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2012

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Publication Details
Simpson, D. 2012, 'Truth, perspectivism, and philosophy', E-Logos: electronic journal for philosophy, no. 2, pp. 1-16.

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Truth, Perspectivism, and Philosophy

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Abstract

In Nietzsche's later work the problem of the possibility of philosophy presents a significant interpretative and practical dilemma. Nietzsche attempts to undermine the idea of the absolute, as a source of value, meaning and truth, and to tease out the traces of this idea in our philosophising. He is thus one of those who has given us the means to complete the Kantian project of moving beyond metaphysical realism and a representational understanding of meaning.

However, along with the gift comes a paradox. For Nietzsche's diagnosis seems to make it clear that desire for the absolute is intrinsic to the practice of philosophy – that in important respects, philosophy just is the (hopeless) attempt to frame or discover overarching, context-less objectivity. Furthermore, Nietzsche's analysis of philosophy is accompanied by a recognition and critique of the nihilism that arises in reaction to the collapse of absolutism.

I suggest that we can find (in Nietzsche) a resolution of this paradox that involves the continuation of philosophy, not through a consciousness *for* philosophy, but through understanding philosophy as a process without a subject. That is, understanding philosophy as a practice that does not involve a *moment* that is the resolution of the paradox at all, but which is a process, involving the continual crisis of its paradox (which we might see as a constitutive paradox).

I Introduction

The first motivation for this paper is meta-philosophical: the question of the possibility of there being a role for philosophy. The problem for philosophy is that it looks like an exercise of talking about the world, rather than in the world, and that such an exercise (metaphysics) is impossible. On the other hand, if philosophy eschews metaphysics, it looks as though it collapses into science, or at best remains as a gate-keeping exercise, monitoring discourse, but not actually saying anything, as in logical positivism, perhaps also critical theory, and possibly also the later Wittgenstein. The second motivation is a more directly scholarly interest in Nietzsche – specifically in his perspectivism and his view of truth. The outcome of these combined interests is a proposal regarding an answer to the first question that might be available in Nietzsche's work.

Nietzsche presents philosophy as a tension between the ascetic ideal and the nihilism that arises from the collapse of that ideal. The ascetic ideal expresses philosophy's aim to capture timeless, unconditioned, cold truth. But the expression of the ideal – the commitment to truth-above-all – shows that the ideal is impossible, that all judgement is ineradicably conditioned as a naturalistic phenomenon. When faith in the God of the ascetic ideal is thus lost, nihilism arises, either as a refusal to judge (thus the silencing of life), or as an ironic, 'artistic' dismissal of the ideal, which Nietzsche finds even more distasteful (*GM* BK.III, §26).

The collapse of the ascetic ideal can only be overcome through active nihilism: acknowledging the collapse, yet somehow continuing to make judgements in spite of that. In this context, Nietzsche offers us certain figures – the new philosopher, and the philosopher of the future – who are able to live and thrive in this dual aspect.

It is perhaps natural to see these figures as exemplars, or as ideal ways to be a philosopher. My purpose, however, is to reject this sort of response. Nietzsche's new philosophers are not models of an overcoming subjectivity to which we might aspire. They are instead a trope, used to demonstrate how philosophy, as a process without a subject, can continue in the face of the unavoidability and impossibility of the ascetic ideal.

I will begin by sketching Nietzsche's account of truth, and the relation between this and his analysis of nihilism. Much of this will be familiar, but I want to be clear about the way the paradox that arises here relates to perspectivism. I do not attempt to resolve the paradox that perspectivism seems to generate; instead, I claim that the paradox is integral to Nietzsche's

point about judgement in general and truth in particular. Because of this, the hope of a consciousness that is able to surmount the conflict between the ascetic ideal and nihilism amounts to turning away from Nietzsche's analysis. That is, whatever the psychological plausibility of such a consciousness, it is a consciousness that would amount to a reassertion of the fantasy of the ascetic ideal itself: the rediscovery of a surmounting, knowing consciousness that is the very target of Nietzsche's attack.

