

The Dialectic of Perspectivism, II

James Conant

What follows is the second half of a paper whose first half appeared in the previous issue of this journal.

V. Varieties of Pseudo-Kantianism

As we have seen, the crucial step in Nietzsche's argument for his early doctrine is summed up in the following remark: 'If we are forced to comprehend all things only under these forms, then it ceases to be amazing that in all things we actually comprehend nothing but these forms' (1979, pp. 87–8). Before eventually learning to be suspicious of it, Nietzsche spends a good deal of time wondering instead what it would mean to *live* with the conclusion that (what he calls) "the Kantian philosophy" apparently thus forces upon one, if one allows oneself to take this step. The different ways of living with its implications that Nietzsche goes on to distinguish in his early writings play an important role in his own subsequent retrospective understanding of the stations of the dialectic through which his thought had to traverse in its movement towards his mature perspectivism. Nietzsche contrasts these, in turn, with different possible versions of stage-two perspectivism. It is these finer discriminations that Nietzsche makes among the possible ways of occupying the second and third stages of the dialectic that will briefly concern us in this part of the paper.

The prototype, for Nietzsche, of a bold thinker who follows through on the commitments of the (pseudo-)Kantian philosophy – the doctrine of "idealism" (as Nietzsche calls it in the passage quoted on p. 48 of Part I of this paper) – is Schopenhauer. But the early Nietzsche has other pseudo-Kantian heroes. Heinrich von Kleist is an instructive example.³⁴ Here is Kleist (writing his fiancé, Wilhelmine von Zenge):

I recently became familiar with the more recent, so-called Kantian philosophy, and I may impart one of its leading ideas to you without fear of its shattering you as deeply, as painfully, as it has me. For, after all, you are not versed enough in the whole matter to grasp its import

34. Certain affinities in philosophical concern that unite the writings of early Nietzsche and Kleist are easily traced to parallels in their respective understandings of what Kant is supposed

completely. I shall therefore speak as clearly as possible. If everyone saw the world through green glasses, they would be forced to judge that everything they saw *was* green, and could never be sure whether their eyes saw things as they really are, or did not add something of their own to what they saw. And so it is with our intellect. We can never be certain that what we call Truth is really Truth, or whether it does not merely appear so to us. If the latter, then the Truth that we acquire here is *not* Truth (Kleist 1982, p. 95, I have modified the translation).

First, notice how the transition here from the case of the green glasses to the case of our whole intellect involves moving in a single leap from naive perspectivism all the way to stage-three perspectivism.³⁵ Kleist, like many of Nietzsche's commentators, scoots right by stages one and two. Second, notice how, having made this transition, Kleist draws the same conclusion as the young Nietzsche: 'the Truth that we acquire here is *not* Truth'. In order to understand better how such a conclusion can appear to be immediately forced on one, as soon as one becomes captivated by anything like Kleist's analogy of the green glasses – that is, how stage-three perspectivism can seem to follow ineluctably out of the initial metaphorical extension of the concept of a

to have shown and wherein its importance is held to consist. (A useful discussion of Kleist's understanding of (what he and Nietzsche both call) "the Kantian philosophy" (i.e., pseudo-Kantianism), and how it precipitated Kleist's so-called "Kant crisis", is to be found in Muth (1954).) Partly on the basis of these parallels, a number of scholars of German letters, starting with Stefan Zweig, have been concerned to claim that there are very far-reaching affinities in the literary/philosophical projects of Kleist and Nietzsche. If this paper is right about the manner in which Nietzsche's thought develops, then any such claim, if construed to be about their respective philosophical commitments, ought not to extend at all easily to the relation between the thought of Kleist and that of the *later* Nietzsche.

