPTER ONE: PARADISE UNMADE

The first power to come into being was Chaos.

– Hesiod[29]

The time will come when that which seems high to you will no
longer be in sight, and that which seems low to you will be all-too-
near; even what was sublime to you will frighten you like a ghost.
And you will cry, "All is false!"
    There are feelings which want to kill the lonely; and if they
do not succeed, well, then they themselves must die. But are you
capable of this – to be a murderer? (Z I 17)

The basic outline of Nietzsche's theory of truth is presented in "On Truth

and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense." Written in 1873 at the start of Nietzsche's

career, "On Truth and Lies" is a "relatively polished"[30] essay and includes the

epistemological arguments that form the basis of his subsequent works. The

theory of truth put forward in "On Truth and Lies" is not only consistent with

itself, but is also consistent with, and forms the starting point for, the rest of

Nietzsche's thought.

"On Truth and Lies" illustrates Nietzsche's use of different definitions of

truth. Some of these are unique to him and some are definitions used by others.

Nietzsche takes the time in "On Truth and Lies" to explain the various meanings

he employs. Nietzsche tends to avoid this practice in his other works and, by so

doing, creates a great deal of confusion and the impression that he contradicts

himself. As I hope to demonstrate, the epistemology Nietzsche articulates in

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[29] Hesiod, *Theogony* (line 116) in *The Poems of Hesiod*. Translated by R.M. Frazer
(Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), 30.

[30] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth: Selections From Nietzsche's Notebooks of the
Early 1870's*. Edited and translated by Daniel Breazeale (New Jersey: Humanities Press,
1979), 79.

"On Truth and Lies" can be used to make sense of his references to truth and related terms such as knowledge and facts in his other works.

A common thread is evident among the various definitions of truth in "On Truth and Lies." In all cases, truth refers to "the actual state of affairs" and true statements are those that accurately depict the actual state of affairs. Confusion is created by the fact that "truth" is sometimes used to refer to the true statements rather than the reality they describe. According to this view, truth is separate from, but *corresponds to,* reality. Nietzsche uses truth in both of these ways and does not get bogged down in the debate over the distinction between the two meanings.

The different definitions of truth and, in turn, the parameters that determine whether or not statements are true or false depend on what is meant by "the actual state of affairs." Three distinct definitions of "the actual state of affairs" are outlined in "On Truth and Lies" and each plays a central role in Nietzsche's thought. This chapter uses "On Truth and Lies" as a starting point to discuss these three fundamental definitions.

The True World: History of an Error

> Man seeks "the truth": a world that is not self-contradictory, not deceptive, does not change, a *true* world – a world in which one does not suffer; contradiction, deception, change – causes of suffering! He does not doubt that a world as it ought to be exists; he would like to seek out the road to it. (WP 585)

According to the first definition of truth, the actual state of affairs is the world prior to man's perception of it – untouched, unfiltered, pure. This definition has led philosophers to divide reality into two separate parts or worlds. There is a true world (also known as the transcendental or real world)

and there is the actual or apparent world (the world of the senses, the world of nature). The true world is a realm of perfection (Being) and is of great value whereas the actual world is a realm of imperfection (becoming) and has little if any value compared to the true world (see, for example, WP 583). Nietzsche argues that this division is an error rooted in a psychological need that drives metaphysicians[31] to invent a true world because they are too weak to accept the "change, contradiction, and struggle" (WP 578) that characterizes the actual world. The creation of a true world is "an expression of hatred for a world that makes one suffer: the *ressentiment* of metaphysicians against actuality is here creative" (WP 579).

The true world contains a particular "grade" of truth (OTL 1). Nietzsche refers to this grade as pure knowledge or the pure truth and associates it with things in themselves independent of human interaction (consequences):

> The "thing in itself" (which is precisely what the pure truth, apart from any of its consequences, would be) is ... something quite incomprehensible to the creator of language and something not in the least worth striving for. This creator only designates the relations of things to men, and for expressing these relations [as opposed to the things in themselves] he lays hold of the boldest metaphors. (OTL 1)

Language does not mirror things in themselves, but uses metaphors to capture the *relations* of things to men – i.e., the "consequences" of our interaction with the world around us:

> ...we believe that we know something about the things themselves when we speak of trees, colors, snow, and flowers; and yet we

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[31] Metaphysicians and the psychology of metaphysics (see WP 576) are linked to the ascetic priests and the ascetic ideal (see GM III 11). The metaphysician and the ascetic priest both deny life in the actual world (the "sphere of becoming and transitoriness") in favour of a "true world." Hence, they are ascetic and life-denying.

possess nothing but metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities. ...the mysterious X of the thing in itself first appears as a nerve stimulus, then as an image, and finally as a sound. Thus the genesis of language does not proceed logically in any case, and all the material within and with which the man of truth, the scientist, and the philosopher later work and build, if not derived from never-never land, is at least not derived from the essence of things. (OTL 1)

Our senses and intellect do not tell us about pure (objective) truth; we can never gain access to the world of original entities.[32] Man stands between himself and the world independent of man. Our senses and intellect automatically and unavoidably form a cave around us that cuts us off from the "essence of things." What the world is like prior to our intermingling with it is "inaccessible and undefinable for us" (OTL 1).[33] Hence, *in this sense,* there is no "truth" and everything we know about the world is illusion, art, interpretation. This does not mean that we can create anything we want; there is a world out there and we cannot simply wish away the *consequences* of our interaction with it.

There are two larger philosophical implications of this argument. The first implication is that we have no direct access to a true world (e.g., the realm

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[32] See WP 555: ...supposing there were an in-itself, an unconditioned thing, it would for that very reason be unknowable! Something unconditioned cannot be known; otherwise it would not be unconditioned! ... Coming to know means "to place oneself in a conditional relation to something"; to feel oneself conditioned by something and oneself to condition it – it is therefore under all circumstances establishing, denoting, and making-conscious of conditions (not forthcoming entities, things, what is "in-itself"). See also WP 556: The question "what is that?" is an imposition of meaning from some other viewpoint. "Essence," the "essential nature," is something perspective and already presupposes a multiplicity. At the bottom of it there always lies "what is that for *me*?" (for us, for all that lives, etc.).

[33] See GM III 12: ...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 nonsense. There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective "knowing"....

of Plato's Forms or Kant's *ding an sich*). The world of pure truth exists only as a *concept* and, because we can know nothing about its *content,* it is philosophically and empirically irrelevant.

There are two possible means of escape from the cave that defines the boundaries of the world of the here and now: (1) special access to the true world via man's intellect; or (2) divine intervention. These are the paths to the true world suggested by philosophy and religion. Since we can never get beyond the wall of the cave via our senses, science (empirical observation) cannot reveal the true world and is therefore only able to operate *within* the cave (see, for example, WP 583).[34]

Nietzsche addresses both of these claims in "On Truth and Lies." He argues that the human intellect is not up to the task of breaking through the epistemological walls created by our perceptions and is not as special as philosophers such as Socrates would have us believe:

> 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. One might invent such a fable, and yet he still would not have adequately illustrated how miserable, how shadowy and transient, how aimless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature. There were eternities during which it did not exist. And when it is all over with the human intellect, nothing will have happened. For this intellect has no additional mission which

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[34] Nietzsche points out in GS 344 that those with a "faith in science" may believe in a true world and the divinity of truth. As a mode of inquiry, however, science remains restricted to the empirical data available to us via our senses. Nietzsche's critique of the faith in science in GS 344 is aimed at the *conviction* that nothing is needed more than the truths discovered by science.

would lead it beyond human life. Rather, it is human, and only its possessor and begetter takes it so solemnly (OTL 1)

Nietzsche claims that the evidence of *this world* suggests that the intellect is incapable of achieving an extra-sensory awareness of a reality independent of perception. The intellect is not a conduit to the Good. Man is merely a beast that uses his intellect "as a device for detaining [himself] a minute within existence" (OTL 1).[35] Nietzsche revisits this argument in *Beyond Good and Evil* and argues that the "falsification" of becoming that takes place when man interprets his reality (i.e., simplifies it and transforms it into fixed concepts) is "life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species cultivating" (BGE 4; see also BGE 2). Hence, "untruth" is "a condition of life."

Man's ego leads him astray and convinces him that his "power of knowing" (OTL 1) can reveal the realm of pure truth. Nietzsche attacks this claim because it has been used to devalue the world of the here and now (the only world to which we have access) and as a justification for absolute transcendent standards that do not exist. The pursuit of truth conceived of as a true world replete with hidden messages about the right way to live our lives is rooted in man's ego and his desire to baptize his prejudices as truths (BGE 5). We cannot, according to Nietzsche's epistemology, appeal to a true world as a means of legitimizing the choices we make in this one.

Even if we cannot access the true world in a *direct* sense, it could be argued that we are able to learn about it via the *indirect* evidence of the world in which we live. There may be, in other words, clues about the true world that

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[35] See also WP 584; GS 110; DB 26.

can be gleaned from our experiences in this world. In fact, according to Nietzsche's epistemology, the *only* valid source of evidence about anything is the world we experience via our senses and interpret using our intellect.[36] Nietzsche does not shy away from this challenge and devotes considerable intellectual energy to making the case that he has examined the evidence of this world and found nothing to indicate the existence of a separate and better world. Instead, he finds ample evidence that the *idea* of a true world has been used as an excuse to justify competing moral *choices*. Philosophers and other moralists are unable to find a justification for their claims in this world, so they invent another one and call it the true world.[37] One of the central ramifications of Nietzsche's theory of truth is that you cannot disregard the evidence of this world – the "world of relationships" (WP 568) in which we live – by using the trump card of a true world to which you claim to have privileged access.

It is important to note that, although Nietzsche denies the existence of a true world, he does not abandon his description of the actual world as a realm of becoming, imperfection, and errors. It is *because of these traits* that metaphysicians invent a true world (see, for example, BGE 2). Metaphysicians need a true world because they are unable to justify a fallen world *on their own*

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[36] See, for example, BGE 134: All credibility, all good conscience, all evidence of truth come only from the senses.

[37] See, for example, WP 430: The great concepts "good" and "just" are severed from the presuppositions to which they belong and, as liberated "ideas," become objects of dialectic. One looks for truth in them, one takes them for entities or signs of entities: one invents a world where they are at home, where they originate—

grounds. [38] They are, in other words, unable to posit an aesthetic justification for life (see WP 416).

The "errors" that characterize the actual world are not created by a failure to adequately mirror the reality of the true world, but by the failure to fully capture the reality of becoming (i.e., of this world):

> In a world of becoming, "reality" is always only a simplification for practical ends, or a deception through the coarseness of organs, or a variation in the tempo of becoming. (WP 580)

Arguing that the true world is a myth does, however, debunk the claim that the actual world is a pale imitation of, and inferior to, the true world. As a result, value is no longer located in an otherworldly sphere (the Forms, the Good, Paradise). Nietzsche wants us to *choose* to value becoming and the "reality" we drape over it and, in this way, "set free" the "the value feelings that hitherto have been squandered on the world of being" (WP 585). Man must "do without meaning in things" and "endure to live in a meaningless world" by creating his own meaning (WP 585). In this way, he accepts the suffering and imperfection of the actual world and loves both it and the art he creates to overcome it.[39] To achieve this freedom, Nietzsche exposes the lie of the true world.

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[38] See WP 585: Belief in what has being is only a consequence: the real *primum mobile* is disbelief in becoming, mistrust of becoming, the low valuation of all that becomes— What kind of man reflects in this way? An unproductive suffering kind, a kind weary of life [which is, according to Nietzsche, the combination of becoming and artistic responses to it]. If we imagine the opposite kind of man, he would not need to believe in what has being; more, he would despise it as dead, tedious, indifferent— The belief that the world as it ought to be *is,* really exists, is a belief of the unproductive who do *not desire to create a world* as it ought to be. They posit it as already available, they seek ways and means of reaching it. "Will to truth" – *as the impotence of the will to create.*

[39] This stands in stark contrast to the nihilist who is aware that there is no true world and no normative truth, but is unable to create his own values and stand behind them on his own grounds. The nihilist continues to need and desire the true world he no longer believes in and is, therefore, unable to place his faith in values that are created. See WP 585: A nihilist

The actual world does not contain the normative truth formerly located in the true world. Nietzsche examines the actual world and finds no evidence of normative truth. Man, not nature, is the determiner of value. Nietzsche does not, in other words, deconstruct the true world in order to relocate Truth in the actual world. Human choice and invention stand behind every table of values and always will.

For example, in the absence of both otherworldly and this-worldly standards, one could *choose* to disregard Nietzsche's desire to undermine the ascetic ideal and "translate man back into nature" (BGE 230) (i.e., to reacquaint man with his role as a creator of values that affirm life in the actual world) and argue that it is better to stick with the old otherworldly values or not bother with such things and focus on living a comfortable life akin to that of the "last man" (see Z P 5). The point here is that the actual world is no more a source of normative truth than the mirage of the true world. Man is on his own in this regard.

Nietzsche's Perspectivism

> What then are our experiences? Much *more* that which we put into them than that which they already contain! Or must we go so far as to say: in themselves they contain nothing? To experience is to invent? (DB 120)

> You have to choose where you look, and in making that choice you eliminate entire worlds.

> Barbara Bloom, Artist

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is a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought *not* to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist. According to this view, our existence (action, suffering, willing, feeling) has no meaning: the pathos of "in vain" is the nihilists' pathos....