II Philosophy's Paradox

In a note in *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche says:

> 'Truth' is … not something there, that might be found or discovered—but something *that must be created* and that gives a name to a *process,* or rather to a will to overcome that has in itself no end—introducing truth, as a *processus in infinitum,* an active determining—not a becoming-conscious of something [that] is 'in itself' firm and determined. It is a word for the 'will to power.' (Nietzsche, *WP* §522 - from 1886/7)

The passage expresses two key themes in Nietzsche's later approach to truth.[1] It presents the rejection of 'metaphysical realism', and it adopts a view of the epistemic subject as actively 'establishing' the truth of its world, not as a voluntaristic creation, but as the expression of its grounding in the world. The subject is grounded in biology, psychology, culture and language, and this constitutes the naturalistic basis for the will to power, the will to survive by overcoming and dominating the world.

This image is meant to contrast with that of the ideal epistemic subject of the tradition Nietzsche sees as stemming from Plato: a disinterested observer of the real, objective world. In the *Genealogy of Morals* he refers to the conceptual fiction 'that posited a pure, will-less, painless, timeless, knowing subject', and says that with concepts such as this,

> We are asked to think an eye which cannot be thought at all, an eye turned in no direction at all, an eye where the active and interpretative powers are to be suppressed, absent, but through which seeing still becomes a seeing-something, so it is an absurdity and a non-concept of an eye that is demanded. (*GM* Bk III §12)

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1 The question of the distinction between 'early' and 'late' Nietzsche is beyond the scope of this paper. I have previously supported a distinction between Nietzsche's early work ('On Truth and Lie', for example), and the 'mature' positions. In doing so I follow the standard developmental story of, for example, Clark (1990). However, recent scholarship by James Porter (2000) makes me now hesitate in aspects of this assessment. See also the discussion of Clark's interpretation in Conard (1994).

These interpreting powers cannot be eliminated, since they constitute the very possibility of the subject in the first place, but they in turn make nugatory the notion of an independent reality: as if, Nietzsche says, 'world would remain over after one deducted the perspective!' (*WP* §567).

It is, of course, is logically possible that both Nietzsche's claims about the subject *and* metaphysical realism are true. However, I think that Nietzsche's point here is that this logical possibility is particularly vacuous. Consider the *Phaedrus* as one way of expressing this possibility. Plato invokes the realm of the Forms, constituting what is true and real, but announces that it is inaccessible to humans because of all-too-human characteristics that Nietzsche would recognise. The problem with this idea is that Plato purports to speak about what cannot be thought, and we need to ask what role the posit plays – and here we echo Nietzsche's critique of Kant (e.g., *GS* §335 & *BGE* §6).[2] So while we do not rule out metaphysical realism by invoking the grounded subject, we have reason to be suspicious and dismissive of an attachment to the possibility.[3]

We can understand Nietzsche's approach here, as throughout his work, as an assault on our conceit that we can, in our evaluations, possess nobility. That is, the conceit that our philosophy, our aesthetic, moral and epistemic judgements, can in principle have a higher, justifying ground, purified of biology, psychology and habit. Nietzsche's constant refrain is that our judgements arise out of and express our human condition, and that we have no access to a source of justification that transcends that human condition. This naturalism is crucial to the understanding of Nietzsche I am promoting.[4]

This naturalism – and thus the rejection of the subject, and the metaphysics, of the ascetic ideal – generates a problem that became familiar, if not always well understood, through the Twentieth Century; for in undermining the ascetic ideal, naturalists undermine the self-understanding of philosophy, and the cultural and political self-confidence to which that self-

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2 See Welshon (2004, Ch. 4) for a useful discussion.

3 There is a worthwhile discussion to be had (but not here) as to how 'fair' Nietzsche is to Kant. That is, it is worth asking to what extent Nietzsche's diagnosis of Kant's motivations, and his contempt for Kant's heirs (and so, of the implications of Kant's philosophy) infects Nietzsche's representation of Kant's philosophy itself. Such a discussion would help clarify Nietzsche's argumentative-rhetorical methodology. For aspects of such a discussion, see Hill (2003).

