

Two Nietzsches on Truth

Patrick Miller

Occasionally Nietzsche is comfortable with truth. For example, when he eulogizes Heraclitus in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* he writes that "the world forever needs the truth, hence the world forever needs Heraclitus."¹ However, most of his statements about truth--like most of his statements about being, reason, and other so-called fetishes of traditional philosophy--are critical. The most explicit of such statements is found in one of his earliest, unpublished works, *On Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense*: "truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions."² And the critical spirit of this early work certainly persists into his late, published works. In fact, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* he states that a critique of truth--or, more precisely, a critique of the will to truth--is the defining task of his philosophy.³ Nietzsche remains critical of truth throughout his corpus; this much is clear. More obscure, though, is the motive which lies behind that persistent critique.

In this paper, I will argue that there is no *single* such motive, for I believe there are at least two distinct motives. Moreover, I will argue that these two distinct motives are in fact opposed to each other: on the one hand, in the early, unpublished works we find Nietzsche using an element of Kantianism, i.e., the "thing-in-itself," as a premise in a critical argument; while on the other hand, in the late, published works we find him articulating a standpoint, i.e., the genealogical standpoint, from which he vehemently rejects Kantianism, among other metaphysical theories. Of the early, unpublished works, I will focus on *On Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense*, and cite *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*; of the late, published works, I will focus on *The Twilight of the*

¹ PTG p.68; cf. *ibid* pp.52,53,60, BT 7,8, BT-ASC 1, EH IV, 3.

² TF p.180; cf. also BGE 4, GM III 24, GS 344.

³ GM III, 24: "The will to truth requires a critique--let us define our own task--the value of truth must for once be experimentally called into question."

Idols, and cite both *On the Genealogy of Morals* and part five of *The Gay Science*. Before I begin, however, I must add a note of clarification. In this paper I do not intend to suggest that elements of the critique of truth found in these late, published works are not found in the early, unpublished works; on the contrary, I think such elements are evidently nascent there (although, for the sake of brevity, I will not highlight them). Instead, I merely intend to defend the following two theses: (i) that a fundamental element of the critique of truth found in the early, unpublished works disappears entirely from Nietzsche's subsequent critique of truth, and (ii) that this disappearance is in fact required by the standpoint of that subsequent critique. Now if these two theses are correct, they not only contribute to our understanding of Nietzsche's philosophical development, they also help explain why he published neither of these early, but nonetheless polished, works.

The Early Critique of Truth

In order to expose the principal motive of the critique of truth found in the early, unpublished works, I will first offer a reconstruction of that critique as it appears in *On Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense*. Following that reconstruction, I will raise an objection one might make against such an effort to schematize, in this way, one of Nietzsche's works. Then, finally, I will reply to that objection by corroborating my schema with a few passages from *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*.

In *On Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense*, Nietzsche sets out to answer four main questions: (i) What is a word? (p.177); (ii) How do we form ideas? (p.179); (iii) What is truth? (p.180); and (iv) Whence arises the impulse to truth? (p.180). Actually, (iv) appears twice, as the last of the questions, on p.180 as I have noted, but also as the first of them, on p.176. Its repetition is perhaps best explained by briefly considering the intent and structure of the essay as a whole. I believe that *On Truth and*

Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense is an effort to answer (iv), and that Nietzsche poses and answers it precipitately in the opening pages only in order to provoke his reader. For when we consider that the traditional understanding of the impulse to truth, which finds its roots in Aristotle,⁴ is that all humans by nature desire to know the truth for its own sake, Nietzsche's answer, that "it is in a . . . limited sense only that man desires truth: he covets the agreeable, life-preserving consequences of truth," (TF, p.177) standing undefended as it does at that point, can serve as little more than provocation. I believe Nietzsche tries to defend that provocative answer in the remainder of the essay by posing the three other questions and answering them in such a way that they eventually function as premises in an argument critical of the traditional understanding of the impulse to truth.

Taking these other questions in order, then, Nietzsche answers the first--i.e., What is a word?--directly after posing it. According to him, a word is "the expression of a nerve-stimulus in sounds." (TF, p.177) Not surprisingly, this answer also opposes a traditional understanding, the traditional understanding of meaning which finds its roots at least in Augustine.⁵ A word is traditionally considered a sign which can, but need not, refer to something outside of the speaker, i.e., to something in the external world. Nietzsche's understanding of meaning thus opposes the traditional understanding in two respects: first of all, according to him, words do not refer, they express; and secondly, according to him, words are not occasioned by anything in the external world, but instead by internal events--namely, nerve-stimuli. Now a proponent of the traditional understanding might try to assimilate Nietzsche by granting that, yes, words express, and that, yes, they express nerve-stimuli, while arguing, first of all, that nerve-stimuli are themselves caused by events in the external world. Indeed, she might continue to argue,

⁴ *Metaphysics*, 980a.