The second major philosophical implication of the argument that everything we know about the world is illusion, art, and interpretation is that man is, by nature, a creator, an artist; he is *always* involved in the production of knowledge about his world. As a result, our understanding (i.e., interpretation) of the world is not as fixed as it may appear. This teaches us to be more critical and more wary of how we understand our reality. Nonetheless, interpretation has its limits; the world is not clay, but acts on us in ways that we cannot simply interpret away. Interpretations are valid if they explain relatively fixed aspects of our interface with reality. The point is that the *perspective* of the observer cannot be divorced from the knowledge the perspective yields.

In his later works and notes, Nietzsche discusses his "perspectivism" in more detail and argues that very idea of a true world does not make sense (from man's perspective at least):

> ...facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact "in itself": perhaps it is even folly to want to do such a thing. ...In so far as the word "knowledge" has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings.— "Perspectivism." (WP 481)[40]

Other interpretations of the world are possible by other perceivers. Things are defined by their *interaction* with other things. There is no original starting point and no transcendental observer that can see things from all possible

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[40] See also WP 567: Every center of force adopts a perspective toward the entire remainder, i.e., its own particular valuation, mode of action, and mode of resistance. ...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— ...there is no "other," no "true," no essential being – for this would be the expression of a world *without* action and reaction—

perspectives.[41] Meaning is generated by interaction (a process Nietzsche will later refer to as "will to power"); *it is not given.* The idea that there is a set of facts "out there" that have a nature independent of interaction with one another is, according to Nietzsche, absurd. The observer is also conditional and exists as "a process, a becoming" rather than a "being" (WP 556).[42]

Nietzsche's Atheism

> 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)

According to Nietzsche, we cannot access a "true world" via our senses and we cannot access it through our intellect. This still leaves the possibility that divine intervention can bridge the gap for us (e.g., write eternal laws in our hearts, bestow Grace upon us, communicate otherworldly truths via divine texts, etc). Nietzsche denies this possibility and argues that all claims to divine knowledge are false and all values that claim to have divine sanction are lies. Nietzsche examines the evidence available to us and learns that man – not God – is the source of all religious claims to knowledge about a true world and the moral laws it is believed to contain. The "wise, the pious, [and] the virtuous" (TI IV) invent a true world and then claim that they have special access to it.

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[41] See WP 556: A thing would be defined once all creatures had asked "what is that?" and had answered their question. Supposing one single creature, with its own relationships and perspectives for all things, were missing, then the thing would not yet be "defined." See also WP 557-560.

[42] Nietzsche goes on to argue in WP 556 that "The origin of 'things' is wholly the work of that which imagines, thinks, wills, feels. The concept 'thing' itself just as much as its qualities.— Even 'the subject' is such a created entity, a 'thing' like all others: a

This special access then grants them the power associated with knowing and speaking the Will of God.

God, however, is an invention:

> 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 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)

Truth in this passage refers to the lack of normative truth and the knowledge that all claims to the contrary are "falsifications."[43] There is, in turn, no God to play the role of the creator and observer of all things in their true form and, therefore, the true world cannot be cited as a source of moral truths.

The Truth About Truth

> There are no moral phenomena at all, but only a moral interpretation of phenomena— (BGE 108)

Since the cave in which we live does not contain normative truth, and since we have no access to a true world via our intellect or by way of divine inspiration, it follows that, according to Nietzsche, *there is no normative truth.* This is the truth about Truth and explains why Nietzsche often describes "truth"

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simplification with the object of defining the force which posits, invents, thinks, as distinct from all individual positing, inventing, thinking as such."

[43] It is notable that it is the search for truth that undermines faith in normative truth. In GS 357, Nietzsche argues that Schopenhauer's atheism was "a triumph achieved finally and with great difficulty by the European conscience, being the most fateful act of two thousand years of discipline for truth that in the end forbids itself the *lie* in faith in God." In this way, the search for truth overcomes itself and reveals its highest form – Truth – to be a myth.

(i.e., the lack of normative truth) as "hard" (e.g., BGE 257) and "ugly" (e.g., WP 822).[44] The truth about Truth tells us that the Truths that give us comfort and hope in a cruel and heartless world are illusions. We learn, for example, that there is no reason for suffering, no God to judge the wicked, and no Heaven. We learn, in short, that there is no meaning except the meaning we *create*. The long tradition of only valuing the meaning that is given rather than created makes the truth about Truth a hard pill to swallow and leads to the impasse of nihilism.

The discovery of the truth about Truth is, however, also an *opportunity* for man to rediscover his role as an "esteemer":

> Verily, men gave themselves all their good and evil. Verily, they did not take it, they did not find it, nor did it come to them as a voice from heaven. Only man placed values in things to preserve himself – he alone created a meaning for things, a human meaning. Therefore he calls himself "man," which means: the esteemer.
> To esteem is to create: hear this, you creators! Esteeming itself is of all esteemed things the most estimable treasure. Through esteeming alone is there value.... (Z I 15)

Nietzsche tries to convince us that the need for Truth evolved and we (or at least those of us who are strong enough) can overcome it and live with the knowledge that we create our own meaning. The strong do not need the crutch of normative truth and are able to stand behind their values with nothing but

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[44] The following reference to "ugly truths" in WP 598 illustrates Nietzsche's inconsistent epistemological nomenclature: "Belief that there is no truth at all, the nihilistic belief, is a great relaxation for one who, as a warrior of knowledge, is ceaselessly fighting ugly truths." In this passage, Nietzsche is using truth to refer to normative truth. Hence, there "is no truth at all" and, because normative truth is often what Nietzsche is against, he calls this type of truth ugly. In WP 822, on the other hand, truth is used to refer to the truth about Truth and is, for that reason, ugly: "For a philosopher to say, 'the good and beautiful are one', is infamy; if he goes on to add, 'also the true', one ought to thrash him. Truth is ugly. We possess *art* lest we *perish of the truth*.

their own reasons as justification. The strong do not need to make *their* way into *the* way. They are able, rather, to love their "art" and redeem the world of suffering and becoming by creating "illusions" (this is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two).

It can be argued that this is a direct route to the idea that "might makes right" and will open the door for power-mad oppressors that impose their will on others. The fear is that, without Truth, without the threat of a final judgement, people will act like maniacs akin to Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Normative truth is needed because it sets limits to excessive behaviour.[45] Nietzsche, I believe, would respond to this by arguing that if you want to oppose dictators and the raw expression of power, you do not need Truth – you can oppose it on your own grounds. A lack of normative truth does not mean that you cannot continue to set limits and endorse values formerly justified by normative truth; it simply means that you cannot appeal to it as a justification for your beliefs and actions.

It follows, that the moral systems derived from the false belief in a true world are not automatically "bad" or "refuted" because they are untrue. For Nietzsche, the truth of something does not determine its value; this is a *separate* judgment and is based (in the absence of normative truth) on personal grounds. Nietzsche, for example, argues against the otherworldliness of the definition of truth as a true world *not* because it is "untrue," but because *he chooses* to see it as a waste of man's energy and a denial of the only world we know. The fact

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[45] It is also important to note that normative truth does not always set limits; it is also used as an *excuse* for excessive behaviour, social oppression, and political tyranny.

that it is untrue, however, is a critical piece of information. If there is a true world that we can access, and if it contains lessons about the right way to live our lives (i.e., normative truth), striving for the true world should be our goal and believing in it would not be a waste. It is the lack of normative truth that creates the rationale for critiquing arguments based on it.

Thus, the truth about Truth plays a central role in Nietzsche's thought. This role, however, is very different from the role played by normative truth in the Western tradition. Whereas philosophers from Socrates to John Stuart Mill have used normative truth as the basis of the values they endorse, Nietzsche's denial of normative truth eliminates this as an option. This allows him the freedom to critique the value systems that he dislikes – to critique the quest for Truth itself – and to offer the alternative of the value-creating Overman (see Z P 3, 4). In this way, Nietzsche remains pious toward truth (see GS 344), but for very different reasons than the philosophers he criticizes.

Nietzsche's rediscovery[46] of the truth about Truth is not, it follows, the same as proclaiming a new Truth that replaces the (false) Truths posited by previous philosophers. Proclaiming the lack of normative truth and discussing the implications of the moral void created by it (e.g., that if we want values, we have to create them ourselves and, in turn, that those of us who can create values on a cultural level are "great," "life-affirming," "healthy," and "strong") is very different from claiming to know what the "true," the "correct," the "best," or the "right" values are. There is, in other words, no Truth against which to

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[46] Nietzsche argues that the pre-Socratic Greeks understood the truth about Truth on a symbolic level.

measure the *content* of our value choices. All the truth about Truth tells us is that we have no one else to turn to but ourselves if we want meaning in our lives. Nietzsche's references to what he thinks is good and bad should, it follows, be interpreted as statements about his preferences rather than as values rooted in normative truth (i.e., as opinions rather than Truths). In addition, although the truth about Truth helps make the case for Nietzsche's vision of a value-creating Overman, the lack of normative truth means that the Overman is only valuable if we *choose* to see him as such; his value is not given. Rudimentary truth is still relevant, and it is still useful to have knowledge of the actual state of affairs, but it is no longer the determining factor – the final court of appeal – that it once was. In fact, in the absence of Truth, *all* values are open to critique including Nietzsche's. This does not mean that all values are equal in terms of their consequences, nor does it mean that we are unable to choose between them. It does mean, however, that none of them can appeal to normative truth as a reason to choose them. This allows Nietzsche to critique the value choices he dislikes; it also means that his choices cannot hide behind the protective shield of Truth anymore than the choices he rejects.

Becoming as Truth

> ...we have faced up to the beautiful chaos of existence and denied
> it all providential reason and goodness... (GS 277)

Nietzsche argues that the world in which we live – the world left over after the true world is deconstructed – has two distinct layers. Each layer

corresponds to a unique definition of the actual state of affairs[47] and, as a result, each layer yields a specific grade of truth.

The first and most basic layer of our reality is becoming. Becoming is what the world we experience is like and is, therefore, the "truest" grade of truth that we have access to from our perspective. Hence, because the words, concepts, and theories that we use to describe our world do not capture the full pageant of becoming, they are, *in this sense,* "errors":

> Change, mutation, becoming in general were formerly taken as proof of appearance, as a sign of the presence of something which led us astray. Today, on the contrary, we see ourselves as it were entangled in error, *necessitated* to error, to precisely the extent that our prejudice in favour of reason compels us to posit unity, identity, duration, substance, cause, materiality, being: however sure we may be, on the basis of a strict reckoning, *that* error is to be found here. (TI III 5)

Becoming, however, is not the same as a "true world" as it does not contain stable, pre-defined entities or eternal Truths. Becoming, moreover, does not stand in opposition to the actual world, but is its primal essence. Nonetheless, just as the everyday world is an error compared to the perfection of the true world, the everyday world is an error compared to the complexity, richness, and chaos of becoming.

Becoming forms the outer wall of the cave created by our perspective and is available to us in its raw form via our senses:

> I set apart with high reverence the name of *Heraclitus.* When the rest of the philosopher crowd rejected the evidence of the senses

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[47] Nietzsche uses the Greek gods Dionysus and Apollo as symbols of these two layers. Dionysus is associated with darkness, mystery, emotion, the depths, and ecstasy; he represents the flux of becoming that lies beneath the Apollonian layer. Apollo is associated with clarity, order, rationality, the surface, and form; he represents the empirical solidity of the everyday world. I discuss these tropes in more detail in Chapter Two.

because these showed plurality and change, he rejected their
evidence because they showed things as if they possessed
duration and unity. Heraclitus too was unjust to the senses, which
neither lie in the way the Eleatics believe nor as he believed –
they do not lie at all. It is what we make of their evidence that first
introduces the lie into it, for example the lie of unity, the lie of
materiality, of substance, of duration. ... In so far as the senses
show becoming, passing away, change, they do not lie. (TI III 2)

Nietzsche describes becoming as "a monster of energy" (WP 1067), as change,

as chaos, as a "mysterious primordial unity" (BT 1), and "a sea of forces flowing

and rushing together, eternally changing" (WP 1067). It is important to note that

becoming is beyond good and evil, that it is morally neutral, and that it cannot

help us decide what is of value or determine the right way to live our lives:

"becoming aims at *nothing* and achieves *nothing*" (WP 12).[48] Becoming lacks

"order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other names there

are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms" (GS 109). In this way, Nietzsche de-

deifies nature (see GS 109).[49] The only knowledge human beings can learn

from becoming is that they are the ones who put value into things. Human

beings are "naturalized" by showing them that nature contains no pre-defined

meaning and that they – not Truth – are the judges of what is valuable.[50]

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[48] See WP 602: ...the more superficially and coarsely it is conceived, the more valuable the world appears. The deeper one looks, the more our valuations disappear – meaninglessness approaches. We have *created* the world that possesses values!

[49] See BGE 9: "'According to nature'" you want to *live*? O you noble Stoics, what deceptive words these are! Imagine a being like nature, wasteful beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure, without purposes and consideration, without mercy and justice, fertile and desolate and uncertain at the same time; imagine indifference itself as a power – how *could* you live according to this indifference? Living – is that not precisely wanting to be other than this nature?" Nietzsche therefore draws a distinction between living according to nature (i.e., using nature as a standard) and being natural (i.e., creating one's own values as a response to the meaninglessness of becoming).