4 Such an interpretation of Nietzsche is developed to good effect by Leiter (2004).

understanding relates. If our evaluations lose their transcendent ground, then the self-conceptions, and institutions, that depend on acceptance of this fantasy also lose their ground.

In the Book of the *Genealogy of Morals* devoted to the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche says that all philosophers are oblivious to 'how much the will to truth itself first requires justification'.

> From the moment faith in the God of the ascetic ideal is denied, a *new problem arises:* that of the *value* of truth.
> The will to truth requires a critique—let us thus define our own task—the value of truth must for once be experimentally *called into question.* (*GM,* Bk. III *§*24.)

It is crucial to note that Nietzsche is not here denying the value of truth and the will to truth. Calling the value of truth into question instead amounts to casting off the assumption that truth is always, necessarily, for all people, intrinsically valuable. It is also important to see that the critique of the will to truth does not and cannot involve stepping outside of the epoch of philosophy. Rather, it involves the arising of a new self-consciousness, in which 'the will to truth becomes conscious of itself as a *problem'* (*GM* Bk. III *§*27). Here, however, lies the threat, since the casting aside of absolutes, and thus being forced to take on, in a deep sense, responsibility for one's evaluations, can generate a surrender to passive nihilism.

That is, passive nihilism is an indirect outcome of absolutism. It derives from the will to truth's absolutist desire, which aims to close down new ways of seeing and acting. For Nietzsche this is life denying and dishonest – absolutist nihilism.

> Man seeks 'the truth': a world that is not self-contradictory, not deceptive, does not change, a *true* world …
> 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. (WP* §585)

The danger is that when the will to truth is frustrated by the inevitable impossibility of its absolutist ideals it collapses into passive nihilism – and this, for Nietzsche, is a cultural-political, not just an intellectual danger. The absolutist, on discovering that there is no true world, casts aside the desire to evaluate because they can no longer conceive of its possibility, and rests in 'skepticism, the soft, sweet, soothing, poppy flower of skepticism' (*BGE* §208). Regarding 'modern historiography' Nietzsche says:

> Its noblest claim nowadays is that it is a *mirror,* it rejects all teleology, it does not want to 'prove' anything any more; it scorns playing the judge, and shows

> good taste there, – it affirms as little as it denies, it asserts and 'describes' … All this is ascetic to a high degree; but to an even higher degree it is *nihilistic* […]! You see a sad, hard but determined gaze, – an eye *peers out,* like a lone explorer at the North Pole (perhaps so as not to peer in? or peer back?…). Here there is snow, here life is silenced …. (*GM* Bk III §26)

As well, however, and for Nietzsche more worryingly, there is the alternative playful response to the collapse of absolutism:

> With regard to that other type of historian, perhaps an even more 'modern', pleasure-seeking, voluptuous type who flirts with life as much as with the ascetic ideal, who uses the word 'artist' as a glove and commandeers for himself the praise of contemplation: oh, how thirsty these cloying wits make me even for ascetics and winter landscapes! (*GM* Bk III §26)

Yet the will to truth is life *enhancing* when, out of nihilism, it emerges as a reborn will to evaluate, in active nihilism (*WP* §§22&23).

This expression of the will to truth in active nihilism involves a complex challenge. On the one hand, it appears to involve a certain dishonesty, and a certain forgetfulness, for surely in the assertion of truths we must deny, or at least forget our perspective nature, our being a part of nature and thus embedded in the deception and error that pervades human life. But in fact, for Nietzsche, this life affirming expression of the will to truth must be done with honesty, refusing to forget, displaying the willingness to continually acknowledge the limited, conditioned nature of our interpretations, and not rest with them as absolute. He says that the will to truth involves, not the desire to avoid being deceived, but the assertion of a principle: 'I will not deceive, not even myself'. With this principle, he says, 'we stand on moral ground' (*GS* §344). We can see the complexity that has arisen here. The claim that our truths be evaluated in terms of their value for life is an ethical move; but active nihilism, the life-preserving rebirth of the will to truth in the light of an ethical critique of truth, is a moral position, involving the adoption of honesty as a principle. As the assertion of truth it seemingly inherits the attempt to present ourselves as capable of adopting an unconditioned perspective; but as active nihilism it involves (also) directly confronting our conditioned nature.[5]

By honesty Nietzsche also means the ability to 'read well', to read slowly and to allow new, possibly unexpected, possibly valuable possibilities of interpretation to arise from a text. This

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5 By way of contrast, see Nehamas (1985: 128-133).

idea accompanies Nietzsche's return to philology[6] (a revised conception of philology) in the later work.