⁵ *Confessions*, I. 8: "Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified".

secondly, that there are natural relations between certain nerve-stimuli and certain events in the external world such that those natural relations distinguish expression which refers from mere expression. In this way, then, she could conclude that, even for Nietzsche, words are signs which can refer, albeit indirectly, to something outside the speaker. However, Nietzsche forestalls any such attempt to assimilate him by admonishing us against the first stage of such an argument: "to infer a cause outside us from the nerve-stimulus is already the result of a wrong and unjustifiable application of the proposition of causality." (TF, p.177) In order to avoid assimilating Nietzsche, then, we must establish why such an inference is at least unjustifiable.

As explanation of this unjustifiability, Nietzsche says only that we should not dare to think that our perceptions--from which, he will we later argue, we derive our words--are anything more than entirely subjective stimuli. Consider, for example, a perception that a stone is hard. If we were to infer from this perception of hardness that there is indeed a hard thing outside of us that causes it, we might say "the stone is hard; as if 'hard' was known to us otherwise; and not merely as an entirely subjective stimulus!" (TF, p.177) In other words, Nietzsche thinks the inference of an objective stimulus from a subjective stimulus is unjustifiable. As it stands, though, this explanation is laconic. I think the unjustifiability of such an inference is better explained by turning to Nietzsche's discussion of a question that arises later in the essay: whether the perceptions of the world had by a bird or insect, on the one hand, or the perceptions of the world had by a human, on the other, are the more accurate (TF, p.184). Nietzsche considers this question senseless, since "to decide this question it would be necessary to apply the standard of *right perception*, i.e., to apply a standard which *does not exist*." (TF, p.184) Now I think this claim--that the standard of right perception does not exist--is, in turn, best understood by trying to imagine what it would be for such a standard to exist. Let us, then, consider the following example:

You place the same tree before both a bird and a human. Since this tree would continue to exist even if both the bird and the human were to stop perceiving it, it must exist outside of their minds. But because it exists outside of their minds, we might well wonder how they perceive it; in other words, we might well wonder how a percept of something that is outside of their minds can get into their minds. Nietzsche seems to have an answer to this question. He writes that a percept is a transformed nerve-stimulus (TF, p.178); and with such a model of perception, he might explain how they perceive the tree along the following lines: somehow it stimulates their nerves in such a way that percepts, each of a tree, appear in their minds. With this model of perception, though, if the human were to ask himself which perception was more accurate, his or the bird's, he would indeed be asking a senseless question. For after all, in order to judge which perception was more accurate, he would, first of all, have to have the right perception of the tree-- i.e., a perception of the tree in-itself, without the intermediate step of nerve-stimulus; and secondly, he would have to compare this right perception with his own perception, on the one hand, and the bird's, on the other, so as to judge which of the two was more accurate. Yet such a procedure would be impossible to perform, simply because the standard of right perception is, as Nietzsche writes, "a nonentity full of contradictions" (TF, p. 184). That is to say, if the right perception of a tree is supposed to be a perception of that tree in-itself, without the intermediate step of nerve-stimulus, while all perceptions are themselves but transformed nerve-stimuli, the right perception is at once supposed to be and not be a perception.

Without a standard of right perception, though, it would be a mistake for the human to judge that his perception of the tree is more accurate than that of the bird. Of course, it would likewise be a mistake for the bird to judge that his perception of the tree is more accurate than that of the human. Nevertheless, it might still seem that you, having placed the tree before them in the first place, could adjudicate--after all, you stand outside both of them, and are thus free from the obstacles that their nerve-stimuli place between

them and the tree in-itself. Yet this too would be a mistake; for although their nerve-stimuli present no obstacle to you, you have your own nerve-stimuli to contend with. Thus, the tree in-itself is as inaccessible to you as it is to them. In fact, if a percept is but a transformed nerve-stimulus, as Nietzsche writes, the tree in-itself is necessarily inaccessible to all perceivers. And I believe it is this necessary inaccessibility which leads him to call the inference from a nerve-stimulus to a cause outside of us "the result of a wrong and unjustifiable application of the proposition of causality." We cannot justifiably infer, from our nerve-stimuli, the existence of any things-in-themselves, as if the nerve-stimuli were effects and the things-in-themselves causes, simply because we have no experience, and moreover cannot have any experience, of things-in-themselves. Such an inference would be unverifiable, and thus unjustifiable.

Of what importance is this, however, to Nietzsche's dictum that a word is "the expression of a nerve-stimulus in sounds"? Consider our example of the tree once again. Given what has been said about things-in-themselves, percepts, and words, Nietzsche seems to think that the meaning of the word 'tree' works according to the following model: trees exist outside of us as things-in-themselves, we perceive them only indirectly, via nerve-stimuli, and our word 'tree' is but an expression of these nerve-stimuli. When Nietzsche elaborates upon this model of meaning, he calls the first transformation--i.e., of a nerve-stimulus into a percept--the creation of a first metaphor (TF, p.178; cf. p.184), and likewise calls the second transformation--i.e., of a percept into a sound--the creation of a second metaphor. Of course, these uses of 'metaphor' must themselves be metaphorical, since metaphors are traditionally considered figures of, and only of, language. Yet his meaning is clear enough. For metaphors are also traditionally understood in opposition to literal uses of language: whereas literal uses attempt to adequately represent something by direct reference, metaphors eschew representation altogether. Interpreting his metaphorical uses of 'metaphor' thus, he must mean that a percept does not adequately represent a nerve-stimulus, and that, likewise, a word does