35. Recourse to an analogy between colored glasses and forms of subjectivity – an analogy that allows one to move straight from naive perspectivism to stage-three perspectivism in a single leap – has become, since Kleist's time, a frequent occurrence in a popular accounts of Kant's philosophy. Here is Bertrand Russell:

According to Kant, the outer world causes only the matter of sensation, but our own mental apparatus orders this matter in space and time and supplies the concepts by means of which we understand experience. [...] If you always wore blue spectacles, you could be sure of seeing everything blue (this is not Kant's illustration). Similarly, since you always wear spatial spectacles in your mind, you are sure of always seeing everything in space (Russell 1945, p. 709–710). The employment of this putatively perspicuous illustration (which, as Russell says, is not Kant's) to explain the fundamental idea behind Kant's philosophy has the effect of turning Kant into a pseudo-Kantian in a single stroke.

perspective – it helps to see why one might think that one cannot stop halfway, why, that is, for example, stage two does not appear to a thinker such as Kleist to be a possible philosophical resting place.

In order to be able to sort those perspectives that are distorting from those that are not, the stage-two perspectivist needs to postulate some form of (what the early Nietzsche calls) “pure knowledge” – some comparatively transparent mode of access to reality. In his mature writings, Nietzsche distinguishes three successive *phases of stage-two perspectivism*: the Platonic, the Christian, and the modern scientific and sees each as growing out of and retaining two crucial presuppositions of stage one.³⁶ The first presupposition is that the “true world” is accessible only to a certain kind of appropriately tuned mind – in Platonism, to the philosopher who becomes capable of contemplating the Forms; in Christianity, to the sinner who hears the Word of God, repents, and whose subsequent employment of the natural light of reason is disciplined by a proper understanding of revealed scripture. In the third and most recent phase, Science is cast into the role formerly occupied by philosophy and religion providing, now via mathematical cum experimental resources, the proper set of concepts for homing in on the nature of the “true world”. The second presupposition is that such a tuning of the mind is achieved by overcoming all aspects of our parochial, earthbound, everyday view of the world and attaining an alternative, cognitively undistorted perspective on reality. At its inception, the scientific conception of “pure knowledge” arises initially out a hybrid of religious and scientific conceptions of transparent access. (Descartes, for example, holds that it is only if we, first, purify our idea of God that will we then, subsequently, be able come to see why it is that the principles disclosed by scientific enquiry are the ones which describe the sort of world which a benevolent God would have created along with us.) In later, increasingly scientific, versions of the third phase, to obtain the relevant sort of access to reality, the cultivation of a particular way of life (and, as a condition of that way of life, the cultivation of a suitably self-effacing character – or any other aspect of what Nietzsche calls the ascetic ideal) starts to seem to require a less and less overtly ethico-religious form of self-discipline – it can start to seem that all that is required is

36. In order to minimize confusion, I will call the more finely grained variants of the stages of the dialectic which the early Nietzsche goes to the trouble to discriminate *phases* of the dialectic and will continue to call the more coarsely grained ones, that primarily concern us here and are individuated in Part Two of this paper, *stages* of the dialectic. Each stage subtends a number of phases.

a familiarity with the conclusions of modern science that have been furnished by others. Nietzsche regards nineteenth-century scientism as a late incarnation of Platonic-Christian metaphysics without God. (He also anticipates the work of a number of contemporary historians of science in emphasizing the ways in which the modern ideal of “scientific objectivity” involves a tacit *ethical* dimension, the attainment of which requires forms of self-discipline, self-restraint, and self-overcoming. His aim is to retain and refine certain aspects of this 19th-century scientific transformation of the ethical dimension of the Platonic-Christian ascetic ideal, while stripping it of its unwitting vestigial metaphysical commitments.) He is never tempted by the idea that scientific inquiry, on its own steam, is able to furnish a metaphysically transparent mode of access to reality.³⁷ It seems obvious to him that this is a reprise of earlier gambits for