> Philology is to be understood here in a very wide sense as the art of reading well—of being able to read off a fact *without* falsifying it by interpretation, *without* losing caution, patience, subtlety in the desire for understanding. (*A* §52.)

Furthermore, Nietzsche's own commitment to the will to truth in the face of nihilism is exemplified in all his work and in the nature of his work. Those very passages in which he most vehemently attacks 'truth', or insists that we face up to the fact of the beast in the human, display his own commitment to the task of speaking the truth, and his insistence on honesty.

As will be clear, the beneficial aspects of the will to truth seem to generate a paradox. Nietzsche seems to be asking, if we are to avoid the poles of nihilism, that we both accept perspectivism *and* engage seriously – with the seriousness of a child at play (*BGE* §94; compare §57) – in a philological search for and creation of value and truth. This seems to be a difficult task.[7]

III Perspectivism

Nietzsche deploys 'perspectivism' in a range of situations, and it is natural, and often important, to be sensitive to the difference between, for example, epistemic, aesthetic, moral, and truth perspectivism. However, I suggest that it is equally important to understand the overarching feature of the notion, as a thesis about evaluation or judgement. In my view, perspectivism is not a thesis about sets of beliefs (and here I agree with Hales and Welshon (2000)), and it is not best thought of as a thesis directly about interpretation (and here I disagree with Nehamas (1985)). Perspectivism is a thesis that expresses a naturalistic understanding of the human, and especially a naturalistic understanding of those aspects of human activity that have been thought of as supernatural or transcendental: pre-eminently, the assignment of value. Perspectivism is the thesis that all our evaluations are conditioned by the

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6 If, indeed, 'return' is the correct term, in the light of Porter's work. Schrift (1990, Ch. 6) offers a reading of Nietzsche's developmental relation to philology close to the one I have adopted here.

7 This discussion should make it clear that Nietzsche does not, as some have suggested (e.g., Tanesini [1995], and Danto [1965, Ch. 3]) hold a type of pragmatic theory of truth. He does not define truth as what is life enhancing; he evaluates (or asks that we evaluate) the particular life enhancing effects of the category of truth and the will to truth. It is best thought of as an ethical theory of truth.

biological, psychological, cultural and linguistic background in which we are embedded and which constitutes our perspective. It is therefore a rebuttal of the idea, the idea that ultimately defines the ascetic ideal, that our evaluations can, at least in principle, be given an ultimate justification.

Understood thus, perspectivism does not automatically generate the claim that all our evaluations are 'subjective' – yet it is true that the term itself, read as an optical metaphor, makes it easy to assimilate perspectivism to a range of un-Nietzschean notions in epistemology and cultural theory.

One consequence of a focus on the optical metaphor, I suspect, is the attention paid to the possibility that perspectivism falls prey to a self-referential semantic paradox. The idea is that the thesis appears to be a claim *regarding* all possible perspectives, and such a claim seems to be absolute in its scope. That is, it seems to carry the pragmatic implication that it holds *in* all perspectives as well, and in that case it implicitly claims to be what it says is impossible. However, if the thesis *itself* is perspectival, it allows that there are perspectives in which absolutism is true; but for absolutism to be true, there cannot be perspectives in which perspectivism is true (if we assume that perspectivism entails the denial that there are statements true in all perspectives) – so it seems, either perspectivism is absolutely false, or it is absolutely true, and therefore false.[8]

The general tendency, among those who attempt to save Nietzsche from paradox, is to moderate either the scope or strength of perspectivism, in a way that avoids any semantic or truth-functional paradox; that is, it avoids a situation in which we are unable to assign the thesis a determinate truth value.