not adequately represent a percept. And such a point would be relatively straightforward. After all, a nerve-stimulus is an electrical impulse, a percept a mental experience, and a word either a sound or a character on a page--it is difficult to imagine how any one could adequately represent any other. That this is indeed the point he intends to make here is, I think, confirmed by his subsequent, more illustrative, metaphor: these transformations--from nerve-stimulus to percept, and then again from percept to word--are like the transformation of a thing-itself to a nerve-stimulus, which, he writes, is but "a suggestive metamorphosis, a stammering translation into quite a foreign language" (TF, p.184).

To conclude my reconstruction of Nietzsche's answer to his first main question, then, a word is the final result of a series of stammering translations of a thing-in-itself, first into a nerve-stimulus, then into a percept, and finally into a sound. And each translation is the creation of metaphor: sounds are metaphors for percepts, percepts for nerve-stimuli, and, finally, nerve-stimuli for things-in-themselves. That Nietzsche does answer his first main question in this way, and that he thus subscribes to both the model of perception and the model of meaning presupposed by such an answer, is most evident in the following passage:

When we talk about trees, colours, snow and flowers, we believe we know something about the things themselves, and yet we only possess metaphors of the things, and these metaphors do not in the least correspond to the original essentials. Just as sound shows itself as a sand figure, in the same way the enigmatical x of the Thing-in-itself is seen first as nerve stimulus, then as percept, and finally as a sound. (TF, p.178)

As it stands, however, this model of meaning is too simple. For it is not as if each different percept must occasion a different word. Unlike the relation between nerve-stimuli and percepts, which, we might speculate, is one-to-one and rigidly fixed, the relation between percepts and words seems sometimes to be many-to-one, at other times to be one-to-many, and thus on the whole to be rather flexible. For example, after

enjoying the distinct percepts of this paper, on the one hand, and the morning newspaper, on the other, you may have the idea 'paper'. That is, even though there were significant qualitative differences between these numerically distinct percepts, you may include them under the rubric of one universal idea. Recognizing that such a mysterious process occurs leads us to ask Nietzsche's second main question--i.e., How do we form such ideas? Nietzsche never explicitly poses it, but this question is evidently what prompts him to observe that ideas are not meant to designate particular percepts, but rather to include many particular percepts under their rubric (TF, p.179). Oddly enough, this observation resembles, in some respects, the traditional understanding of the process of idea-formation, which finds its roots in Plato.⁶ Nevertheless, Nietzsche maintains his independence from that tradition by criticising, rather than deifying, the ideas which are formed through the process it describes. He has several such criticisms, but I will here discuss only two.

In his first criticism, Nietzsche argues that ideas necessarily misrepresent our percepts. Taking the example of leaves--which, he asserts, are all different from one another--he states that the formation of the idea 'leaf' must arbitrarily omit differences between them. After all, if I am presented with three individuals, a green leaf, an orange leaf, and a red leaf, I do not hesitate to call them all 'leaves', even though, by doing so, I omit to mention their differences in colour. One might try to justify my omission by suggesting that these individuals are essentially leaves, but not essentially of different colours. If this suggestion were right, my omission would not be arbitrary: it would instead be based upon a principled distinction between essential and nonessential properties. However, Nietzsche denies this and all similar distinctions by adopting an austere nominalism. According to him, "nature knows no forms and ideas, and therefore

⁶ *Parmenides* 132a: "I imagine your ground for believing in a single form in each case is this. When it seems to you that a number of things are large, there seems, I suppose, to be a certain single character which is the same when you look at them all; hence you think that largeness is a single thing." Cf. TF p.179, ". . . and this idea now awakens the notion that in nature there is, besides the leaves, a something called, *the* 'leaf', perhaps a primal form."

knows no species but only an *x*" (TF, p.180; cf. 181-2). If his nominalism is right, and there are only individuals, then we do form ideas by necessarily misrepresenting our percepts, i.e., by "equating the unequal." (TF, p.179) It is thus his nominalism that motivates Nietzsche to criticise ideas as both misrepresentations and occult qualities.