37. This is not to say that Nietzsche is hostile to *science* per se or, in particular, to the virtues of the able scientific practitioner. On the contrary, he admires them. What Nietzsche is concerned to criticize is not science or scientists going about their business, but rather a certain *philosophical conception* of what the natural sciences are able to deliver – one that is still very much alive today – according to which science is able to attain to a comparatively non-perspectival, metaphysically privileged description of the fabric of reality. This means that any topic that might seem to fit neatly under some apparently straightforward rubric such as “Nietzsche’s view of science” is, in fact, an extremely complex one, requiring nuanced treatment. The most basic requirement of such a treatment is that it not assume at the outset (as a remarkably large number of commentators do) that all Nietzsche’s remarks on the subject are expressions of a single monolithic “pro” or “con” attitude towards science. Such a treatment would need, first, to distinguish between various philosophical understandings of what the success of modern science shows and Nietzsche’s own understanding of what is important and what is mistaken in such philosophical understandings of science – that is, between (what he takes to be) the metaphysical commitments of most contemporary admirers of science and (what he takes to be) the nonetheless impressive implicit ideal of truth (along with its concomitant forms of self-discipline) that has arisen through the practice of modern science. (This has the following consequence: we may not simply take it for granted that because Nietzsche finds much to admire in modern science he therefore is concerned to celebrate its accomplishments for the reasons that contemporary philosophical naturalists are.) Second, such a treatment would need to distinguish between the various transformations that Nietzsche’s understanding of the dialectic of perspectivism undergoes in order to distinguish the various views he holds at different periods in the development of his philosophy regarding what and how much in the way of knowledge any perspective (including a scientific perspective) on the world can deliver. Third, it would need to distinguish between the various transformations that Nietzsche’s attitude towards the Platonic-Christian ascetic ideal undergoes in order to distinguish the various views he holds at different periods in the development of his philosophy regarding what and how much should be retained in the particular version of the ascetic ideal implicit in the ideal of truth that underlies the conduct and aim of scientific inquiry.

attempting to achieve a stable form of stage-two perspectivism. No strategy of “pure knowledge” ever appears credible to Nietzsche – regardless of whether it is the pure knowledge of a Platonic contemplation of the forms, the pure knowledge of a Christian communion with the Deity, the pure knowledge of a Galilean or Cartesian description of the universe in terms of primary qualities, or the putatively even purer knowledge of the latest successor to Galilean or Cartesian science – one that involves an even more radical conception of how the true fabric of the universe requires transcendence of our ordinary perspectives on it. If all such strategies of “pure knowledge” fail to tempt one, then one is likely to be drawn to move rapidly from the initial metaphorical inflection of the concept of a perspective to a stage-three employment of it.

Nietzsche also distinguishes various *phases of stage three*. The first phase is represented by the example of those Kantians who are ‘mere clattering thought- and calculating-machines’ (Nietzsche 1997, p. 140). We will return to them in a moment. Kant himself (according to Nietzsche’s pseudo-Kantian reading of him) fully saw the epistemological shape of the problem, but (the early Nietzsche thinks) failed to think through the question of the philosophical response that his own discovery called for. Kleist’s response represents a more courageous if no less failed attempt to come to grips with this. When we left Kleist, he had just arrived at the same conclusion as the young Nietzsche – that ‘the Truth that we acquire [...] is *not* Truth’. What Nietzsche admires about Kleist, however, is not just that he arrives, through philosophical reflection, at this conclusion, but his unflinching and heartfelt *response* to the conclusion he thus reaches. Kleist’s letter continues:

Ah, Wilhelmine, if the point of this thought does not strike you to your heart, do not smile at one who feels himself wounded by it in his most sacred inner being. My one, my highest goal has sunk from sight, and I have no other.

Since coming to the realization in my soul that Truth is nowhere to be known here on earth, I have not touched another book. I have paced idly in my room. I have sat by the open window, I have run from the house, an inner unrest at last drove me to taverns and coffee houses, I have gone to plays and concerts for distraction, and, to find some relief, I have even committed a folly which I would rather you learned about from Carl; and still my one thought, which my soul, with this tumult all about it, kept belaboring with a burning anxiety, was this: your *only*, your *highest* goal has sunk from sight.

Ah, it is the most painful state of mind to be completely without a goal

in life, something toward which our inner self, in joyful occupation, might unswervingly progress – but such was my state (Kleist 1982, pp. 95–96).