[50] It is important to note here that man is not the *ultimate* judge of what is valuable in the universe (see WP 12). He can only determine what is valuable *to him*. The desire to transform one's values into eternal Truths – to see your choices as the only correct choices –

Human beings, however, cannot live in the face of becoming (what Nietzsche refers to in *The Birth of Tragedy* as the Dionysian) and need the order, the boundaries, the reason, and the art of the second layer of reality symbolized by the "calm of the sculptor god" Apollo. It is the Apollonian layer of reality that makes "life possible and worth living" (BT 1). It does this, however, by superimposing sensory images, words, concepts, and tables of value (e.g., moral codes, gods, social goals) over the flux of becoming. In this way, man distances himself from the reality of becoming and lives in a world of "illusion" *(Schein)*.[51] The world that concerns us is, in turn, a "fiction" (BGE 34):[52]

> That which we now call the world is the outcome of a host of errors and fantasies which have gradually arisen and grown entwined with one another in the course of the overall evolution of the organic being, and are now inherited by us as the accumulated treasure of the entire past – as treasure: for the value of our humanity depends on it. (HAH I 17)

This explains Nietzsche's references to "the *erroneousness* of the world in which we think we live" (BGE 34). It also points to the vital importance of man's artistic talents (both as a perceiver and as a creator of meaning) and the relative value of "art" compared to "truth" (which turns out to be a realm of becoming rather than a true world).

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is, Nietzsche argues, egotistical. This point is a rebuttal to the argument that Nietzsche is egotistical to think that he is free to determine what is good and bad.

[51] Walter Kaufmann notes that he sometimes translates the German word *Schein* as "illusion" and other times as "mere appearance." The closest English-language equivalent is simply "shine." Regardless of how it is translated, Nietzsche uses the word to suggest the the art, the show, and the semblance of the Apollonian layer (the surface) that masks the Dionysian layer (the depths).

[52] See also WP 616: The world with which we are concerned is false, i.e., is not a fact but a fable and approximation on the basis of a meager sum of observations....

It is important to note that the illusions are not "mere shadows on a wall —
for [man] lives and suffers with these scenes" (BT 1). Apollonian truth allows
man to understand and use nature albeit only from his perspective and based
on "life-preserving errors" (GS 110) such as his belief in things, substance, and
causality.[53] It is also the realm within which man creates the values that make
life bearable (GS 107). In keeping with this, the Apollonian layer of reality
contains two different types of illusion: (1) anthropomorphic truth (the life-
preserving errors); and (2) pure art or pure illusion (values). I discuss each type
of illusion below.

The Horizon of Our Knowledge

> We set up a word at the point at which our ignorance
> begins, at which we can see no further, e.g., the word "I," the word
> "do," the word "suffer": — these are perhaps the horizon of our
> knowledge, but not "truths." (WP 482)

It is significant that Nietzsche has placed the word "truths" in quotation
marks in the above passage because it indicates that he is referring to a
particular type of truth. Words such as "I," "do," and "suffer" simplify the full
experience of becoming and, in turn, do not correspond to the way things truly
are. Human beings need an "abbreviated" (WP 15) version of reality in order to
survive amid the sensory overload of becoming:

> In order that the concept of substance could originate — which is
> indispensable for logic although in the strictest sense nothing real
> corresponds to it — it was...necessary that for a long time one did
> not see or perceive the changes in things. The beings that did not
> see so precisely had an advantage over those that saw everything
> "in flux." (GS 111)

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[53] Cf. GS 265: What are man's truths ultimately? Merely his *irrefutable* errors.

In a world of becoming, "reality" is always only a simplification for practical ends, or a deception through the coarseness of organs, or a variation in the tempo of becoming. (WP 580)[54]

In this sense, "delusion and error are conditions of human knowledge and sensation" (GS 107)[55] and "untruth is a condition of life" (BGE 4).[56] The will to truth is, it turns out, a will to deception. As a result, human beings "are deeply immersed in illusions and dream images; their eyes merely glide over surfaces of things and see 'forms'" (OTL 1). This process of simplification is very useful for it allows human beings the repose needed to make sense of the maelstrom of becoming.[57] Human beings filter out the majority of the information they receive via their senses and organize their perceptions of becoming into fixed patterns (see OTL 1). If this were not the case, human beings would be overwhelmed with too much information and would be unable to function.[58] This is a central theme of Nietzsche's epistemology and one he repeats again

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[54] See also WP 517: The fictitious world of subject, substance, "reason," etc. is needed—: there is in us a power to order, simply, falsify, artificially distinguish. "Truth" is the will to be master over the multiplicity of sensations:—to classify phenomena into definite categories.

[55] See also GS 11: ...all our consciousness relates to errors.

[56] See also BGE 34: ...there would be no life at all if not on the basis of perspective estimates and appearances; WP 520: A world in a state of becoming could not, in a strict sense, be "comprehended" or "known"; only to the extent that the "comprehending" and knowing" intellect encounters a coarse, already-created world, fabricated out of mere appearances but firm to the extent that this kind of appearance has preserved life.... Cf. GS 110 and 111.

[57] See OTL 1: What does man actually know about himself? Is he, indeed, ever able to perceive himself as if laid out in a lighted display case? Does nature not conceal most things from him — even concerning his own body — in order to confine and lock him within a proud, deceptive consciousness, aloof from the coils of the bowels, the rapid flow of the bloodstream, and the intricate quivering of the fibers! She threw away the key.

[58] According to contemporary psychology, human cognition is a "data reduction system that 'boils down' floods of information into a stream of useful data." Dennis Coon, *Introduction to Psychology: Exploration and Application,* Fifth Edition (New York: West Publishing Company, 1989), 81. Humans beings also practice sensory adaptation and selective attention: "Sensory adaptation refers to a decrease in sensory response to a constant or unchanging stimulus." Selective attention is the ability to "'tune in on' any of the many of sensory messages bombarding us while excluding others" (Coon, 103).

and again. Even the idea of a single, unified "self" represented by the word "I" is just a convenient form of shorthand for a host of complex forces and competing wills that evolve over time. When this will to deception is combined with the fact that all knowledge is based on a particular perspective (and therefore only one of many possible versions), it becomes clear that Nietzsche's theory of truth is far removed from the one proposed by his nemesis Socrates.

Knowledge of the "life-preserving errors" (GS 110) forms the actual state of affairs *for human beings* (recognizing that becoming lies beneath it as its base). This definition of the actual state of affairs yields a grade of truth Nietzsche refers to as "anthropomorphic truth" (OTL 1). Anthropomorphic truth is functionally equivalent to rudimentary truth. Nietzsche describes anthropomorphic truth as a "lie" and an "error" to point to man's role in its creation and to highlight the degree to which it differs from the chimera of pure truth:

> The habits of our senses have woven us into lies and deception of sensation: these again are the basis of all our judgements and 'knowledge' – there is absolutely no escape, no backway or bypath into the *real world!* (DB 117)

Anthropomorphic truth "contains not a single point which would be 'true in itself' or really and universally valid apart from man" (OTL 1). Rudimentary truth is no longer the polar opposite of art but is itself a creation. Nonetheless, anthropomorphic truth describes – albeit imperfectly – the relatively fixed aspects of the outside world human beings have access to via their senses (see DB 117). We cannot, for example, smell light, see sub-atomic particles with the naked eye, or experience time flowing in more than one direction. Our perceptual world may be a fiction, but we are not free to create any version of

reality we wish and still "get things the way they are for us." Nietzsche's epistemology does not, in other words, imply a perceptual free-for-all and the dictum "all is false" does not mean "all is possible." Within the confines of the horizon established by anthropomorphic truth – words such as "I," "do," and "suffer" *function* as truths. The paradox inherent in Nietzsche's epistemology is that anthropomorphic truth is both true *and* false. Nietzsche is, in turn, able to make claims regarding the nature of the actual world (e.g., that it is will to power), the psychological origin of metaphysics, the genealogy of various moralities, and a host of other statements about the way things are and, at the same time, deny the existence of "truth."

Nietzsche argues that anthropomorphic truth is an error because it does not fully capture and, therefore, falsifies the primal essence of the actual world (becoming). Ascetics argue that anthropomorphic truth is an error because it is not pure truth (Being):

> Suppose such an incarnate will to contradiction and antinaturalness is induced to *philosophize*: upon what will it vent its innermost contrariness? Upon what is felt most certainly to be real and actual: it will look for error precisely where the instinct of life most unconditionally posits truth. (GM III 12)[59]

The type of truth that life posits (and rigorous empirical observation reveals) is anthropomorphic truth. Anthropomorphic truth is art, but the material with which it works is the actual world we learn about via our senses. One of Nietzsche's goals here is to stress the value of anthropomorphic truth (it enables us to

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[59] Cf. HAH 3: It is the mark of a higher culture to value the little unpretentious truths which have been discovered by means of rigorous method more highly than the errors handed down by metaphysical and artistic ages and men, which blind us and make us happy.

survive in a harsh world) and man's role in its creation. By so doing, he undermines the counterclaim that the only source of value is a true world that is found rather than made. We do not need pure truth; we can understand our world and create our own values without it.

Unlike anthropomorphic truth, the fiction of the true world is not based on a natural and necessary tendency to transform the raw experience of becoming into fixed impressions, words, and concepts. It is based, rather, on the fact that the true world is an invention with no basis in reality other than the drive to create a perfect world. Anthropomorphic truth is art based on man's interface with the actual world whereas the idea of the true world is a fabrication rooted in the desire that such a world exist.

The lie of the true world is an example of the second type of Apollonian illusion. I refer to this type as "pure illusion" to indicate that, unlike anthropomorphic truth, it is not part of the relatively fixed aspects of the outside world human beings have access to via their senses, but is added by them after the fact. One of the tasks that Nietzsche sets for himself and for others is to distinguish between anthropomorphic truth and pure illusion – between what is unalterable and what is alterable.[60] In this regard, Nietzsche argues that pure illusions include value labels (good, bad, right, wrong, just, unjust, etc.) and the many gods, myths, moral codes, and other forms of meaning that human beings have created and injected into the empirical world. For example, our

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[60] See (UM IV 3): To me...the most vital of questions for philosophy appears to be to what extent the character of the world is unalterable: so as, once this question has been answered, to set about *improving that part of it recognized as alterable* with the most

understanding of gravity is a simplification of an aspect of becoming that is external to us and our desires. Justice, on the other hand, is not based on a relationship with something that is "out there," but is an invention that springs from the human mind. Hence, gravity is an anthropomorphic truth whereas justice is a pure illusion.

Once we become aware that all values are created, we must decide to either stand behind them on our own grounds (i.e., to love what we create) or live a meaningless existence. We used to value Truth, but we learn that Truth is not what we thought it was. This presents us with a critical question: is the only reason we value something because we think it is true (i.e., commanded by a higher power or rooted in some sort of eternal text of existence)? Are we, in turn, able to stand behind what we believe in on our own grounds? This is the challenge inherent in Nietzsche's epistemology. We need, Nietzsche argues, to find inspiration in the truth of becoming, and like the pre-Socratic Greeks, love the illusions we create:

> Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial – out of profundity. (GS P 4).[61]

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ruthless courage. True philosophers themselves teach this lesson, through the fact that they have worked to improve the very much alterable judgments of mankind....

[61] See WP 853: Art as the redemption of the man of knowledge – of those who see the terrifying and questionable character of existence, who want to see it, the men of tragic knowledge.

CHAPTER TWO: REDEMPTION THROUGH ILLUSION

Chorus: You suffered —
Oedpius: Yes, unspeakably.
Chorus: You sinned —
Oedipus: No, I did not sin!

Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*

Let's reinvent the gods, all the myths of the ages
Celebrate symbols from deep elder forests

Jim Morrison, "An American Prayer"

[The] antithesis of the Dionysian and the Apollinian[62] within the Greek soul is one of the great riddles to which I felt myself drawn when considering the nature of the Greeks. Fundamentally I was concerned with nothing except to guess why precisely Greek Apollinianism had to grow out of a Dionysian subsoil.... (WP 1050)

The cultural ramifications of the truth about Truth and the concomitant need for an Apollonian veil of illusion to be placed over the chaos and meaninglessness of Dionysian becoming are discussed at length in Nietzsche's maiden work *The Birth of Tragedy*. As a result, it is fruitful to examine why Nietzsche believes pre-Socratic Greek culture exemplifies a "healthy" response to the truth about Truth.[63] Nietzsche's explanation in *The Birth of Tragedy* of the origin of Attic tragedy[64] and its demise in the wake of Socratic philosophy also sheds light on his rejection of "the *moral* interpretation and significance of existence" in favour of a "purely aesthetic interpretation and justification of the world" (ASC 5). What Nietzsche admires most about the pre-Socratic Greeks is

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[62] Kaufmann chooses to translate *Apollinisch* as Apollinian rather than Apollonian. I have chosen to use Apollonian on the grounds that it is less confusing.

[63] See, for example, BT *passim;* UM II 10, WP 1050-51.

[64] E.g., the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles.

their ability to use art[65] to justify and improve life in the *actual world* rather than put their faith in a *true world*. Nietzsche, in other words, compares the illusions of the pre-Socratic Greeks and the illusions created by metaphysicians (which includes Christianity), and decides that the art of the pre-Socratic Greeks is better. All works of art are not, therefore, equal in Nietzsche's eyes and this explains why the illusion of a true world and the cultures to which it gives rise are not, according to Nietzsche, "just as good" as the illusions and culture of the pre-Socratic Greeks.

The examination of Greek culture in *The Birth of Tragedy* is an interpretative touchstone of Nietzsche's views on human greatness and the characteristics he feels a culture needs in order to approach the level of vitality and nobility exhibited by the Greeks before they were seduced by Socrates. This is not to suggest that Nietzsche advocates a dogmatic recreation of pre-Socratic Greek society in the present; it is meant, rather, to point out that his claims regarding the essence of early Hellenism form the basis of his vision of a healthy culture in any age.