In his second criticism, Nietzsche remarks upon the result that has attended both belief in these occult qualities and faith in the process that forms them. For following this process, any two or more experiences which have something in common, no matter how insignificant, may be collected under the rubric of an idea. Moreover, several ideas may be concatenated to form complex ideas. In this way, an intangible dome of ideas may be piled up, growing in both abstraction and complexity from a foundation comprised of those many primitive ideas which are occasioned by percepts. According to Nietzsche, this dome is in fact what humans, with their belief in ideas, and their faith in the process which produces them, have built. Purely as a spectacle, this dome evokes his admiration; nevertheless, he warns that it is precariously piled "on a movable foundation and as it were on running water" (TF, p.182). Thus we find him writing metaphorically again; however, we are already equipped for interpretation: the dome's foundation is movable precisely because the primitive ideas, or words, it comprises are occasioned by percepts, which, as we saw, are themselves but transformed nerve-stimuli. As we also saw, no nerve-stimulus can adequately represent any thing-in-itself; consequently, neither percept, nor word, nor idea--ultimately depending as they all do upon nerve-stimuli--can adequately represent any thing-in-itself. To conclude my reconstruction of Nietzsche's answer to the second main question, then: ideas are formed by abstraction from words and percepts, both words and percepts are but metaphors for nerve-stimuli, while nerve-stimuli are themselves but stammering translations of things-in-themselves. Our ideas thus misrepresent our percepts, and, worse still, our percepts misrepresent the things-in-themselves.

Now that I have reconstructed Nietzsche's answer to his second main question, I will turn, finally, to his third--i.e., What is truth? The traditional understanding of truth, which finds its roots in Aristotle,⁷ is that truth is a spoken representation of things as they are. Considering that Nietzsche has opposed the philosophical tradition on several points so far, we should expect him to reject this understanding as well. There are even several passages which seem to confirm this expectation--the most famous being that which immediately follows his statement of the question:

What therefore is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in short a sum of human relations which become poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after a long usage seem to a nation fixed; (TF, p.180)

According to Nietzsche, it seems, truth is not a spoken representation of things as they are; for if he thinks that truth is a mobile army of metaphors, he must also think that truth is a mobile army of figures of languages which eschew representation altogether (following what was earlier said about metaphors). But if truth does not represent, what does it do?

At the beginning of *On Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense*, remember, Nietzsche provocatively stated that the impulse to truth arises from a desire for its agreeable, life-preserving consequences. That provocative statement arose from his speculation that the peace which follows a war of all against all brings humans together so that they are able to develop language. With this development, he added, "that which henceforth is to be 'truth' is now fixed; that is to say, a uniformly valid and binding designation of things is invented and the legislature of language also gives the first laws of truth." (TF, p.176) According to Nietzsche, it thus seems, truth is nothing but obedience to the laws of designation invented by a society in its effort to preserve peace.

⁷ *Metaphysics* 1011b26-27.

Yet we must interpret Nietzsche carefully here. Since Nietzsche here alludes to 'truth', not truth, I suspect he is presupposing a distinction between what is conventionally taken for truth, on the one hand, and what truth genuinely is, on the other. Another thought-experiment will help clarify this distinction.

Let us imagine, with Nietzsche, a group of humans that have banded together just after the dust has settled from the war of all against all. Sharing the impulse to communicate and thereby preserve themselves, they agree upon various designations for words. That is to say, they agree that 'trees' shall designate what appear to them to be trees, and that 'snow' shall designate what appears to them to be snow, etc. After this growing vocabulary becomes sufficiently rich, they are also able to concatenate those words with others in certain ways. That is to say, they can concatenate 'trees' and 'tall', as well as 'snow' and 'white', adding copulae as they go along, and thereby producing sentences like "trees are tall" and "snow is white," etc. By a tacit, collective agreement, however, they call these and many other sentences 'true', whereas they call still others 'false'. Moreover, in order to preserve stability in their society, a moral impulse arises, an impulse remarkably similar to the Humean sentiment for justice, compelling them to legislate truth and falsity as though there were an obligation to seek the one and avoid the other. It is in this sense, this ultramoral sense, that Nietzsche often discusses truth--almost always using inverted commas when he does so: e.g., "If somebody hides a thing behind a bush, seeks it again and finds it in the selfsame place, then there is not much to boast of, respecting this seeking and finding; thus, however, matters stand with the seeking and finding of 'truth' within the realm of reason." (TF, p.183)

In our imaginary society, recall, what the speakers call 'true' they do so by a tacit, collective agreement. But this agreement is also mysterious. For, remembering the models of perception, meaning, and idea-formation discussed earlier, it must be mysterious--as mysterious as the thing-in-itself. After all, no member of the society could ever correlate words or, therefore, sentences with the things-in-themselves, to which he

might hope his words refer, since his percepts and thus his words and sentences will always be inadequate representations of those things. Granting that correlation between language and things-in-themselves is impossible, though, one might still think that the tacit, collective agreement on truth could be forged from a correlation of language with percepts. Yet even this would be impossible, since, as we saw, words and ideas even misrepresent percepts by making the unequal equal with their arbitrary omissions of difference. In sum, this tacit, collective agreement must remain mysterious, unless of course we understand it as arbitrary, i.e., as a mere convention. And yet this understanding seems to be what Nietzsche has in mind when he writes that seeking and finding 'truth' is tantamount to looking for something we ourselves have hidden. For if 'truth' is a matter of mere convention, our discovery of 'truths' can be nothing but the articulation of our own conventions. Moreover, he seems to have this understanding in mind when compares truth and rationality to a game of dice, writing that "'Truth' means to use every die as it is designated, to count its points carefully, to form exact classifications, and never to violate the order of castes and the sequences of rank." (TF, p. 182) And finally, Nietzsche clearly thinks 'truth' is a matter of convention when he writes that "it is anthropomorphic through and through and does not contain one single point which is 'true-in-itself', real, and universally valid, apart from man." (TF, p.183) If Nietzsche thinks that conventional 'truths', on the one hand, are merely a matter of convention, what does he think genuine truths are, on the other?