Nietzsche quotes from this letter of Kleist's in his essay 'Schopenhauer as Educator'. In that essay, Nietzsche describes in some detail (what he calls) 'the three dangers [...] in whose shadow Schopenhauer grew up'. Of these, 'the second was despair of the truth'. Nietzsche introduces his discussion of this danger with the following remarks:

This danger attends every thinker who sets out from the Kantian philosophy, provided he is a vigorous and whole man in suffering and desire and not a mere clattering thought- and calculating-machine. [...] It seems to me, indeed, that Kant has had a living and life-transforming influence on only a very few men. One can read everywhere, I know, that since this quiet scholar produced his work a revolution has taken place in every domain of the spirit; but I cannot believe it. For I cannot see it in those men who would themselves have to be revolutionized before a revolution could take place in any whole domain whatsoever. If Kant ever should begin to exercise any wide influence we shall be aware of it in the form of a gnawing and disintegrating scepticism and relativism; and only in the most active and noble spirits [...] would there appear instead that undermining and despair of all truth such as Heinrich von Kleist for example experiences as the effect of the Kantian philosophy. "Not long ago", he writes in his moving way, "I became acquainted with the Kantian philosophy" [There then follows an extended quotation from Kleist's letter] (1997, p. 140)

Nietzsche here distinguishes between two different sorts of response to (what he calls) "the Kantian philosophy". The first sort of response is that of the first phase: it is to be found among those who are 'mere clattering thought- and calculating-machines' – who, in effect, dishonor Kant by announcing that, due to Kant, 'a revolution has taken place in every domain of the spirit', while failing to think through the consequences of the Kantian philosophy. Their procrastination does not permit them, however, to evade those consequences. The inadequacy of their response is to be gauged not so much by what they say about the Kantian philosophy, as in *how* they say it – in their assenting to it without any accompanying form of inner change – and in what spreads in the aftermath of their complacent form of allegiance to the Kantian philosophy:

‘a gnawing and disintegrating skepticism and relativism’.³⁸ The second sort of response is found only among those ‘most active and noble spirits’, such as Kleist, who not only try to think the matter through, but who also allow themselves to *assess the meaning* of that to which they thus find themselves obliged to assent. Immediately after quoting from Kleist’s letter, Nietzsche goes on to ask:

When, indeed, will men again learn to assess the meaning of a philosophy in the “most sacred part” of their being? And yet this must be done if we are to understand what, after Kant, Schopenhauer can be to us – namely the leader who leads us from the heights of skeptical gloom or criticizing renunciation up to the heights of tragic contemplation (1997, p. 141).

It is, Nietzsche’s thinks, to Kleist’s credit that he works his way deeply and honestly enough into this stage of the dialectic to attain to ‘the heights of skeptical gloom’. What Nietzsche admires about Kleist is, we might say, the authenticity of his response.

Nietzsche, however, does not here mention this response in order to recommend it as the ultimate terminus for philosophical reflection, but rather only to highlight it as a necessary transitional stage. What undergoes development in his thinking here is not (yet) his understanding of the substance of the philosophical doctrine to which one ought to assent, but rather his understanding of what sort of *attitude* one ought to have towards the doctrine – what sort of posture one ought to assume in the face of the revelation contained in an honest assessment of where the Kantian philosophy leaves one. It is along this dimension that the early Nietzsche seeks to distinguish between Kant’s, Kleist’s, Schopenhauer’s, and his own (early) philosophical positions – where what is at issue now is not differences in philosophical “position” in the sense of differences in epistemological or metaphysical doctrine.³⁹ What is at issue here, for Nietzsche, are rather differences in “position” in the sense of *existential stances* adopted towards a commonly shared first-order philosophical

38. It is worth noting that here in 1874, at this still very early point in his career, only shortly after having penned *Truth and Lie in Their Extra-Moral Sense*, Nietzsche is already seeking for some way to concede what is true in the Kantian philosophy while avoiding ‘a gnawing and disintegrating skepticism and relativism’.