The Ancient Greeks and Truth

> What is amazing about the religiosity of the ancient Greeks is the enormous abundance of gratitude that it exudes: it is a very noble type of man that confronts nature and life in *this* way.
> Later, when the rabble gained the upper hand in Greece, *fear* became rampant in religion, too — and the ground was prepared for Christianity. (BGE 49)

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[65] For Nietzsche, art includes everything from a painting to cultural institutions.

Nietzsche's veneration of the culture of the pre-Socratic Greeks – "a world to touch whose very hem would give us the greatest happiness" (BT 13) – is inextricably related to his conception of truth. Nietzsche argues in *The Birth of Tragedy* that what is usually understood to be reality is, in fact, "mere appearance" *(Schein)*. "[T]he reality in which we live and have our being" (BT 1) exists in the same relation to the true reality of becoming as a dream exists in relation to life in the waking world. Despite the similarity of this view to the Socratic argument that we live in a world of shadows that only approximates the Ideas of the realm of truth, Nietzsche's formulation represents a dramatic departure from the theory of truth posited by Socrates. Unlike Socrates, Nietzsche does not believe in a realm of independently existing Ideas and argues that what lies beyond the veil of Apollonian illusion – despite its "exuberant fertility" (BT 17) – is a realm of chaos and "eternal contradiction" (BT 4). Ultimate truth is not, as Socrates would have it, the Good, but rather, a frenzied, uncontrolled life force that is at once uncaring and "amoral" (ACS 5). The "innermost heart of things" (BT 16) is not a guiding principle or omnipotent god, but a "ceaseless flux" (BT 17) devoid of meaning. The heart of nature is a place of suffering, excess, and self-oblivion (BT 4).[66] It lacks the beauty, moderation, and form of the Apollonian realm. This lack of meaning, however, inspires man the artist to create illusions and, by so doing, *inject* meaning into his world. The Dionysian realm of becoming and the Apollonian realm of *Schein* are, in fact, interdependent:

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[66] I refer to this type of truth in this chapter as primal truth, Dionysian truth, or the Dionysian realm.

> With his sublime gestures, [Apollo] shows us how necessary is the entire world of suffering [becoming], that by means of it the individual may be impelled to realize the redeeming vision, and then, sunk in contemplation of it, sit quietly amid his tossing bark amid the waves. (BT 4)[67]

In keeping with this, Nietzsche does *not* advocate a transcendence of life in this world in order to become one with the "primal unity" (BT 5). Truth is not the ultimate goal. "Strong" individuals and cultures are able to incorporate knowledge of Dionysian truth into their art whereas "weak" individuals and cultures fear Dionysian truth and flee from it by creating an ideal world that denies the Dionysian underpinnings of reality.[68]

Nietzsche suggests in *The Birth of Tragedy* that nature "seeks" redemption through illusion:[69]

> For the more clearly I perceive in nature those omnipotent art impulses, and in them an ardent longing for illusion, for redemption through illusion, the more I feel myself impelled to the metaphysical assumption that the truly existent primal unity, eternally suffering and contradictory, also needs the rapturous vision, the pleasurable illusion, for its continuous redemption. (BT 4)

In his later works, Nietzsche abandons the "reckless and amoral artist-god" and "artists' metaphysics" (ASC 5) of *The Birth of Tragedy,* but retains the basic tenets of his original argument; namely, that primal reality is becoming, that there is no normative truth, that human beings need illusions, and that "life itself

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[67] See EH IV 1.

[68] See, for example, BGE 59; EH IV.

[69] Nietzsche notes in "Attempt at a Self-Criticism" that he regrets the metaphysical overtones of this argument. Despite this regret, he defends the validity of his arguments in *The Birth of Tragedy* regarding the Apollonian and Dionysian art impulses and the degenerative influence of Socrates. See ASC 5: ...you can call this whole artists' metaphysics arbitrary, idle, fantastic; what matters is that it betrays a spirit who will one day fight at any risk whatever the *moral* interpretation of existence. Here [in *The Birth of*

is based on semblance, art, deception, points of view, and the necessity of perspectives and error" (ASC 5). It follows that value systems that unduly restrict this role are hostile to "life." Although the pre-Socratic Greeks were not consciously aware of this, they understood it on a symbolic level (see BT 17) and this allowed them to create life-affirming art:

> Existence under the bright sunshine of such gods is regarded as desirable in itself, and the real pain of Homeric men is caused by parting from it, especially an early parting: so that now, reversing the wisdom of Silenus,[70] we might say of the Greeks that "to die soon is worst of all for them, the next worst – to die at all." (BT 3)

Nietzsche calls for a temporary and fleeting glance into the "dark abyss" (BT 17) of primal (Dionysian) truth in order to partake of its ecstatic energy and, more importantly, to reaffirm the victory of beauty over truth. It is the ability of the pre-Socratic Greeks to walk this tight-rope between illusion and the harshness of reality that impressed Nietzsche and does much to explain his admiration of their society and art.

The need to conquer primal truth constitutes a second point of difference between the Nietzschean and the Socratic conception of ultimate reality. Whereas Socrates wants to explode the world of myth and illusion in order to facilitate penetration into the (normative) truth that he is certain lies behind them, Nietzsche goes to great lengths to celebrate and stress the importance of the world of dreams:

Tragedy], perhaps for the first time, a pessimism "beyond good and evil" is suggested. See also EH IV.

[70] The wisdom of Silenus is that it is best not to be born, and if already born, to die soon. This is a symbolic representation of the meaningless of becoming, of a world in which people suffer for no reason, of a world without Truth, and of a world that is ugly and unredeemed without the meaning and beauty supplied by Apollonian illusions.

> Though it is certain that of the two halves of our existence, the waking and the dreaming states, the former appeals to us as infinitely preferable, more important, excellent, and worthy of being lived, indeed, as that which alone is lived – yet in relation to that mysterious ground of our being of which we are the phenomena, I should, paradoxical as it may seem, maintain the very opposite estimate of the value of dreams. (BT 4)

Because Nietzsche does not see the realm of truth as the destination of human existence, he stresses the "joyous necessity of the dream experience" (BT 1) and the need to create a bulwark against the "hidden substratum of suffering" (BT 4).[71] Socrates, on the other hand – because he assumes that truth is not only good, but *the Good* – lobbies for the fullest possible apprehension of (normative) truth at the expense of what he sees as the detrimental influence of illusion. According to Nietzsche, (primal) truth has to be *overcome* by art and does not, therefore, campaign in favour of a permanent reunification with the primal unity. *Awareness* of primal truth is, however, useful: (1) it teaches us that art is valuable (and, in turn, that the discovery that there is no Truth need not engender the despair and meaninglessness of nihilism); (2) it inspires us to create great works of art; (3) it reveals that we are free to be creative and choose our own values; and (4) it highlights the futility and wastefulness of faith in a true world. The primal truth of becoming must be embraced *and* overcome. The need to overcome truth reverses the Socratic position and, by so doing, sets the stage for the conflict between the two philosophers.

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[71] Cf. WP 853: ...there is only *one* world, and this is false, cruel, contradictory, seductive, without meaning— A world thus constituted is the real world. *We have need of lies* in order to conquer this reality, this "truth," that is, in order to *live*— That lies are necessary in order to live is itself part of the terrifying and questionable character of existence. See also WP 1050.

In order to understand why Nietzsche is so enthralled by the ancient Greeks, it is necessary to discuss their ability to transform the raw power of primal truth into the life-giving array of art that is associated with them. In this regard, Nietzsche is convinced that "the continuous development of art is bound up with the *Apollinian* and *Dionysian* duality – just as procreation depends on the duality of the sexes, involving only periodic and intervening reconciliations" (BT 1). It is Apollo, as the divine representative of "the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy" and the "principle of individuation" (BT 1), that creates order out of chaos and, by so doing, "[makes] life possible and worth living" (BT 1). As Kaufmann notes, "Apollo represents the aspect of the classical Greek genius extolled by Winckelmann and Goethe: the power to create harmonious and measured beauty; the struggle to shape one's own character no less than works of art...."[72] It is this will to beauty and its roots in the Dionysian flux of becoming that forms the heart of Nietzsche's admiration of Greek culture. The Greeks employed the Apollonian faculty to tame the wild storm of becoming and to carve the cold marble of empirical reality into an enchanting veil of illusion.[73] In this way, the ancient Greeks used the pain of existence as a catalyst of artistic achievement. Modern culture, by contrast, does not invoke Apollo and does not

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[72] Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist,* Fourth Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 128.

[73] See OTL 2: ...because of the way that myth takes it for granted that miracles are always happening, the waking life of a mythically inspired people – the ancient Greeks, for instance – more closely resembles a dream than it does the waking world of a scientifically disenchanted thinker. When every tree can suddenly speak as a nymph, when a god in the shape of a bull can drag away maidens... – and this is what the honest Athenian believed – then, as in a dream, anything is possible at each moment, and all of nature swarms around man as if it were nothing but a masquerade of the gods.... Cf. BT 3. Modern man cannot return to this innocent stage – he is jaded by the search for Truth and science – but he can learn from the ancient Greeks that he is not constrained by Truth.

recognize the need to channel the "drunken frenzy"[74] of the Dionysian into art. Instead, modern culture invokes Socrates and the need to discover Truth. As a result, modern culture tends to generate an overly rational, overly narrow (i.e., moral), and unnecessarily ascetic barrier between itself and the horror of existence.

What then is so admirable about the illusions of ancient Greece? In response to this question, Nietzsche argues that the answer lies in the production by the Greeks of the "illustrious company of the Olympian beings" (BT 13) that forms the basis of their myths and art. The Greeks were able to "interpose between [themselves] and life [i.e., becoming] the radiant dream-birth of the Olympians" (BT 3). By so doing, the Greeks were able to overcome the "overwhelming dismay in the face of the titanic powers of nature" (BT 3) that threatens to render man an impotent nihilist. Nietzsche's veneration of the pre-Socratic Greeks and their response to primal truth is, however, based on more than their successful transfiguration of Dionysian truth and includes his admiration for the content of the illusions they created. He lauds the fact that nothing in the illusions created by the pre-Socratic Greeks "suggests asceticism, spirituality, or duty. We hear nothing but the accents of an exuberant, triumphant life in which all things are deified" (BT 3). It is "this fantastic excess of life" (BT 3) that so impresses Nietzsche. He argues further that "the [Greek] gods justify the life of man: they themselves live it – the only satisfactory theodicy!" (BT 3). It is this idea of the only satisfactory theodicy that is the driving force behind Nietzsche's love-affair with pre-Socratic Greek

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[74] Kaufmann, *ibid.*, 128.

culture. It is the worldliness of the Greek religion and outlook that makes their response to Dionysian truth especially alluring to a philosopher that argues there is no true world and, in turn, that life must be lived in this world.

Another aspect of Nietzsche's explanation of why pre-Socratic Greek culture should be viewed as the "most beautiful, most envied type of humanity to date, [that] most apt to seduce us to life" (ASC 1) is a function of his understanding of the Dionysian art tendency and its role in the formation of the Hellenic veil. He argues that the "interdependence" (BT 4) that existed between the illusions created by the Greeks and the chaos of existence revealed by Dionysus forms a key ingredient needed to make the world of the Olympians so fantastically "forceful and pleasurable" (BT 3). In order for Greek art to reach the plateau Nietzsche claims that it did, the ancient Greeks had to accept the terror of existence. It was the "terrific need" (BT 3) to repudiate Silenus's statement in *Oedipus at Colonus* that what is "'best and most desirable of all things for man... is utterly beyond [his] reach: not to be born, not to *be*, to be nothing'" (BT 3) that was the source of the potency of the Greek response. The Greek world of the Olympian gods is, therefore, related to the wisdom of Silenus "[e]ven as the rapturous vision of the tortured martyr to his suffering" (BT 3). As Kaufmann suggests, "the Dionysian represents that negative and yet necessary dialectic element without which the creation of aesthetic values would be...an impossibility."[75] The ancient Greeks created a delusion to save themselves from despair, and yet, they were not deluded into a complete denial of the truth.

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[75] Kaufmann, *ibid.*, 129.

Their response to nature allowed them to "[reverse] the wisdom of Silenus" (BT 3) and embrace life. The victory of Apollo over Dionysus manifest in, for example, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* "is by no means a simple condition that comes into being naturally and as if inevitably" (BT 3). The struggle is, claims Nietzsche, reflected in the fact that the Apollonian "must first overthrow an empire of Titans and slay monsters" (BT 3) before it can claim its victory over nature. The Homeric Greeks, however, did not understand the intimate connection between the titanic forces of nature and the beautiful world of their gods as fully as they would once the worship of Dionysus came out into the open with the rise of festivals in his honour. The worship of Dionysus signals a new period of Greek art marked by a deeper understanding of the relationship between the artistic forces represented by Apollo and Dionysus.

Tragic Knowledge

> ...the Dionysian Greek needed to become Apollinian; that is, to break his will to the terrible, multifarious, uncertain, frightful, upon a will to measure, to simplicity, to submission to rule and concept. (WP 1050)

> Art as the redemption of the man of knowledge – of those who see the terrifying and questionable character of existence, who want to see it, the men of tragic knowledge. (WP 853)

Nietzsche is clearly in favour of the deeper awareness of truth he believes to be inherent in the post-Homeric art of Attic tragedy, but only in so far as the "two drives...unfold their powers in a strict proportion" (BT 25). Both gods are necessary gods. Dionysian revelations must be counterbalanced by the protective veil of Apollonian illusion. Nietzsche refers to this knowledge as tragic knowledge. The greater the amount of Dionysian insight a culture

exhibits – so long as it does not exceed the ability of the Apollonian to incorporate it into the realm of art – the better the culture will be for it is the interplay between the two forces that is the source of great (and this-worldly) art. Nietzsche, in turn, argues that the symbolic references to the groundlessness of existence in Attic tragedy are better than the "naive" (BT 3) art of the Homeric age.