Following this final passage quoted above, I believe Nietzsche thinks genuine truths must meet the standards of reality and universality that lie in the thing-in-itself, and thereby outside the anthropomorphic conventions. Accordingly, he alludes elsewhere to such standards: e.g., "The 'Thing-in-itself' (it is just this which would be the *pure ineffective truth*)".⁸ For I believe Nietzsche here shows an understanding of truth as

⁸ TF, p.178: italics mine; cf. PTG, p.83, italics also mine: "Words are but symbols for the relations of things to one another and to us; nowhere do they touch upon *absolute truth* . . . Through words and

representation of things-in-themselves. If I am right, however, contrary to the rebellious spirit of his other answers to his main questions, it is here, with his model of genuine truth, that Nietzsche remains traditional. Yet if I am right, we have no cause to wonder that he famously describes "truths as illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions" (TF, p.180). For I believe he is here referring to truth as a matter of mere convention, claiming, as we should expect, that it does not represent things-in-themselves. After all, according to him, we makers of the conventions are necessarily incapable of representing things-in-themselves: our nerve-stimuli present obstacles between us and them, our percepts misrepresent our nerve-stimuli, and our words and ideas, in turn, misrepresent our percepts. Thus, we should no more wonder when he writes that "the whole material in which and with which the man of truth, the investigator, the philosopher works and builds, originates, if not from Nephelococcygia, cloud-land, at any rate not from the essence of things." (TF, p.179) For I believe this passage captures the thrust of his critique of truth in the early, unpublished works: this essence of things, i.e., things-in-themselves, lies beyond human cognition; genuine truth, however, is a representation of these things-in-themselves; hence we are incapable of achieving truth. The truths which we are capable of achieving, however, are conventional truths, and thus our truths are illusions.

Now this critique of truth is open to many weighty objections--too many to examine here, so I will only mention the most weighty. We may object that it refutes itself: after all, if there are no genuine truths, this critique of truth cannot be genuinely true; but if this critique of truth cannot be genuinely true, we have no good reason to believe it; and if we have no good reason to believe it, we have no good reason to believe that there are no genuine truths. At first blush, there seems to be one reply to this objection: according to this critique of truth, nothing is genuinely true; thus were we only

concepts we shall never reach beyond the wall of relations, to some sort of fabulous primal ground of things."

to believe what is genuinely true we would believe nothing; but we must believe something; therefore we should believe what is conventionally true. As soon as we draw this reply's conclusion, however, its weakness reveals itself: because we should believe what is conventionally true, we should believe this critique. Needless to say, this critique is far from being conventionally true, since, as I hope to have shown, it rebels against convention and tradition at many junctures.

Nevertheless, I have not reconstructed Nietzsche's critique in order to criticize it; rather, I have reconstructed it in order to reveal the element of Kantianism which motivates it--i.e., the 'thing-in-itself'. That this element was Kantian, at least in its inception, is undeniable:

And we indeed, rightly considering objects of sense as mere appearances, confess thereby that they are based upon a thing in itself, though we know not this thing as it is in itself but only know its appearances, namely, the way in which our senses are affected by this unknown something.⁹

But of course there were many other German metaphysicians besides Kant who used the 'thing-in-itself' in their theories. That it was Kant who influenced Nietzsche here is therefore a matter for scholarly dispute; and scholars have indeed disputed it. Maudemarie Clare, for instance, maintains that it was Schopenhauer.¹⁰ Whether it was Kant or Schopenhauer is difficult to resolve, since both shared more or less the model of perception that I am attributing to Nietzsche. In the face of this difficulty, though, one might hastily decide in favour of Schopenhauer, simply because Nietzsche was so enamoured of him at this point in his career.¹¹ I will have the opportunity to offer reasons why I think it was rather Kant shortly. In the meantime, the precise historical allegiance of this term is not crucial to my defense of the central theses of this paper.

⁹ *Prolegomena*, 314; cf. *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxxvi-xxvii, A251-252 (cited in Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) p.238.)

¹⁰ Clare, pp.79-82.

¹¹ Witness Nietzsche's three-page quotation of *The World as Will and Representation* in BT, 16.

What is crucial is that Nietzsche helps himself to a metaphysical concept in his critical argument; indeed, what is most crucial is that he must help himself to this concept. For without postulating things-in-themselves--objects in the external world that are necessarily inaccessible to us, and to which our truths, if they are to be genuine, must correspond--Nietzsche's critical argument, as I have reconstructed it, could not even begin.