39. Along this dimension, Nietzsche, in 1874, thinks there is little that separates the four of them, taking all to be on roughly the same philosophical page, all wanting to espouse variants of the same doctrine. Nietzsche’s ability to see Kant, on the one hand, and Kleist, Schopenhauer

doctrine. Kleist, unlike Kant himself, is awarded credit for appreciating that an authentic existential appropriation of the full implications of the Kantian doctrine will not be compatible with leading the clockwork life of a professor – i.e., the sort of life that Nietzsche takes Kant himself to have led. Nietzsche distinguishes between Kleist’s and Schopenhauer’s respective responses to the potentially shattering revelations of “the Kantian philosophy”, by noting that Schopenhauer, too, passes through the phase of skeptical gloom (that leaves Kleist utterly shattered) but he does not stop there: he eventually attains to a certain degree of genuine tranquility – he learns to accommodate himself to the human predicament as revealed by the Kantian philosophy. He “ascends” even further than Kleist, all the way ‘up to the heights of tragic contemplation’. But, a little further on in this same essay, (the still very early) Nietzsche wonders: must one be content with a tragic response here, or is some more affirmative form of response perhaps possible?⁴⁰

In this set of transitions – from his praise of Kleist for genuinely embracing the mood of skeptical gloom (that is the touchstone of an authentic preliminary response to “the Kantian philosophy”), to his praise of Schopenhauer (for working his way first into and then out of such a mood), to his own increasingly strident repudiation of Schopenhauer’s tragically contemplative quietism, and hence to his own early faltering attempts at a more cheerful response to the (pseudo-Kantian) abyss – there is, already at the time of this still very early essay of Nietzsche’s, something which remains true of Nietzsche’s struggle

and himself, on the other, as on anywhere near the same page is not accidentally related to his having read much more Schopenhauer than Kant, and thereby, in the process, imbibing Schopenhauer’s (thoroughly pseudo-Kantian) reading of Kant. From his very early to his latest writings, Nietzsche’s Kant, for the most, simply is Schopenhauer’s Kant – and therefore, I would argue, very far from Kant. Indeed, I would argue that the understanding of the dialectic of perspectivism that Nietzsche eventually arrives at in his mature philosophy actually brings him in certain ways much closer to Kant’s own understanding of these matters (and, in particular, of the relation between forms of subjectivity and the possibility of knowledge) than any that is available according to the (pseudo-Kantian) philosophical view that Nietzsche here identifies with “the Kantian philosophy”. But such an argument is well beyond the scope of this paper.

40. The author of ‘Schopenhauer as Educator’ does not mean to stop at the point where Schopenhauer himself comes to a rest. Indeed, it is the burden of this early essay of Nietzsche’s to show that Schopenhauer succeeds in being Nietzsche’s “educator” precisely by enabling him to attain an appreciation of the limitations of the Schopenhauerian philosophy, thereby helping him come of philosophical age and no longer merely remain Schopenhauer’s pupil, satisfied with the Schopenhauerian response of tragic contemplation. For further discussion, see my ‘Nietzsche’s Perfectionism: A Reading of Schopenhauer as Educator’ (2001).

with perspectivism at every subsequent phase of his philosophical trajectory: namely, a resolute determination to *think through* the problem, trying to find some way to a further stage of the dialectic, suspecting that perhaps the dialectic comes to a premature climax in stage three.

VI. The Fundamental Commitments of Nietzsche's Early Perspectivism

The time has come to take a closer look at the fundamental commitments of Nietzsche's early perspectivism. I will identify three of these⁴¹, the first of which comes forcefully into view in connection with his reflections on the topic of transcendence. The very idea of transcendence strikes the early Nietzsche as inherently suspect. But if he throws the concept of transcendence away altogether, he threatens to saw off the branch he sits on when he employs his favorite philosophical metaphor – the metaphor of a perspective. In order for us to be able to understand a metaphorical application of this concept, we must first be able to make *some* sense of its literal application. That is, we must allow that the ordinary concept of a perspective is an example of the sort of thing which *does* admit of transcendence. To say that something round looks elliptical when viewed from a certain perspective presupposes the idea that there is something that counts as transcending that perspective. Nietzsche needs to hold on to some version of that idea if the rest of his argumentation is to make much sense. His argument requires that we be able to understand what words such as 'distort' and 'true estimation' are supposed to mean when, in connection with the literal use of the concept of a perspective, we utter platitudes such as the following: 'A perspective on an object involves an angle of vision on it that may *distort* our view of it (e.g., viewed from a certain angle a circular object will appear elliptical in shape) and we can arrive at a *true estimation* of the shape of the object by correcting for the angle from which we view it (e.g., when viewing it from the more advantageous perspective, we see that it is circular).' He needs to hold on to the intelligibility of such ways of talking – and hence to the idea that, in the ordinary case, there is something to mean