Nietzsche distinguishes between the Homeric world that developed "under the sway of the Apollonian impulse to beauty" (BT 4) and the period of Greek history and culture that immediately followed it. This later period is the age of Attic tragedy and was the product of an "influx of the Dionysian" (BT 4). Attic tragedy was not, however, the only response to this invasion of the Dionysian in that "wherever the first Dionysian onslaught was successfully withstood, the authority and majesty of the Delphic god exhibited itself as more rigid and menacing than ever" (BT 4). An example of this type of reaction is the Doric or Spartan state. In order to prevent being overwhelmed by the Dionysian impulse, the Spartans incorporated into their culture a military element that could, through training and cruelty, successfully resist the tempting power and frenzy of Dionysian truth. Nietzsche's open disdain for this type of reaction, while much less than his disdain for modern Socratic culture, combined with his reference to Attic tragedy as the "climax" (BT 4) of the Apollonian-Dionysian dialectic, make it clear that the tragic phase of Greek history is the most deserving of praise and imitation. Doric art, on the other hand, because it rejected Dionysus, deprived itself of the god's blessings.

It is important to point out that Nietzsche sees an "immense gap" (BT 2) between the Dionysian Greek and the Dionysian barbarian. He considers the

barbaric version to be licentious, lustful, and related to the Greek form in the same way that the satyr is related to Dionysus (BT 2). The Dionysian is not a perverted "witches' brew" (BT 2), but instead, "the annihilation of the veil of *māyā* [illusions]" (BT 2):[76]

> Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man. ...Now the slave is a free man; now all the rigid, hostile barriers that necessity, caprice, or "impudent convention" have fixed between man and man are broken... as if the veil of *māyā* had been torn aside and were now merely fluttering in tatters before the mysterious primordial unity. (BT 1)

The Dionysian tendency reveals the eternal essence of the universe from which the Apollonian impulse draws its energy. Dionysus allows his devotees to look into "the essence of things" (BT 7) and, thereby, learn the secrets of nature. The primal unity, however, is not – despite its positive aspects – paradise, but a terrifying and contradictory maelstrom of raw power that needs the form-giving influence of Apollo to harness its energy. Man requires the Apollonian world of illusion to intercede on his behalf and transform the Dionysian into a life-giving, as opposed to life-destroying, force. To know truth is to know that the universe is heartless. This knowledge, in turn, requires illusion to temper it or else it will lead to "nausea" with life:

> In this sense the Dionysian man resembles Hamlet: both have once looked truly into the essence of things, they have *gained knowledge,* and nausea inhibits action, for their action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things; they feel it ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a

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[76] Kaufmann notes that *māyā* is a Sanskrit word usually translated as illusions (BT 1, note 6).

world that is out of joint. Knowledge kills action; action requires the veils of illusion.... (BT 7)

Dionysus, as the myths that recount his exploits suggest, arrived late on the Greek stage and shocked the Apollonian Greek with his intoxication and debauchery. Their astonishment became "all the greater the more it was mingled with the shuddering suspicion that [the Dionysian rites were] actually not so very alien to [them] after all" (BT 3). Once the Dionysian impulse had "burst forth from the deepest roots of the Hellenic nature" (BT 2), the result was the fusion of Apollonian culture and Dionysian insight in the art of Attic tragedy. Part of Nietzsche's admiration for the pre-Socratic Greeks arises out of "how firmly and fearlessly" they partook of the Dionysian as opposed to "how timorously and mawkishly modern man" (BT 8) does so. The pre-Socratic Greeks embraced the Dionysian (though not the Spartans) and, in this way, channeled the power of nature into their culture "just as roses burst from thorny bushes" (BT 3).

Attic tragedy is worthy of esteem because it is conscious – at least symbolically – of primal truth and, at the same time, is an artistic triumph over the nausea that is primal truth's progeny. By creating tragedies, the pre-Socratic Greeks successfully affirmed life in the face of its unfairness and lack of meaning outside the protective embrace of illusion. Whereas the Homeric Greeks had only a slight awareness of the Dionysian foundations of their culture, the tragic Greeks – through the symbolic experiences of the tragic hero – understood the horrors of truth, and yet, were able to "justify the existence of even the worst world" (BT 25). Art as the "saving sorceress, expert at healing" (BT 7) was the means by which the pre-Socratic Greeks were able to

simultaneously accept truth and escape the nihilism to which it threatens to give rise. This "more profound view of the world" (BT 10) allowed the pre-Socratic Greeks to experience the oneness and power of truth and, because of its Apollonian grounding in art, prevent themselves from experiencing "orgiastic self-annihilation" (BT 21). The Dionysian shatters the Apollonian individual and grants him access to primal truth. The individual then needs "the healing balm of blissful illusion" (BT 21) to put him back together so that he can continue his existence. Nietzsche values the affirmation of life over the surrender to primal truth and absorption into the eternal oneness. He also values the life that is aware of both truth and its remedy in illusion over the life that recognizes illusion alone or which has only a tentative grasp on what lurks beneath the world of *Schein*.

Nietzsche argues that suffering caused by knowledge of primal truth is necessary for "by means of it the individual may be impelled to realize the redeeming vision, and then, sunk in contemplation of it, sit quietly in his tossing bark, amid the waves" (BT 4). The imagery used by Nietzsche here is apt. The terror of truth (the endless sea) is overcome by the Apollonian illusion (the tossing bark). In this way, the individual, rather than finding himself lost in the middle of the ocean of existence with no shore to swim to, is able to avoid drowning and live out his life. In addition, because one must have knowledge of the sea to build a craft that will sail upon it successfully, Nietzsche concludes that the Greeks must have suffered much to have "become so beautiful" (BT 25). It was their awareness of the truth of becoming that explains the beauty and power of their illusions. Only art that taps into the artistic wellspring of primal truth and manages to wield it for its own life-giving purposes will achieve

the cultural excellence Nietzsche attributes to the pre-Socratic Greeks. Art that denies primal truth is, according to Nietzsche, not only second-best, but degenerate as well. The richness and plentitude of pre-Socratic Greek art is evidence that the Greeks felt the horror of existence so deeply so as to require a fantastic artistic response. Their greatness lies not so much in understanding primal truth as in their capacity to react to it positively rather than deny it or allow it to defeat their will to live.

The story of Oedipus is an example of Attic tragedy's ability to at once comprehend, and overcome, primal truth – all at a symbolic level. Oedipus unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother. By so doing, Oedipus – accidentally or not – commits acts in excess of what Apollo allows. In order to prevent the unraveling of the world of illusion, Apollo demands that his disciples adhere to the dictums "know thyself" and "nothing in excess." Oedipus fails in both respects: he does not know who his real father and mother are and, consequently, does not know himself; and by killing his father and marrying his mother, he accidentally crosses the boundaries that keep the chaos of the Dionysian realm at bay. Because of this, Oedipus becomes a source of pollution and brings a plague upon Thebes. This suggests that Dionysian insight is dangerous and stresses the importance of the restraint associated with the Apollonian art impluse. Oedipus discovers who he is and Thebes is saved by his expulsion from the city. It is important to note that Oedipus suffers not only because of the unfortunate things that happen to him, but also because he knows he *did not sin* and, in turn, that the world is a cruel place. Oedipus's suffering reveals to the audience, albeit figuratively, the groundlessness of existence and the extra-moral nature of suffering (i.e., the truth about Truth).

How then does tragedy affirm life? The answer is threefold: First, the tragedy is itself a work of art and, according to Nietzsche, a means of responding to tragic events by creating order and art out of them. Second, the value of the world of Apollonian illusion is reaffirmed by the fact that the plague ends once Oedipus is punished for his excessive behaviour. Third, the veil of illusion is further enhanced by the fact that the land where Oedipus is buried enjoys magical benefits. It is this fusion of illusion and truth that makes the tragic period of pre-Socratic Greek culture the object of Nietzsche's most intense admiration. This reveals the fact that Nietzsche respects pre-Socratic Greek culture not only on an aesthetic level, but also because of how it responds to truth.

Nietzsche *Contra* Socrates

> Socrates is recognized [in *The Birth of Tragedy*] as an instrument of Greek disintegration, as a typical decadent. "Rationality" *against* instinct. "Rationality" at any price as a dangerous force that undermines life. (EH IV 1)

Another means by which to discover the reasons for Nietzsche's admiration of pre-Socratic Greek culture and its relationship to his theory of truth is to examine its demise. According to Nietzsche, the murder of Attic tragedy was the work of none other than the wily Socrates. I disagree with Kaufmann who claims in his introduction to *The Birth of Tragedy* that "Nietzsche is no more against (or for) Socrates than he is against (or for) Apollo or Dionysus."[77]

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[77] Walter Kaufmann, "Translator's Introduction" in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner,* translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 11.

Nietzsche – despite his respect for Socrates's "tremendous intellect" (BT 14) – is

clearly against Socrates and his "demonic" (BT 12) influence:

> Wherever Socratism turns its searching eyes it sees lack of insight
> and the power of illusion; and from this lack it infers the essential
> perversity and reprehensibility of what exists. Basing himself on
> this point, Socrates conceives it to be his duty to correct existence:
> all alone, with an expression of irreverence and superiority, the
> precursor of an altogether different culture, art, and morality, he
> enters a world, to touch whose very hem would give us the
> greatest happiness. (BT 13)

The pre-Socratic Greeks did not apply the rationalistic method advocated by

Socrates and were thus able to preserve the integrity of the Apollonian illusion.

Moreover, Greek culture prior to Socrates understood – albeit at only a

subconscious and symbolic level – that that there is no Truth – no Good. This

is represented by the fact that Oedipus suffers even though he did not sin. In

this way, Greek tragedy reveals the heartlessness of nature. The order and

meaning provided by the gods is juxtaposed with the tragic knowledge that

there is no Truth and that Apollonian meaning is an illusion. Socrates denies

this tragic knowledge and, instead, conjures up an optimistic view of the

universe which requires its adherents to forsake illusion in favour of an endless

quest for the Good.

This reversal of the pre-Socratic pattern and the insatiable search for

Truth it engenders eventually lead to the discovery that truth is not the Good but

the chaos of becoming. Because illusion has been devalued, the discovery that

Truth is an illusion leads to nihilism and despair. Tragic insight is achieved, but

the redeeming vision is not. The end result of Socratism is described in T.S.

Eliot's *The Waste Land:*

> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,

> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
> And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
> There is shadow under this red rock,
> (Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
> And I will show you something different from either
> Your shadow at morning striding behind you
> Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
> I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

Modern man sees "fear in a handful of dust" because he has lost touch with the illusions that transform reality into a meaningful world. Eliot's lament is especially poignant in that he is aware that God once lived, that illusions once gave life, but that now they are nothing but "a heap of broken images." Eliot despairs in *The Waste Land* because he *needs* Truth and is unable to overcome his fears without it. Socratism, however, is a *felix culpa* because it leads to the *conscious* awareness of Dionysian truth and, by so doing, suggests the possibility of the Overman.

The Overman is, like Attic tragedy, able to fuse the Dionysian and Apollonian – to give both gods their due – and create new illusions that he knows are illusions. Since Dionysian truth is the catalyst of art, the Overman's acceptance of it grants him the power to create to a previously unimaginable degree. It is ironic that it is the final legacy of Socrates – the discovery of the truth about Truth and "the radical repudiation of the very concept of *being*" (EH IV 3) – that paves the way for Nietzsche's vision of the Overman.

I agree with Nietzsche that pre-Socratic Greek culture is worthy of our veneration in that it was particularly vital and life-affirming. As Bernard Malamud puts it in *The Natural*, "'[w]ithout heroes we're all plain people and

don't know how far we can go'."[78] The contemporary desire to recreate an age and an outlook free from the oppressive sovereignty of empirical knowledge is evident in, for example, Jim Morrison's call in "An American Prayer" "to reinvent the gods." Modern science – despite its uses and even its wonders – is not a plentiful source of aesthetic or life-giving insight and, therefore, testifies in favour of the need for a more profound response to life. Undoubtedly, Nietzsche would say that pre-Socratic Greek culture is superior to modern culture on aesthetic grounds. More important, however, are the reasons why he believes Greek culture was able to achieve what it did and, by implication, why modern culture is unable to live up to the standards set by ancient Greece. It is the roots of the Greek response that are key to understanding why Nietzsche holds it in such high regard. Pre-Socratic Greek culture was not the product of chance, but rather, the outcome of an apprehension of, and reaction to, Dionysian truth. The greatness of Greek culture was, in other words, a function of its ability to heal the wound of existence. It is key that the Greeks did not attempt to ignore or deny the wound as they would do after the onslaught of Socratism for it was the ability of the pre-Socratic Greeks to meet the challenge head-on that made their response so powerful.

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[78] Bernard Malamud, *The Natural* (New York: Avon Books, 1952), 140.

CHAPTER THREE: BEYOND GOOD AND BAD?
NIETZSCHE AND FOUCAULT ON TRUTH AND POWER

...eventually the surroundings grew unrecognizable and I knew I had gone beyond all previous boundaries. I have heard people describe the moment, when setting sail in a ship, when one finally loses sight of the land. I imagine the experience of unease mixed with exhilaration often described in connection with this moment is very similar to what I felt in the Ford as the surroundings grew strange around me.

Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*

The argument of this chapter takes as its starting point a single sentence from a preface Michel Foucault wrote for *L'Anti-Oedipe* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: "Do not become enamored of power." What I hope to demonstrate is that this sentence provides us with a clear and concise summary of the ethic that Foucault endorses. The importance of examining Foucault's "ethical sensibility"[79] to the argument of this thesis arises out of the fact that it presents an *alternative* response to the political problems created by Friedrich Nietzsche's influential critique of the quest for Truth.

As Nietzsche's veneration of pre-Socratic Greek culture illustrates, he does not think that all choices are of equal value; Truth or no Truth, he is more than willing to make all sorts of value judgements and to stand by them. He argues that we should be honest about our judgements and make it clear that they are choices rather than Truths. He is equally adamant that this does not mean that we should shy away from acting on our decisions and create a culture based on the "noble" values of the Overman.

A very different response to the truth about Truth can be gleaned from the thought of Michel Foucault. Foucault accepts Nietzsche's epistemology, but

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[79] William E. Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault" in *Political Theory* 21.3, August 1993.

rejects his claim that Truth needs to be replaced by a new table of values. Foucault does not want the void left by the death of Truth to be filled by the value choices of the Overman; he recommends, instead, that we seek a state of constant flux and resist the temptation to allow our value judgements to solidify into fixed regimes of power. In this way, Foucault provides a useful foil to Nietzsche and helps illustrate some of the implications of Nietzsche's epistemological arguments glossed over by Nietzsche's veneration of Greek culture and his longing for the Overman.

The issue is the degree to which we are able, given the lack of normative truth proclaimed by Nietzsche and wholeheartedly embraced by Foucault, to place meaningful limits on the use of power over others. Nietzsche and Foucault arrive at this problem by way of the same epistemological arguments, but – at the crucial juncture – make very different choices regarding the proper role of power in a world without Truth.[80]

The topographical analysis of the points at which Foucault follows Nietzsche and, conversely, departs from him that I present in this chapter is not meant to function as critique (though this may be a by-product of the exercise). What is intended is a deeper understanding of two related but distinct philosophical positions. Therefore, while it may be true that "[t]he only valid tribute to thought such as Nietzsche's is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest" (PK 53-54), I argue, contrary to Foucault's claim that "if commentators...say that I am being faithful or unfaithful to Nietzsche, that is of absolutely no interest" (PK 54), that the ways in which Foucault departs from Nietzsche enable us to better understand *both* thinkers.

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[80] The proper role of power in a world with Truth is to use it to reveal and embrace Truth.

The Zero-Degree of the Sign

> Your will and your valuations you have placed on the river of becoming; and what the people believe to be good and evil, that betrays to me an ancient will to power. (Z II 12)

The type of truth that Nietzsche and Foucault wholeheartedly reject is normative truth.[81] Foucault borrows Nietzsche's definition of Truth as a veil of illusion inserted by man between himself and the chaos of becoming. He agrees, moreover, that the career Truth has followed has been a "hazardous" one; Western philosophy is — at least in part — responsible for setting civilization on an unfortunate course. Foucault, in turn, follows Nietzsche's lead and seeks to uncover the ways in which Truth and power have worked in tandem to install a series of discourses and regimes of domination that have unduly restricted the expression of human freedom and creativity. What has been passed off as, or mistaken for, normative truth is not, according to both thinkers, part of the world of Being, but instead, a mere mortal and therefore perishable resident of the world of becoming:

> Why does Nietzsche challenge the pursuit of the origin...? First, because it is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities; because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the world of accident and succession. The search is directed to "that which was already there," the image of a primordial truth fully adequate to its nature, and it necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity.

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[81]Foucault is, however, careful to note that even a deflated form of rudimentary truth can be incorporated into a normative discourse (e.g., definitions of madness into the institutional field of mental illness). In this way, seemingly benign truths can be and are used for questionable purposes. See Michel Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984" in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 12, Spring 1987, 128.

> However, if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is "something altogether different" behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms. (NGH 78)

Normative truth is, for both thinkers, a *product* of the human imagination and will.

It follows that human behaviour is – normatively speaking – empty of value; it is an empty sign that is *given* value by human beings. A useful analogy can be gleaned from the work of Roland Barthes. Barthes argues that signs begin at degree zero (i.e., empty of significance) and have meaning *imposed* upon them. We choose to read the sign in a certain way but this reading has nothing to do with what the symbol ultimately means because all its meaning is the result of previous readings. In this way, signs often acquire many layers of meaning. The important point is that the meaning is imposed upon the sign rather than derived from it.[82] In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, for example, the heroine is made to wear a scarlet letter "A" as a punishment for adultery. The meaning of the letter, however, is not fixed; different people attach different significations to the same symbol. The scarlet letter is a magnet of meaning that means nothing in itself; it is an object to which the community can *bring* meaning.

Our moral and political actions are, like the scarlet letter, signs that point at what we want them to point at. John Calvin argues that virtue is a sign of Grace. Socrates argues that Cephalus is wrong: to tell the truth and pay one's debts are not signs of Justice. These arguments are, according to Nietzsche

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[82]Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology.* Translated by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970).

and Foucault, bogus, for the signs (Grace and Justice) are added to behaviour after the fact:

> The 'in itself'.—Formerly we asked: what is the laughable? as though there were things external to us to which the laughable adhered as a quality, and we exhausted ourselves in suggestions (one theologian even opined that it was 'the naivety of sin'.) Now we ask: what is laughter? How does laughter originate? We have thought the matter over and finally decided that there is nothing good, nothing sublime, nothing evil in itself, but that there are states of soul in which we impose such words upon things external to and within us. We have again *taken back* the predicates of things, or at the least remembered that it was we who *lent* them to them:—let us take care that this insight does not deprive us of the *capacity* to lend, and that we have not become at the same time *richer* and *greedier*. (D 210)

Teacher and Student

One repays a teacher badly if one always remains nothing but a pupil. (Z I 22.3)

The idea that Truth is an illusion combined with the intense dissatisfaction with its role in human affairs leads Nietzsche, and Foucault after him, to adopt a genealogical methodology. Even here at this particularly close juncture in the relationship between Nietzsche the teacher and Foucault the student we can discern some of the many ways in which Foucault has taken what he believes to be useful in Nietzsche's thought, embedded it in his own philosophical infrastructure, and left the rest behind. The departure in this instance arises out of the fact that Nietzsche uses genealogical analysis to go beyond good and evil (i.e., normative truth) whereas Foucault uses the same method to go beyond not only good and evil but beyond good and bad as well.

Nietzsche makes it clear in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that "the dangerous slogan...*Beyond Good and Evil*...does *not* mean 'Beyond Good and Bad'" (GM I 17). Nietzsche is willing to make all kinds of judgments about what

he thinks is good and bad, noble and base, strong and weak, etc. Foucault, conversely, argues in favour of abandoning discourses of judgment altogether except, of course, the decision to value this course of action over others. Just as Nietzsche chooses to value certain things, Foucault also makes a decision to place a tremendous amount of value on avoiding the arbitrary use of power and/or institutionalization of discourses of judgment (regardless of whether or not they are based on normative truth or personal taste). This allows him to be highly critical of all sorts of things on the grounds that they transgress this basic ethical principle. For Foucault, anything does go *except* behaviour that causes relationships of power to congeal into relationships of oppression.[83] This type of behaviour could be anything from physically attacking another (without invitation) to defining a sexual practice as "abnormal." This caveat allows Foucault to sanction resistance to congealed power[84] without contradicting his opposition to defining courses of action as good or bad. Unlike Nietzsche, Foucault does not support the replacement of normative truth by a new man-made set of standards (e.g., the standards of the Overman), but advocates the transcendence of all standards *except* the opposition to congealed power.[85] This opposition, however, leads to a number of related ethical propositions.

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[83]It may be tempting here to draw a parallel between Foucault and John Stuart Mill. This would, however, be a mistake for Mill is firmly allied to imposing all sorts of Truths on others.

[84]It is important to note that Foucault does not reject power in general. He rejects, rather, relations of power that have become "firmly set and congealed." See Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," 114. Cf. 128-130. If games of power are "played with a minimum of domination" (129) and remain fluid, Foucault does not oppose the use of power. More often than not, however, power goes hand in hand with domination: "In many cases the relations of power are fixed in such a way that they are perpetually asymmetrical and the margin of liberty is extremely limited" (123).

[85]This brings us to a charge that is repeatedly brought against Nietzsche and Foucault: If there is no good and evil, or worse, no good and bad, how do we respond to people who,

The Purpose of Genealogy

> If I wanted to be pretentious, I would use the 'genealogy of morals' as the general title of what I am doing. (PK 53)

Foucault's writings reveal an ethic that is meant to inform the way we live our lives based on a genealogical approach to all aspects of the human condition. In fact, in order to live in accordance with the ethic Foucault advocates – an ethic that is, despite the problems it gives rise to, a genuinely heartfelt "[acknowledgment of] our impatience for liberty and our passion for ecstasy"[86] – we must engage in "a *permanent* critique of ourselves in our *autonomy*" (WIE 44, emphasis added). I have stressed the words permanent and autonomy because they reveal that, while Foucault believes we should be creative, it is the act of creation as opposed to the creation itself that should be permanent. The results of the creative process should, moreover, be autonomous and, therefore, should not go beyond a body unless invited. There is no solidity to what is formed; there is no art, only artistry. For Foucault, genealogy becomes an end in itself rather than, as it is for Nietzsche, a means of exposing the Truths that are antithetical to a way of life that will not require a constant critique of itself, but the creation of a horizon within which a "noble" existence is possible. Although both Nietzsche and Foucault reject critique based on Truth and use genealogical investigation to expose the arbitrary

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for example, think rape and murder are acceptable behaviour? The answer is that we oppose rape and murder *on our own grounds.* Both Nietzsche and Foucault are critical of those who feel they *need* an objective reason to act.

[86]James W. Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Towards an Ethics for Thought* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1990), 183.

nature of what was, and still is, held by many to be Truth, the ultimate purpose of genealogy in Foucault's vision is much more radical than it is in Nietzsche's. Nietzsche's "corrosive skepticism" is a means to an end (GM P 5) rather than the goal.

Walter Kaufmann, referring to "On the Three Metamorphoses" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, notes that what Nietzsche "celebrates is neither the camel nor the lion but the creator [the child]."[87] Nietzsche, moreover, does not want to reverse the effects of the camel and lion stages, but combine the camel's depth of soul and the lion's fierceness of spirit with the creativity of the child. Foucault, on the other hand, dislikes all three stages of the spirit and demands that we become "un-created" through a process of "constant...de-individualization."[88] Foucault suggests that we resist the temptation to become enamoured of what we create. This radical new ethic, however, finds itself in trouble when it encounters the problem of nihilism that Nietzsche tries to overcome. For Nietzsche, the death of Truth is as much a problem as it is a blessing. Art, in turn, must tap into the maelstrom of chaos in order to save us from nothingness and despair. Foucault, conversely, does not see the demise of Truth as a problem at all. In fact, freedom and ecstasy will profit from its eradication. The question we are left with is whether or not constant experimentation,

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[87]Walter Kaufmann, "Editor's Introduction" to *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 12.

[88]Michel Foucault, "Preface" in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), xiv. De-individualization presupposes that the self is a construction of power. De-individualization is the constant deconstruction of the self that is constructed by power.

rearrangement of roles, and so on are able to fill the void that is created by the departure of Truth. Unlike Nietzsche, Foucault does not offer an explanation of how man will be able to live in the face of chaos and not lapse into a state of despair.

In regard to the specific purpose of genealogy, Foucault argues that

[w]here the soul pretends unification or the self fabricates a coherent identity, the genealogist sets out to study the beginning – numberless beginnings, whose faint traces and hints of color are readily seen by the historical eye. The analysis of descent permits the dissociation of the self, its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis, in liberating a profusion of lost events. (NGH 81)

The dissociation of the self, moreover, is not done in order to construct a new and improved self. The goal is the empty synthesis. The self is the product of power and, in turn, should be deconstructed. The self is not a problem in Nietzsche for it is not his intention to overcome congealed power, but to redirect it to more noble ends. Nietzsche, in addition, does not abandon the notion of a relatively fixed human nature that varies among individuals. For Nietzsche, there is the high and the low, the masters and slaves, the eagles and the lambs, the rare and the common, and he is willing to accept differences in power among these categories.

For Foucault there is the body and only the body; there is no self other than the false self produced by power. It is the body he seeks to liberate for it is its pleasures that are attacked by congealed power-knowledge circuits. The task of genealogy "is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body" (NGH 83) in order to erase the impression, to wipe away history and the self from the body so that only a freely experimenting *tabula rasa* remains. Foucault does not want to write anything

new on this blank slate as this would be to continue the "series of subjugations...the hazardous play of dominations" (NGH 83). Foucault wants to transcend a politics that is the continuation of war by other means (HS 93), a politics of "confrontation" (NGH 84) that begins with the creation of a self and, as a consequence, of "the other" and the idea of limitation:

> The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophic life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed upon us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them. (WIE 50)

Foucault's most adamant desire is for man to escape the "the endlessly repeated play of dominations...by which humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination" (NGH 85). "The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules...and [of redirecting] them against those who had initially imposed them" (NGH 86). It is this positive, creative, intricate, clever, form of power that Foucault does not want to redirect against the reigning power matrix. You do not seize the judicial apparatus but destroy it; you do not use the care of the self to new ends; you destroy the whole idea of a self. "Given this, [genealogy] corresponds to the acuity of a glance capable of liberating divergence and marginal elements – the kind of dissociating view that is capable of decomposing itself, capable of shattering the unity of man's being" (NGH 87). This decomposition is not a means to an end but the end itself. The goal is to "[introduce] discontinuity into our very being" (NGH 88). "'Effective history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature" (NGH 88). This endorsement of the "Dionysian" that "confirms our existence...without landmark

or a point of reference" (NGH 89) is the core of Foucault's philosophy and his ethic. The illness is congealed power and the cure is a genealogical approach to life that allows nothing, not even the self, to become solid or permanent.