At this point, one might object fundamentally to my effort to reconstruct Nietzsche's argument, as such. After all, in the late works (as I hope to show in the next section of this paper) Nietzsche articulates a standpoint from which he criticizes dialectical reasoning for the rancour it both conceals and engenders. Perhaps, then, it is also from this standpoint that Nietzsche intends the critique of truth found in his early works. If that were the case, my effort to reconstruct a critical *argument* from these early works would not only conceal and engender rancour, it would also betray an ironic misunderstanding of the critique of truth and dialectical reasoning he actually there offers. To this objection, however, I might quickly reply that the early works at least seem to be susceptible to reconstruction. Whereas the late works resist such reconstruction at every step, these early works at least seem to reason dialectically. But such a quick reply lacks the sophistication required to defeat this objection, since a proponent of it could add:

Nietzsche did of course assert that the most skilful dialectical reasoning had in fact failed by its own standards as well as by his . . . He had nothing but scorn for Kant and Mill. But in pointing this out Nietzsche was once again mocking the pretensions of dialectic, not turning it against itself in a way which would have made of him only one more dialectician. (MacIntyre, p.42)

Speaking specifically to my reconstruction of *On Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense*, then, a proponent of this objection would add that Nietzsche's use of the Kantian 'thing-in-itself' is insincere. Rather than using it as a premise in an argument critical of

truth as if he were just one more dialectician, Nietzsche uses this element of Kantianism to mock dialectical reasoning, showing that it fails by its own standards. After all, he had nothing but scorn for Kant. My modified reply to this objection involves three considerations.

First of all, I do not agree that Nietzsche had nothing but scorn for Kant. For although this is true of the late, published works, here in the early, unpublished works we find him repeatedly appealing to Kant as a philosophical authority. For instance, by appealing to the Kantian Copernican revolution, he is able to criticise Parmenides' metaphysics as a crude anachronism: "if Parmenides could permit himself . . . to derive absolute being from a forever subjective concept, today, after Kant, it is certainly reckless ignorance to attempt it." (PTG, p.83) And again, in his long-suffering attempt to disabuse us of the illusion that we have direct access to things-in-themselves, he uses a Kantian theory of space and time: "time and space . . . we are compelled to conceive all things under these forms only." (TF, p.186)¹² To verify that this is an appeal to Kant, consider the following passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "It is, therefore, . . . indubitably certain, that space and time, as the necessary conditions of all outer and inner experience, are merely subjective conditions of all our intuitions." (A49)

Now these appeals are nonetheless consistent with the claim of the objection at hand--namely, that Nietzsche here uses Kantianism playfully, in order to mock the dialectical reasoning. Thus, on its own, this first consideration of my reply is not telling. However, when we consider it in conjunction with two other, brief considerations, it becomes more so. First, when we remember that Nietzsche's use of an element of Kantianism in *On Truth and Falsity in Their Ultramoral Sense* produced a critique of truth that did not refute truth, but instead refuted only itself, if a proponent of this objection continues to maintain that Nietzsche used that element in order to mock the

¹² CF. PTG, p.52: There, in his celebration of intuitive thinking, Nietzsche writes that it has two advantages, the second being that it embraces "the conditions which alone make any experience of this world possible: time and space."

dialectic, I would reply that this mocking amounts to little more than a bad joke. And secondly, when we remember that Nietzsche left these early, polished works unpublished, a proponent of this objection still owes an explanation of why that is so. My hypothesis--that these uses of Kantianism are not only sincere, but actually motivate the critique of truth found in these early works--has the distinct advantage that it explains quite naturally why that is so. For as I hope to show in the next section of this paper, the late, published works do indeed have nothing but scorn for Kant; they articulate a standpoint, i.e., the genealogical standpoint, from which Nietzsche vehemently rejected Kantianism, among other metaphysical theories.

The Late Critique of Truth

Gilles Deleuze writes that "there is, in Nietzsche, not only a Kantian heritage, but a half-avowed, half-hidden rivalry" (Deleuze, p.52). In the first section of this paper I hoped to reveal that heritage; in this second section I hope to reveal that rivalry. Deleuze thinks that rivalry exists because Nietzsche, like Kant, considers himself to be offering a critique of reason, truth, knowledge, and related concepts. However, with Nietzsche's late works, the similarity ends there. For whereas Kant undertook a critique of particular claims of reason, truth and knowledge, Nietzsche undertakes a critique of reason, truth and knowledge themselves (Deleuze, p.89). Moreover, he changes the focus of the critical project. Instead of asking questions like 'What is truth?', and then trying to justify the answer produced by an analysis of received notions, Nietzsche aims to ask questions like 'Who wills the truth?' or 'What does someone who wills the truth want?' (Deleuze, p.94). Of course, anyone who sincerely asks a question like 'What is truth?' wills to know the truth about truth; indeed, anyone who asks a question of this form, i.e., 'What is . . . ?', wills to know the truth about something. Now because Kant was such a person--perhaps the epitome of such a person--he thereby becomes an object of the Nietzschean critique.

By taking the critical project which Kant began to an extreme which Kant could never have envisioned, Nietzsche thus ironically makes Kant himself an object of that project. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that there is, in Nietzsche, not only a Kantian heritage, but a rivalry as well.