41. I do not wish to endorse the claim that the three fundamental commitments that I am about to distinguish in this section of the paper are, at the end of the day, properly regarded – or are even, at the end of the day, actually regarded by Nietzsche – as really separable and distinct species of philosophical confusion. Nonetheless, I provisionally treat them as if they were thus distinct, since Nietzsche works himself free of his early perspectivism in a series of steps usefully, if somewhat artificially, identified with the gradual successive repudiation of each of these fundamental commitments.

by talk of ‘transcending our perspective on the object’ – in order for there to be something for the word ‘transcendence’ to mean in the sorts of context in which Nietzsche most wants to employ it. He needs us first to be able to understand *what it would mean* for us to be able to transcend our perspective (i.e., the sort of perspective at issue at stage three), if only we could, and he then wants us to be able to go on and conclude that *we cannot do this* – where the “this” is meant to stand for something impossible but nonetheless intelligible.

It is important that it be intelligible. For the early Nietzsche takes himself to be giving voice to an important philosophical discovery when he concludes we cannot transcend our perspective. He takes himself to have discovered the impossibility of the sort of transcendence that the stage-one perspectivist thought *was* possible. (The stage-one perspectivist thinks things are really spatially extended but only apparently colored. The early Nietzsche concludes that they are no more really extended than they are really colored.) And Nietzsche takes himself to have discovered the impossibility of the sort of transcendence that the stage-two perspectivist thought was possible. (One recent sort of stage-two perspectivist – a contemporary Scientific Realist – thinks that a certain object “when viewed from the perspective of our everyday conceptual scheme” will appear to have the properties of, say, a table – solid, homogenous, etc. – whereas in reality what we call “the table” consists of mostly empty space plus some microphysical particles. Early Nietzsche thinks that the unknowable X under discussion here is no more really mostly empty space plus some microphysical particles than it is really a table.) The sorts of transcendence that seem possible at stages one and two, early Nietzsche wants to show, turn out merely to involve the exchange of one distorting perspective for another. As we move from one such perspective to another, we come no closer to achieving a true estimation of the underlying shape of reality. Previous philosophers thought our perspective could be transcended; early Nietzsche aims to show that they were wrong. But since the original logic of the concept of a perspective would seem to entail the possibility of transcendence, the stage-three perspectivist takes himself to have made an extraordinary *discovery*: his philosophical reflections have disclosed the existence of a very special, particularly fundamental, kind of perspective – one that cannot be transcended. In his eagerness to declare his discovery that our perspective cannot be transcended, Nietzsche indicates the archetypically stage-three character of his rejection of prior perspectivism. This is (what I will call) the *first fundamental commitment* of his early perspectivism that Nietzsche later subjects to close scrutiny – the supposition that the claim of the pseudo-Kantian (e.g., ‘we cannot transcend our perspec-

tive and attain a view of the object as it is in itself”) is intelligible, that it is the sort of thing that one could discover to be true or false.