Clark (1990), for example, says that we ought see the thesis as a sentence of a metalanguage (*a la* Tarski), which never includes itself within its scope; and Schrift (1990 Ch. 6) suggests that the thesis is less radical than it at first appears because it is in fact claiming that perspectivism is only perspectivally true.

Nehamas (1985 Ch. 2) thinks that concern about a paradox here is based on the mistaken assumption that just because a view is an interpretation, it is false. He says that we should understand the thesis of perspectivism modally. That is, he suggests that we should treat

8 Hales and Welshon (2000 pp. 21-31) provide a useful survey of the problem.

perspectivism as the thesis that *every* view is an interpretation, and recognise that this implies only that the thesis, like any interpretation (therefore like any view), *might* be false (pp. 65-68). Hales and Welshon (2000 Ch. 1) reject Nehamas's approach, on the basis, I take it, that we would need to assign the thesis itself a truth value, given that it is asserted. Hales and Welshon instead identify and defend a form of weak perspectivism, according to which the truth value of some statements vary from perspective to perspective, but the truth of others is absolute, since these truths are required by certain forms of life.

I want to be clear that I think that the debate here is significant and interesting. But I also think that it distracts us when we are trying to get a grip on Nietzsche's perspectivism. I think that we should focus, not on a semantic paradox, but on a pragmatic paradox in his perspectivism. We need to focus on the content of the thesis: the claim that all evaluation, although understanding itself as the outcome of disinterested and objective consideration – of rationality – in fact arises as the outgrowth of a locus of power, and is grounded in non-rationality. Now the paradox here is that what looks like an overarching claim at the same time acknowledges itself to be 'merely' perspectival. This generates the pragmatic paradox that if one believed perspectivism to be true one would hardly bother engaging in the sort of evaluative exercise that constitutes Nietzsche's life and work – one would instead become a passive nihilist.[9]

In this context, it is worth considering an interesting possibility. We might note that Nietzsche is, in effect, a naturalistic, anti-foundationalist, deflationary fallibilist. That is, we might note that the sorts of positions Nietzsche adopted are fairly close to being mainstream in contemporary epistemology. Therefore, given Nietzscheanism has pretty much won the battle, let's drop the hyperbole and move on.

However, the problem with this approach is that it exposes itself as a futile attempt to disguise an underlying absolutist ideal – that is, as an attempt to create a new overarching, knowing stance.[10] No such comfortable position is available for us; since any position – any

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9 See Nehamas (1985 pp. 130-131), where my previous comments notwithstanding he shows awareness of the issue.

10 See Genealogy of Morals, Bk. III, §24, on the 'free spirits' – 'they believe they are all as liberated as possible, these "free, very free spirits": and yet … this ideal is quite simply their ideal as well'.

perspective – itself becomes a target for the will to truth.[11] Any position that resolves or side-steps perspectivism, that is to say, misses the fundamental point of perspectivism.

In my view, if we do confront the paradox head on we can see that it shows us something important about the logic of a will to truth. On this interpretation, perspectivism is the culmination of the will to truth, and the position to which the will to truth returns. One dimension of the will to truth is critical – questioning, challenging, tapping the idols of existing philosophies and listening for the sound of their hollowness, demonstrating the all too human origins of absolute claims. This critical activity is a fundamental aspect of the will to truth. And this dimension of the will to truth, and its flowering in various naturalising analyses, is what drives us towards perspectivism. That is, the will to truth drives us to a position that undermines itself, and amounts to nihilism. By its insistent commitment to truthfulness the will to truth exposes the perspectival nature of *all* evaluations (all knowledge claims, all moral claims, all aesthetic claims), and this must mean, if the will to truth is to retain its truthfulness and *integrity*, exposing and acknowledging its own embedded-ness in and as a perspective.