Before we can discover how Kant himself fares as an object of the Nietzschean critique, though, we must first get clear on the details of that critique. For we already have a clear idea of what it means to ask and answer questions of the form 'What is . . . ?' from a philosophical tradition which finds its roots in Socrates. Let us call this familiar form of question the essentialist form, since to ask 'What is x ?' is to ask what the essence of x is. It is, however, not so clear what it means to ask and answer questions of the form 'Who wills . . . ?' or 'What does someone who wills . . . want?', at least when the unspecified object of the will is as abstract as truth. Let us call this unfamiliar form of question the genealogical form, since to ask 'Who wills x ?' or 'What does someone who wills x want?' is to ask what the genealogy or goal of the will to x is. In order to clarify the meaning and purpose of this genealogical form of question, then, I think we do best to consider first what Nietzsche thinks about the essentialist form of question.

Nietzsche is widely known for his comments critical of essentialism. Consider, for example, this passage from *The Will to Power*: "that things possess a constitution in themselves quite apart from interpretation and subjectivity is a quite idle hypothesis." (WP, 560) Following this passage, Nietzsche would evidently think it quite idle to ask what constitution truth possesses in itself, or, in other words, what the essence of truth is, since he thinks truth, like anything else, has no essence in itself. Thus we can assume that his adoption of the genealogical form of question, in lieu of the essentialist form, is partially motivated by a belief that the essentialist form is quite idle. Following this passage further, however, Nietzsche implies that it is worthwhile to ask what constitution truth possesses when it is somehow subject to interpretation and subjectivity. For although he thinks truth has no one constitution, or sense, apart from the forces of

interpretation and subjectivity, he does imply that it has "as many senses as there are forces capable of taking possession of it." (Deleuze, p.4) In this way, when we ask questions of the genealogical form, we not only avoid idle questions of the essentialist form, we also ask the only worthwhile philosophical questions that remain. For to ask 'Who wills the truth?' is to ask 'What force possesses truth as a concept?', and to ask 'What does someone who wills the truth want?' is to ask 'What does the force that possesses truth as a concept determine someone in its grip to want?'. These are the questions Nietzsche asks himself repeatedly throughout the late works--I hope to expose his answers to them by turning to *Twilight of the Idols* in particular.

In the chapter entitled "'Reason' in Philosophy," Nietzsche narrates episodes in the emergence and influence of several metaphysical concepts: unity, identity, permanence, substance, cause, materiality, but most importantly being. His story goes something like this: in the beginning, (i) language and reason deceived us into believing in these concepts (section 5); next, (ii) in a more enlightened age--presumably, that of Plato¹³--we discovered that our senses gave us no impressions corresponding to these concepts--indeed, they gave us impressions to the contrary, i.e., of plurality, diversity and becoming, etc. (section 5); given such a conflict, between the metaphysical concepts of reason, on the one hand, and the evidence of our senses, on the other hand, (iii) we decried the senses as the culprit, for, after all, they are so immoral in everything else (section 1); and finally, having slandered the senses as deceptive, (iv) we wondered whence these concepts arose, inferring, with Plato,¹⁴ that they could not have come from this apparent world, but only from a supersensible, true, real, or higher world (section 5). The lessons that Nietzsche draws from this story are found in four propositions in section six.

¹³ e.g., *Phaedo*, 74d.

¹⁴ e.g., *Phaedo*, 75c-d.

The first proposition seeks to vindicate the so-called apparent world of the senses created by the inference to a supersensible world: "The reasons upon which the apparent nature of 'this' world have been based, rather tend to prove its reality". The world of the senses was first suspected when it conflicted with the metaphysical concepts of language and reason in the second stage of the story. But in that first stage those concepts were said to be deceptions. That the world of the senses contradicts those concepts is thus a proof, rather than a disproof, of its reality.

The second proposition seeks to subvert the pretensions of the so-called true world by pointing out that, "The characteristics with which man has endowed the 'true Being' of things, are the characteristics of non-Being, of *nonentity*." This proposition follows from the first proposition and the second stage of the story; for since the world of the senses is the real world, and the so-called true world is posited in contradiction to that of the senses, it must be unreal.

The third proposition seeks to articulate what someone who wills to assert the existence of another world wants; that is to say, the third proposition seeks to answer a question of the genealogical form. Nietzsche writes, "There is no sense in spinning yarns about another world, provided, of course, that we do not possess a mighty instinct which urges us to slander, belittle, and cast suspicion upon this life".¹⁵ Given the conflict in the third stage of the story between the senses, on the one hand, and the metaphysical concepts of language and reason, on the other hand, Nietzsche writes, remember, that we *reacted against* the senses. Likewise, when we began spinning yarns about another world in the fourth stage of the story, we reacted against the world of the senses. But following the first proposition, we thereby reacted against the reality of this life; and following the second proposition, we thereby reacted against this life in the service of a nonentity, of nothingness. Nietzsche thinks this reaction against life in the name of nothingness was

¹⁵ Cf "Skirmishes in a War with the Age," section 34: "The notion of a 'Beyond' as well--why a Beyond if it be not a means of splashing mud over a 'Here,' over this world?"

the beginning of nihilism. Thus, if we ask the genealogical question 'What force possesses the concept of another world?', Nietzsche answers: the reactive force of nihilism. And if we ask the genealogical question 'Who wills another world?', Nietzsche answers: the nihilist, or, in other words, the decadent (Deleuze, p.159).