Foucault does not want identity; he wants to remove all masks and, by so doing, establish "our 'unrealization' through the excessive choice of identities" (NGH 94). Interestingly, Foucault includes Nietzsche's Zarathustra in his list of historical identities which suggests that he holds Nietzsche's Overman to be a mask that must be seen as part of "the buffoonery of history" (NGH 94) like any other. Apollo creates masks and is, therefore, the enemy, the very source of oppression. Foucault advocates an anti-art that is not solid, not monumental, but part of a space of unreality. Foucault quotes from *Beyond Good and Evil* 223: "Perhaps...we shall...discover the realm of our *invention,* that realm in which we, too, can still be original, say, as parodists of world history and God's buffoons..." (NGH 94). Here we see Nietzsche's call to come out from under the rock of asceticism, idealism, and create! This is precisely where Foucault abandons Nietzsche in that he wants an originality that is impermanent – in constant flux – and not a Nietzschean illusion.

The Role of Illusion

Why couldn't the world *that concerns us* – be a fiction? (BGE 34)

One means of surveying the differences between Nietzsche and Foucault is to compare the way in which their thought responds to criticism. Allan Megill, for example, argues that a similar contradiction lurks at the heart of

both perspectives that renders them "self-defeating."[89] In regard to Nietzsche, Megill argues that if it is known that "the protective illusion is one that we know to be an illusion..., Nietzsche's account appears to break down immediately; for if we know the illusion to be an illusion, then presumably its entire protective force will be lost."[90] What Megill fails to understand here is that contact with the reality of becoming need not be a negative experience in that, if it is precipitated by Dionysian ecstasy rather than an ascetic search for the Good, the end result will be an awakening of the spirit – a mystical experience of power that will impel the initiate to embrace life and create illusion: "Creation – that is the greatest redemption from suffering, and life's growing light. But that the creator may be, suffering is needed and much change" (Z II 2). It is, moreover, precisely the ability to experience the chaos of existence without being shattered that makes great art possible. A second rebuttal that can be drawn from Nietzsche's work is the idea that the Overman is able to transcend the lack of meaning in the world by at once accepting it and creating his own meaning. The Overman does not need to be in love with Truth because he is in love with his art.

Both Nietzsche and Foucault are concerned with illusion. Megill claims that

> Foucault...finds himself in exactly the same position as Nietzsche when he maintains that his historical works are fictions written with the aim of bringing about political effects in the present. If Foucault's readers know that his allegedly historical writing is

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[89] Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 42.
[90] *Ibid.*, 41.

fictional, then that writing cannot have the desired effect on their politics.[91]

Megill, however, misreads Foucault's concept of fiction. Foucault qualifies his statement that he is "well aware that [he has] never written anything but fictions" by saying that this does not mean "that truth is therefore absent" (PK 193). What Foucault is claiming, in other words, is that his works are not word-for-word transcriptions of the actual state of affairs. They are based on his perspective and, in turn, reflect his biases and choices. This chronic discomfort with the authority of his position is a manifestation of Foucauldianism at work and not, as Megill would have it, an inherent contradiction within Foucault's thought.

Now, what is of most interest to the argument of this chapter is that Nietzsche's response to Megill is diametrically opposed to the defense that can be gleaned from Foucault's position. While both Nietzsche and Foucault are preoccupied with illusion and, in this sense, Foucault can be thought of as Nietzschean, they differ markedly on what they believe to be the role and the value of illusion. For Nietzsche, illusion is absolutely essential in that "a continuous and unmediated glance into the depths of reality would be so horrifying as to precipitate a reversion from culture to barbarism."[92] The death of God, because it represents the death of an illusion that Nietzsche holds to be life-negating and, at the same time, the destruction of the protective veil of art that forms the cornerstone of Western civilization, presents Nietzsche with the problem he tries to solve. Foucault, conversely, sees the death of God as the beginning of the solution rather than a problem. He argues, in contradistinction

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[91] *Ibid.*, 42.

to Nietzsche, that the Last Man does not suffer because the veil of Truth has been torn, but because of the oppressive and stifling shroud of illusion that is spread over modern existence. In this way, Foucault turns Nietzsche on his head and claims that the problem is not a lack of illusion, but a preponderance of illusion.

The distance between the two thinkers is evinced by the fact that it is Foucault's intention to erode all illusion rather than replace a bad one with a good one. For Nietzsche, there is an intimate connection between truth/reality and art/illusion. The noble understand reality and, in addition, are struck not only by the need for art but also by the pleasure of existence, its hardness, and the untrammeled sublimity of the creative impulse and the creative enterprise. Megill is wrong when he suggests that there is a simple division in Nietzsche's thought between illusion and truth; the two are sides of the coin of life. Nietzsche does not, moreover, regard the *nature* of the Overman to be a creation of human art, but a relatively fixed aspect of man's reality.

Foucault's views on the distinction between illusion and reality are very different in that he posits a reality of absence, nothingness and freedom that stands at the core of an intensely intricate web of illusion that must not be reasserted in any way, but constantly combated in order to embrace the nothingness and twist free from all veils. It is apparent that the small philosophical space shared by Nietzsche and Foucault is dwarfed by the huge distance that separates them. "The symbol of [the] struggle [for Nietzsche], inscribed in letters legible across all human history, is 'Rome against Judea,

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[92]*Ibid.,* 41.

Judea against Rome': – there has hitherto been no greater event than *this* struggle, *this* question, *this* deadly contradiction" (GM I 16). It is Nietzsche's intention to demonstrate the need to fuse the two symbols into the spirit of the Overman with the stress being on the Roman type. Foucault, on the other hand, is against both Rome and Judea.

Nietzsche looks at man and the world and concludes that we need a horizon. He seeks those who can create a certain type of horizon. Foucault disagrees. He does not think we need a horizon at all. Foucault decides the best thing (for him and those who agree with him) is to keep the horizon as open as possible – to remain adrift. He celebrates the excluded and marginal to combat the forces of oppression. As a result, Foucault often aligned himself with marginalized perspectives for tactical purposes. He did not, however, do so to replace the old, the traditional, the normal with the new, the avant-garde, or the insane, but to see all of them become de-powered.

The Overman Versus the Nonman

> "Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman – a rope over an abyss." (Z P 4)

Nietzsche sees two paths: (1) "the will to the lowering, the abasement, the leveling and the decline and twilight of mankind"; and (2) the "synthesis of the *inhuman* and the *superhuman*." Nietzsche sees this as a debate between the supreme rights of the majority versus the supreme rights of the few (GM I 16). What is interesting here is that Foucault does not reverse Nietzsche and side with the rights of the majority or some other normative standard, but rather, attempts to transcend both sides of the debate. He argues that

> the strategic adversary is fascism.... And not only historical
> fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini – which was able to
> mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively – but also
> the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior,
> the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing
> that dominates and exploits us."[93]

Foucault wants to *transcend* congealed power rather than redirect it to a new end and, by so doing, rejects the very idea of the Overman and the values he will legislate that is so central to Nietzsche's philosophy. Foucault wants the power to destroy all instances of congealed power – the power to be free from petrified power relations. He posits the Nonman as opposed to the Overman. Foucault – perhaps inspired by the Dionysian shattering of the individual that fascinates Nietzsche – advocates the creation of a chaotic whirlwind of difference and constantly shifting power relations and an apocalyptic disintegration of all that is held to be good and evil as well as good and bad. This is another of the many paradoxes of Foucault in that he wants no boundaries and yet he demands that we stay within the bounds of not exerting power over others or even upon our selves (i.e., allowing it to congeal).

In the extremely revealing "Preface" to *L'Anti-Oedipe*, Foucault outlines some of the core elements of his philosophy and his ethic and, by so doing, clearly reveals how he has borrowed from Nietzsche the idea that Truth is created and that genealogy will reveal this premise to be valid, but has imported it into an intellectual domain that is foreign to the one Nietzsche's thought occupies. Foucault notes that "what is productive is not sedentary but

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[93]Foucault, "Preface," xiii.

nomadic"[94] and thus reveals that, unlike Nietzsche, he does not want to destroy a temple in order to erect a new and better one (see GM II 24); he wants to destroy all temples. Foucault rejects the Apollonian solidification of power not only in terms of the creation of illusion on the scale of a society, but also in terms of the creation of individuals. He argues not to

> demand of politics that it restore the "rights" of the individual, as philosophy has defined them. The individual is the product of power. What is needed is to "de-individualize" by means of multiplication and displacement, diverse combinations. The group must not be the organic bond uniting hierarchized individuals, but a constant generator of de-individualization.[95]

We see here Foucault borrowing the idea of a de-individualized Dionysian state but without the demand for "redemption through illusion" (BT 4). Nietzsche's affirmation of the need for Apollonian illusion and moderation is the polar opposite of Foucault's desire for a constant process of de-individualization. Foucault does not want the individual to become an Overman but a Nonman.

Anti-Power

> *This world is the will to power – and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power – and nothing besides. (WP 1067)

Congealed power for Foucault is like radiation in that it can kill the cancer of established power but must not be held to be a true cure for it will cause a new form of illness if it is used for ends other than the destruction of the

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[94]*Ibid.*
[95]*Ibid.,* xiv.

cancer. It is at this point that the most dramatic and the most telling difference between Nietzsche and Foucault is evident: "Nietzsche is the philosopher of power" (PK 53) whereas Foucault is the philosopher of what I will refer to as anti-power. Foucault does not see power as the answer but as the problem. His emphasis on power may be Nietzschean, but his denial of it constitutes the most anti-Nietzschean aspect of his vision.

It is important to note that congealed power in the Foucauldian cosmos is not the ability to achieve an intended result. If this were the case, the transcendence of power would not only be nonsensical, but would also preclude the acts of resistance he calls for in his ethic. Congealed power is the oppressive element in a relationship, the imposition of an ideal or standard; it is domination, subjugation, the generalization of a discourse, of an idea. *Congealed* power is everywhere (see HS 93). Foucault advocates resisting congealed power with no goal other than the chaos of possibility and constant experimentation. A new ideal, a new episode in the history of congealed power, is not the answer, but the road to the Gulag – be it an externally created one or an internally created one based on, for example, an "optimum" of care. To read Foucault as saying that resistance is congealed power is to confuse the attempt to destroy something with its creation. It is the external and internal manifestations of congealed power that Foucault directs his energies against.

It follows that Foucault is not opposed to all aspects of, for example, medicine, even though he seems to dismiss it as a source of normalization and as an instrument of "power." He is not against setting a broken arm or treating an infection; he is against a discourse propagated by the medical community that goes beyond such treatment and starts positing ideals that contribute to a

program of normalization and oppression. A problem arises when an individual is mentally ill. In those cases where the "patient" is diagnosed as "mad" simply because they are not conforming to the standards of the day, Foucault's assault upon the power of the medical and psychiatric disciplines is valid. However, what are the guidelines for action when the person is psychotic and a danger to themselves and others? Do we refrain from "helping" them in order to avoid imposing our version of reality on them? It is at these curious junctures where the application of "power" (i.e., the imposition of a version of what is right) does not seem arbitrary or harmful to the individual that Foucault's thought blinks.

According to Foucault, power is not based simply on "obedience" (HS 85). A definition of power as "poor in resources" (HS 85) – as only being able to say "no" – does not capture what power is:

> Why is [the] juridical notion of power, involving as it does the neglect of everything that makes for its productive effectiveness, its strategic resourcefulness, its positivity, so readily accepted? In a society such as ours, where the devices of power are so numerous, its rituals so visible, and its instruments ultimately so reliable, in this society that has been more imaginative, probably, than any other in creating devious and supple mechanisms of power, what explains this tendency not to recognize the latter except in the negative and emaciated form of prohibition? Why are the deployments of power reduced simply to the procedure of the law of interdiction? (HS 86)

The important element of this passage is the fact that the positivity of power is not something to be applauded, but something that must be rooted out and combated. The positivity of power is the problem, not the solution. The new methods of power are "not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control" (HS 89). In regard to sex, for example, Foucault argues that the positive (i.e., productive) expression of congealed power has transformed the system of condemnation and toleration

that operated during the classical age into a discourse on sex that speaks of it as something to be "managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum" (HS 24). The new discourse of power is not simply "the rigor of taboo" (HS 25), but the positive creation and application of a production of oppression. Hence Foucault's opposition to the positivity of power.

Positivity refers to the ability of congealed power to make itself appear objective; it is not something to be harnessed by the self to achieve a better life. According to Foucault, the individual should become a locus of experimentation that draws no conclusions from its activity about how others should live. It is, in fact, Foucault's attack on the productive aspects of power that distinguishes him most forcefully from Nietzsche's veneration of the positivity of power evident in the call to enlist the will to power in the service of noble ends (as defined by Nietzsche).

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault endeavours to go beyond "a juridical and negative representation of power [and, by so doing,] cease to conceive of it in terms of law, prohibition, liberty, and sovereignty" (HS 90). His goal is not to demonstrate the value or "positive" (i.e., good) side of power, but rather, to present a more accurate picture of the enemy. He argues

> that historical analysis has revealed the presence of a veritable "technology" of sex, one that is much more complex and above all much more positive than the mere effect of a "defense" could be; this being the case, does this example - which can only be considered a privileged one, since power seemed in this instance, more than anywhere else, to function as prohibition - not compel one to discover principles for analyzing power which do not derive from the system of right and the form of law? Hence it is a question of forming a different grid of historical decipherment by starting from a different theory of power; and, at the same time, of advancing little by little toward a different conception of power

through a closer examination of an entire historical material. (HS 90-91)

It is this more heinous and impressive form of positive power that Foucault wants to corrode. It is also this form of power that is inextricably bound-up with the idea of "caring for the self" and, in turn, explains Foucault's attempt to expose the care of the self as just another facet of the oppressive and limiting terminal points of positive power. The care of the self is subtlest form of positive power and should be attacked by a process of de-individualization.