In the 'perspectivist' work,[12] Nietzsche continues to claim that various beliefs are false, and he also claims at various points that all world-views are fictions. But this is because 'falsehood' (like 'truth') adopts two roles.[13] In the first instance, we have a truth claim (that a certain view is false) from within and according to a perspective. Nothing in the thesis of perspectivism implies that the making of truth claims is illegitimate. In fact, it is crucial to the rejection of passive nihilism.

In the second case, falsehood is seemingly used in a non-perspectival sense, as when he says that synthetic *a priori* judgements, or the category of cause and effect, for example, are unavoidable and/or necessary for survival, but false. Here, when Nietzsche asserts the falsity of these judgements and categories, he is denying the possibility of absolute truth: if truth equals objective representation of an independent reality, then all claims are false, because perspectivism shows us that such a relation is impossible.

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11 Nietzsche does, as I've said, adopt these views at various points, but not as a response to the paradox of perspectivism.

12 Although perhaps not in the very late work, as Clark (1990) points out.

13 This double-use is especially prevalent in Book III of Will to Power. See Ackerman (1990: 8-9) on Nietzsche's double use of crucial terms.

So in the second case we have a truth claim which amounts to an assertion of the absolute truth of perspectivism. Both the claim that these judgements and categories are unavoidable, and the invocation of life as a measure, appear to be universal claims. In one sense they are, but they are asserted from within a position, which also asserts the truth of perspectivism. That is, Nietzsche is not reaching outside his perspectivist thesis and seeking support from absolute truths. He is, from within his perspective, attempting to create truths, which is to say that he is attempting to bring it about that these claims become truths.

The earlier discussion of the ethics and morality of truth ought make it clear that the paradoxical nature of this situation is crucial to an understanding of the will to truth. Had Nietzsche avoided the assertion of truths – more generally, avoided evaluation, creating/discovering values – he would have collapsed into nihilism, as he would had he come to playfully disregard the value of truth.

IV The Philosopher of the Future

We might summarise the interpretative and practical dilemma Nietzsche gives us as follows: A fundamental aspect of Nietzsche's work is the attempt to undermine the idea of the absolute, as a source of value, meaning and truth, and to tease out the traces of this idea in our philosophising. Nietzsche is thus one of those (accompanied, for example, by Wittgenstein[14]) who may have given us the means to complete the Kantian project of moving beyond metaphysical realism and a representational understanding of meaning.

However, Nietzsche's diagnosis seems to make it clear that desire for the absolute is intrinsic to the practice of philosophy – that in important respects, philosophy just is the (hopeless) attempt to frame or discover overarching, context-less objectivity. Furthermore, this absolutism collapses under its reflexive expression of the will to truth through naturalistic and genealogical critique. Finally, Nietzsche's analysis of philosophy is accompanied by a recognition and critique of the nihilism that arises in reaction to the collapse of absolutism. If philosophy is unavoidably absolutist, if absolutism is doomed, and if the avoidance of philosophy is nihilism, what then?

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14 The relation between Nietzsche's and Wittgenstein's work is a rich but largely untapped area of study. Two useful beginnings are Turanli (2003) and Bowles (2003); see also Cavell (2003).

In Section 2 of *Beyond Good and Evil,* after challenging philosophers' faith in the existence of opposite values, Nietzsche suggests, as part of the critique of absolutism and the ascetic ideal, that

> Whatever value might be attributed to truth, truthfulness, and selflessness, it could be possible that appearance, the will to deception, and craven self-interest should be accorded a higher and more fundamental value for all life. It could even be possible that whatever gives value to those good and honorable things has an incriminating link, bond, or tie to the very things that look like their evil opposites; perhaps they are even essentially the same. (*BGE* §2)

He then offers a challenge, and a type of hope.

> Perhaps! – But who is willing to take charge of such a dangerous Perhaps! For this we must await the arrival of a new breed of philosophers, ones whose taste and inclination are somehow the reverse of those we have seen so far – philosophers of the dangerous Perhaps in every sense. – And in all seriousness: I see these new philosophers approaching. (*BGE* §2)

The figures announced here are able to meet the challenge, and resolve the dilemma of truthfulness. It looks as though we are being introduced to a type of character: someone with the capacity to embrace the nihilism that accompanies the recognition that there is no true world, and yet create truths. The new philosopher is able to assert truths as truths while acknowledging that they are lies, fabrications and simplifications arising out of our humanity. The new philosopher, therefore, seems able to resolve our dilemma. I suspect that the appeal of such a character explains a certain part of Nietzsche's attraction.