The fourth proposition, finally, seeks to unmask this decadent: "To divide the world into a 'true' and an 'apparent' world, whether after the manner of Christianity or of Kant (after all a Christian in disguise), is only a sign of decadence". It is thus Kant, with his 'thing-in-itself' which necessarily lies forever beyond the grasp of our senses, who is the spinner of other worldly yarns *par excellence*. To the genealogical question 'Who wills the 'thing-in-itself'?', then, Nietzsche will answer once again: the nihilist. But he does not intend to reserve his scorn for Kant; any metaphysician who depreciates life in the name of a supersensible world is, by his lights, a nihilist (Deleuze, p.34). And to the genealogical question 'What does someone who wills the 'thing-in-itself' want?', Nietzsche will answer: to react against this life in the service of a nonentity. With these two answers I hope it is clear that the motive behind the late critique of truth must differ from that behind the early critique. After all, if my reconstruction of that early critique was correct, and it did indeed depend upon the Kantian 'thing-in-itself' in order even to begin, we find Nietzsche here articulating a standpoint, i.e., the genealogical standpoint, from which he must vehemently reject Kantianism, among other metaphysical theories. What remains, then, is to sketch the late critique of truth--or, more precisely, the late critique of the will to truth.

Nietzsche thinks the will to truth resembles the will to a 'thing-in-itself', insofar as "the truthful man," like the Kantian, "*thereby affirms another world.*" (GS, 344). As we saw, according to Nietzsche, when we could not find unity, identity, permanence, substance, cause, or being in the impressions of our senses, we depreciated those impressions, and the world they report, by fabricating another world that embodied those concepts. Likewise, according to Nietzsche, when we do not find truth in our sense

impressions, finding therein only so-called appearances, we fabricate another world whence truth is supposed to originate. And just as we deny this life with the first fabrication, Nietzsche thinks we deny it with the second. Indeed, he thinks these two denials are in fact one and the same, since "Truth was posited as being". (GM III, 24; cf., 27,28). Moreover, these denials serve the same ideal. For as we saw, the will to a 'thing-in-itself' denied life in the service of a nonentity. Likewise, the will to truth denies life in the service of a nonentity. After all, truth, conceived as a set of warranted beliefs, or a correspondence to things, or as any kind of unitary whole whatsoever, must be a nonentity: that things possess a constitution in themselves quite apart from interpretation and subjectivity is, remember, a quite idle hypothesis. According to Nietzsche, then, when we come to truth, and ask the genealogical question 'Who wills the truth?', we must again answer: the nihilist. According to Nietzsche, "being, the true and the real are the avatars of nihilism." (Deleuze, p.184)

This has been but a sketch of Nietzsche's critique of truth in the late works; however, I hope it is sufficient to reveal some of the differences between that critique and the critique of truth found in the early, unpublished works. Specifically, I have tried to highlight two differences: first of all, whereas *On Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense* uses the 'thing-in-itself' in a critical argument which would be impotent without it, the late works not only eschew, but actually scorn, the 'thing-in-itself'; and secondly, whereas the early, unpublished works appeal to Kantian themes, and sometimes even Kant himself, the late, published works have nothing but scorn for him as well. As I mentioned in my introduction, however, there are elements of this late critique already nascent in the early works. For example, just as Nietzsche excepts Heraclitus from the philosophic gang which he scolds in *Twilight of the Idols* ("Reason' in Philosophy," 2) for their rejection of becoming in favour of being, so too he celebrates Heraclitus in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* as the first philosopher to recognize "the everlasting and exclusive coming-to-be, the impermanence of everything actual, which

constantly acts and comes-to-be but never is" (PTG, p.54). It is my conjecture that in the early, unpublished works these elements of the late critique stand alongside, and in evident tension with, the elements which Nietzsche would later scorn. Perhaps it was a recognition of this tension which prevented him from publishing them.

Works by Nietzsche

TF: *On Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense*, translated by Maximillian A. Muge, appearing in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 16, ed. Oscar Levy (London: T. N. Foulis, 1911).

PTG: *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, translated by Marianne Cowan (Washington D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1987).

TI: *The Twilight of the Idols*, translated by Anthony M. Ludovici, appearing in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 16, ed. Oscar Levy (London: T. N. Foulis, 1911).

GM: *On the Genealogy of Morals*, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967).

GS: *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974).

WP: *The Will to Power*, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967).

BT: *The Birth of Tragedy*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967).

EH: *Ecce Homo*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York, Random House, 1967).

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Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990) pp. 32-57.

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