Now, in regard to the idea that Foucault believes power is always present and, therefore inescapable, Foucault himself points out that "[t]his would be to misunderstand the strictly relational character of power relationships" (HS 95). Power, in other words, requires an "other." Perhaps the most radical interpretation I can offer here is that Foucault is not in favour of traditional forms of "resistance." His strategy becomes a strategy of resisting the positive aspects of power that allow it to mutate into a new form of oppression. Resistance based on power is not the solution but an integral part of the problem. Resistance, if retaining the word does not create too much confusion, is not for Foucault the positing of an alternative "discourse," an alternative "power structure," or an alternative "knowledge," but the explosion of all such devices, the turning of knowledge against itself, the abandonment of a discourse that presents an ideal, and the transcendence of the power and knowledge circuit and its self-perpetuating system of domination-resistance.

Foucault calls for "the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge...by the injustice proper to the will to knowledge" (NGH 95-97). He is *not* calling for a revolution that animates a new metamorphosis of the power-knowledge circuit,

but the shattering of the circuit through the rejection of congealed power and the abandonment of "knowledge." Resistance that produces a new discourse produces power, "a strengthening of some terms and the weakening of others" (HS 97). Power is not "stable"; it is "the expanding production of discourses" (HS 98) formed in the space between the domination-resistance dynamic. The care of the self is exposed by Foucault in this light as an attempt to master the body as "the vehicle of a kind of incessant back-and-forth movement of forms of subjugation and schemas of knowledge" (HS 98). Foucault is in favour of subjugated discourses, other ways of living, the ideas of the dominated, but not in order to install them in the vacuum created by the destruction of the dominant discourse/knowledge/power. In this way, Foucault, attempts to refute the charge that he admits can be brought against him: "that there is no escaping from power, that it is always already present, constituting the very thing with which one attempts to counter it." Foucault argues that he is not "[preserving] power for [his] own use," but trying to discard its solidification altogether (HS 82).

> This argument may seem to be contradicted by Foucault's claim that
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> [w]e must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can both be an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for a new strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (HS 101)

I argue, however, that Foucault's goal here is consistent with my interpretation in that he wants to use discourse to thwart power rather than as a means of establishing a "better" type of power. The "formation of a 'reverse' discourse [, for example, when] homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand

that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (HS 101) is not intended by Foucault to be an example of how the excluded or oppressed should seize power, but how they can *combat* it. To do otherwise would be to buy into the series of power dominations. It was after all Christianity's positing of an alternative discourse that eroded the power of the old Greco-Roman discourse and, by so doing, installed, with the best of intentions, an oppressive system of power-knowledge "force relationships" (HS 102). The words "power" and "knowledge" for Foucault denote ideology – be it of the "dominant or the dominated" (HS 102) – and, as a consequence, are used by him in a universally derogatory manner except when they are employed for their own destruction. True resistance, therefore, is not intended to replace one ideology with another. The "tactical efficacy" (HS 102) of power is not something to be pursued, but something to be destroyed.

Congealed power in both its positive and negative forms is the enemy, the problem, the condition that must be transcended. In order to get out of the dialectic of congealed power you do not install a new "discourse" (i.e., the articulation of standards, rules, modes of being, etc.) but engage in a permanent deconstruction of "discourse." Power may be everywhere, but it is not everything and, in turn, its congealed formations can be expelled from the world. Congealed power is not the free actions of a body in its autonomy; it is a relationship of *subjugation* – be it willing, unwilling, known or unknown. Foucault calls for us to live together and strive together in a world where "power" in this sense has been banished. "What is at stake, then, is this: How can the growth of capabilities be disconnected from the *intensification* of power relations (WIE 69).

Nietzsche, on the other hand, is quite willing to use power in the name of art and to pass judgement on the choices of others. This does not mean that Nietzsche is a fascist, but it does mean that he is much more comfortable with the solidification of power than is Foucault.

CONCLUSION: FOUR PATHS

"The horror! The horror!"

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

The sun has gone out, but I have a light

Kurt Cobain, "Dumb"

The fundamental implication of Nietzsche's epistemology is that there is no normative truth. This argument creates a spiritual and political crossroads formed by four possible paths: (1) nihilism; (2) unrestrained use of power ("might makes right"); (3) conscious creation of meaning; or (4) renewed faith in Truth. Each of these paths leads to other paths, but all of them lead back to Nietzsche's theory of truth.

Nietzsche argues that all knowledge is based on a particular perspective and, in turn, that we have no access to a true world. The idea of a true world is an invention inspired by the desire that such a world exist. He also argues that the actual world, while not irrelevant,[96] contains nothing that can be used as the final arbiter of what is good and evil. These claims do not, however, preclude the introduction of a *deus ex machina* that is able to overcome the groundlessness of Dionysian reality and the constraints of perspectivism and bridge the gap between the world of becoming and a beyond replete with a blueprint of the right way to live our lives. For this reason, Nietzsche takes his iconoclasm a step further and announces not only the death of objective Truth,

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[96] It is important to note here that Nietzsche does not argue that value judgements are entirely insulated from the contingencies of rational critique. It is possible, for example, to say that x leads to y and, because I do not want to see y occur, I will avoid x. Nietzsche's celebrated irrationalism is not, in other words, tantamount to an abandonment of rational argument or all forms of truth. It is, rather, a rejection of the *faith* in reason: "the unshakable faith that thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate the deepest abysses of being, and that thought is capable not only of knowing being but even of *correcting* it (DB P 4).

but the death of God as well. These arguments lead to the central tenet of his thought: *there is no Truth.*

It is the search for Truth that leads to its destruction once the truth about Truth is discovered. In this way, *"the highest values devaluate themselves"* (WP 2). This devaluation can, if unchecked, lead to "suicidal nihilism" (GM III 28), despair, and a sense of meaningless. Leo Strauss describes this as the "crisis of modernity":

> The crisis of modernity reveals itself in the fact, or consists in the fact, that modern western man no longer knows what he wants – that he no longer believes that he can know what is good and bad, what is right and wrong. Until a few generations ago, it was generally taken for granted that man can know what is right and wrong, what is just or the good or the best order of society – in a word that political philosophy is possible and necessary.[97]

Nietzsche anticipates this "crisis" and argues that it is rooted in the longstanding habit of seeing Truth as the only source of value in the world. This habit is the result of weakness and can be overcome by embracing the truth about Truth as an opportunity and initiating a revaluation of values that changes the equation from "Truth equals value" to "art equals value." The task is to see that man has been the creator of values all along, and that we do not need Truth to make our lives meaningful, to posit goals, to achieve greatness, and make the world a better place to live. The strong do not need Truth and do not despair in the face of the void left by its death. If we want to avoid nihilism, if we want to avoid the mediocrity symbolized by the Last Man, we need to learn to love a tainted a world. We need to look into the "heart of darkness" and find our own reasons for restraint, our own way of holding back the horror, and our own justification the choices we make.

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[97] Leo Strauss, "The Three Waves of Modernity" in *Political Philosophy: Six Essays by Leo Strauss.* Edited by Hilail Gildin (New York: Pegasus, 1975), 81.

It could be argued that, since there is no Truth, there is no reason not to use whatever means are at our disposal to impose our choices on others and do what we want regardless of how it affects others. Another potential problem is that a dictator will step into the vacuum created by the lack of Truth and use the lust for Truth that remains after its death to help establish a political regime based on oppression and hatred. This begs a key question: how, in the absence of Truth and the passion it engenders, do we avoid chaos, combat the unrestrained use of power, and prevent oppression?[98] Nietzsche's answer to this problem is very similar to his response to the problem of nihilism: we do not need Truth to combat chaos and tyranny; we can resist them *on our own grounds*. It is again a matter of breaking our dependency on Truth and finding the strength to stand behind our choices on our own grounds. Is there nothing stopping you from imposing your views on others or killing someone except Truth? Just because there is no Truth does not mean that we cannot set standards, establish and enforce limits, pass laws, and oppose fascism. Formerly, we did these things in the name of the phantom of Truth; now we do them in our own name and for our own reasons.

The path that Nietzsche hopes man will take once he escapes the shadow of the death of God and Truth is the one that leads to the creation of new goals, new values, and new cultures based on the noble *taste* of great men. The Overman is the symbol of this aristocracy of rare individuals who are able to create meaning and, like the pre-Socratic Greeks, establish a culture

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[98] It could, conversely, be argued that much of the hatred and oppression that marks human history (including the fascist regimes of Hitler and Mussolini) can be linked to an appeal to normative truth. The truth about Truth does not just open the door to lawlessness and domination; it also opens the door to social relations based on greater respect for other perspectives and competing choices. Arguably, without the excuse of Truth, there may be less oppression and less fascism in the world.

that incorporates the wisdom of both Dionysus and Apollo. Man learns the truth about Truth, and by so doing, reacquaints himself with his creative nature. Although Nietzsche would be against it, the freedom to create meaning could be democratized rather than limited to a select few. It is important to note here that Nietzsche's epistemology leaves the door open for responses other than his longing for the Overman. We are free to disregard Nietzsche's emphasis on rare individuals and apply the freedom to decide what is valuable to *all* human beings. We do not have to depend on the coming of the Overman to create meaning for us; we can do it ourselves.

Foucault goes one step further and argues in favour of resisting becoming enamoured of our value choices and preaches an ethic of constant experimentation and resistance to solidified relations of power. This avoids the danger inherent in Nietzsche's willingness to judge between competing values; namely, that the world may end up as intolerant and oppressive without Truth as it was when Truth was a dominant consideration. The allure of Foucault's position lies in his desire to maximize choice and always push the boundaries. This is also its chief failing because he does not provide an adequate explanation of how constant experimentation can be reconciled with the need for a degree of order and stability within which experimentation may take place. Moreover, is there no value in allowing some choices to solidify? Is there no value in leaving some boundaries intact?

Continued faith in the existence of normative truth is the fourth path leading away from Nietzsche's proclamation of the truth about Truth. Nietzsche looks out at the world and finds no evidence for the existence of Truth. He does, however, find ample evidence to support his argument that Truth is a lie rooted in either a desire for certainty in an uncertain world or a lust for power. But, what if one looks out at the world and is not convinced that there is

absolutely no evidence for the existence of Truth? Nietzsche, moreover, is too quick to dismiss the role of faith in the search for Truth. Nietzsche's examination of the psychological roots of faith and the array of reasons why belief in God is problematic presents a powerful critique, but it does not negate the possibility that there are paths to Truth that transcend the world of the senses and becoming. The idea here is not to bury our heads in the sand and ignore Nietzsche's challenge, but to take it to heart and question our Truths with the same courage, honesty, and relentless passion that Nietzsche would question them. Hopefully, one emerges from this process a little more open-minded and a little less certain about one's beliefs. But most people have not taken up this challenge and remain convinced that they have the right answers. The appeal to Truth continues to be used to justify intolerance and baptize opinions as facts. Reading Nietzsche has helped reveal to me what Salman Rushdie refers to as the "migrant perspective." Like a migrant who has seen the Truths of more than one culture and, as a result, has come to understand that much of what people take to be Truths are merely choices dressed up as such, Nietzsche's epistemological arguments make one more aware of both one's own prejudices and the prejudices of others. One of the most important questions raised by Nietzsche's epistemology is: would you value what you do even if it was not True and would you be able to defend your values to others without resorting to the trump card that they are True?

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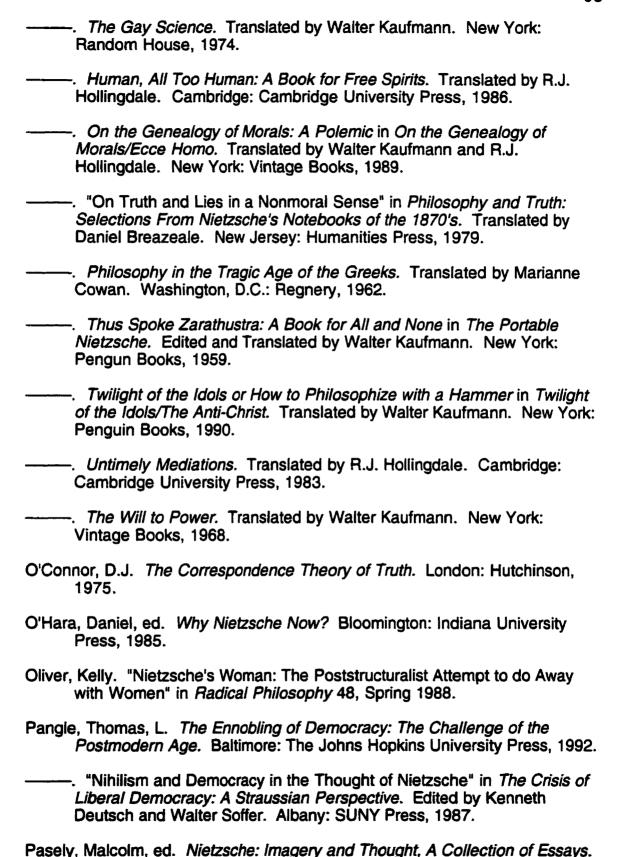
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