Yet the solution ought be rejected. On the one hand, it is not easy to imagine the psychology of this character. The new philosopher is required to exemplify the will to power through exercise of the will to truth, and thereby avoid the abyss of passive nihilism or relativism – this is one dimension of truthfulness. Yet, the new philosopher is supposed to do this while at the same time accepting the ubiquity of perspectivism, thereby avoiding the tyranny of dogmatism. Which is to say that the new philosopher is to create truths as a search for truth while *remembering* that his position is that of the human all to human. This task presents a peculiar psychological challenge.

Perhaps we should hesitate to deny outright the psychological possibility of such a character. But there is a more important consideration, for it seems that Nietzsche should in any case reject my representation of the new philosopher as a *character.* If the conflict could be resolved in a character – that is, in a subjectivity that could attain its unity and purpose, yet

maintain its integrity through truthfulness – then surely we would have offered just that knowing subjectivity which was the ideal of absolutism. That is, we would have overcome Nietzsche's deconstruction of the subjectivity that lay at the core of absolutism.

It might be said that the new philosopher simply exemplifies a new way of thinking, which we, who read Nietzsche well, can take on. Yet this response yet again amounts to a reassertion, at a higher level, of the ascetic ideal – of an end to contingency and becoming through a unity of being and becoming. That is, the new philosopher, as an ideal character, has attained true, perspective-free knowledge, and in doing this, and putting an end to contingency and doubt, has put an end to the conditions for living well; has, that is to say, laid the foundations for the return of passive nihilism.

It seems, therefore, we best read Nietzsche's hailing of the new philosopher (announced 'in all seriousness') as ironic, prompting us to think differently about the whole question of our relation, as subjects, to truth and knowledge. These comments, in effect, repeat my earlier point about the desire to resolve the paradox of perspectivism.

V Conclusion

If we see Nietzsche's ideal philosopher as standing for a *process,* not a fixed character displaying a 'way of thinking,' just as we saw truth as a process, the situation may change. We can now regard the *practice of philosophy* as ideally a continual process of engagement with the twin poles of dogmatism and passive nihilism. Were this process brought to an end, we would have attained the nihilism of the triumph of dogmatism, or the nihilism of the collapse into relativism – and this would amount to the end of philosophy. But philosophy continues, because there is at its core a certain irrationality – a certain childishness, a Dionysian streak, the unconscious, a will to power – which ignores the inevitability of nihilism, and in spite of that inevitability, keeps driving the process on.

Now, what I've said here may risk making things look too easy. It might be interpreted as recommending quietism regarding the problem of philosophy, as claiming that things are well with philosophy, after all. But that would be a mistake, and it is clearly not Nietzsche's position. The persistent problem for philosophy is that it tends to maintain itself by way of a lack of truthfulness, amounting to a motivated blindness. This lack of truthfulness arises in two related ways – in the forgetting of philosophy's history, and in the forgetting of philosophy's embodied-ness. That is to say, philosophy can tend to maintain itself by denying

its perspectival nature. For this reason, the account given of the nature of philosophy needs to be supplemented by the requirement for the constant presence of its critical side, its memory, a presence that continually threatens crisis.

In a sense I *have* been representing this as a 'new way of thinking'. But it is a new way of thinking about the problem of philosophy. It is not a way of thinking that escapes metaphysics or that transcends the paradoxical demands of philosophy. The way of thinking about philosophy is one that surrenders the fantasy of finding ourselves one day in a knowing paradise.

That is, Nietzsche's response to the problem involves understanding philosophy as a practice lacking a *moment* that is the resolution of the paradox at all, but involving the continual crisis of its paradox. We might therefore see the paradox as constitutive of the nature and possibility of philosophy.

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