One way of putting the conclusion of pseudo-Kantianism is as follows: We are unable to attain truly objective knowledge – all of our knowledge is merely subjective. One of the things “*merely* subjective” clearly is supposed to mean in this context is *not objective* (whatever that means). But the question arises whether there is an available and pertinent sense of the term ‘subjective’, when it is employed in such contexts without the modifier ‘merely’, where what is intended is not just to be identified with what is meant by ‘not objective’. In many philosophical contexts, it is natural to take ‘subjective’ as having such an independently specifiable sense – one that derives from the meaning of cognate terms such as ‘subject’ and ‘subjectivity’ in one of their possible employments. If (as early Nietzsche clearly thinks) it requires some argument – i.e., something along the lines of the early Nietzschean argument-form discussed in Part IV – to secure the conclusion that no exercise of human subjectivity is able to deliver objective knowledge (and if such an argument is one that someone else can intelligibly dispute), then terms such as ‘subjective’ and ‘subjectivity’ must in some contexts have a sense that admits of specification independently of whatever sense may be conferred upon them when they enter into a contrast with terms such as ‘objective’ and ‘objectivity’.⁴²

A *subjective* property, in one relevant independently specifiable sense of the term ‘subjective’, is a property whose very conception involves essential reference to how a thing which possesses the property affects the subject.⁴³ For

42. The term ‘subjective’, of course, in one of its possible uses, does simply mean the opposite of ‘objective’. In such contexts of use, “objectivity” is the concept that wears the trousers and “subjectivity” is understood to be the absence or failure of objectivity. Many philosophers use the term both in this way and in the way discussed in the next paragraph that has to do with the subject-dependence of certain properties. Kant, for example, in many contexts, uses the term in the former way (when, for example, he opposes subjective and objective validity; see, e.g., *Critique of Pure Reason*, A820/B848–A822/B850) but also sometimes in the latter way (when, for example, he characterizes our forms of sensibility as subjective; see, e.g., B71–72). This easily allows for confusions parallel to those touched on above in note 14 with regard to the two senses of ‘secondary’: one can easily fail to appreciate that one commits oneself to a substantial philosophical thesis in taking it that any property that is subjective in the latter sense must be subjective in the former sense as well. (I don’t mean to suggest that Kant himself falls into this confusion. If he did he would be a pseudo-Kantian.)

43. As noted earlier, a certain class of subjective properties, in the sense of subject-dependent, are often what is at issue when philosophers talk of “secondary qualities”. The availability of such a possibility of identifying secondary qualities with properties of objects (i.e., things that exist

properties that are subjective in this sense, no adequate conception of what it is for a thing to possess such a property is possible apart from a conception of the sort of (as Nietzsche likes to put it) *Wirkung* the thing typically has, in relevantly standard circumstances, *upon a subject*. I will sometimes refer to properties that are subjective in this sense as *subject-dependent* in order to distinguish this independently specifiable sense of the term ‘subjective’ from the one in which it simply signifies, without additional philosophical premises, that which is not objective. Although the paradigm of a subjective property in this independently specifiable sense of the term is a (so-called) “secondary quality” (such as color), the later Nietzsche tends to prefer to adduce examples of affective properties other than the usual secondary qualities – such as the category of the amusing or the nauseating, as well as traditional aesthetic properties, such as the beautiful and the ugly, and even (as further putative examples of affective properties) moral concepts such as the noble and ignoble. Secondary qualities such as color involve essential reference to the subject for a straightforward reason: they involve essential reference to human sentience: What it is for something to be red cannot be adequately accounted for apart from some story about its looking red under suitable circumstances to a suitably outfitted observer. (This is the feature of such qualities that makes the first metaphorical extension of the concept of perspective so inviting.)

without the mind), however, does depend upon avoiding some of the metaphysical commitments regarding the nature of secondary qualities that easily follow in the train of an endorsement of stage-one perspectivism. Consider, for example, the following doctrine: to say of an object that it is green is really to make a claim only about a quality present in the experience of the observer who reports the object to be green (and thus, so far as the object itself is concerned, it is at most to make a claim about a certain causal effect that the object is disposed to have on an observer) and hence not at all to make a claim about a genuine quality of the object itself. This doctrine entails the conclusion that secondary qualities are really qualities of the sensory experience of the observer and not at all qualities of the observed object per se (though they may be systematically related in some complicated way to causal powers that the object possesses). This doctrine easily tempts one into a further equally fateful philosophical step – to wit, the following: the adjectives that characterize sensory qualities never characterize qualities of an object common to two different observers’ experiences. This then leads to the invention of a whole set of counterpart private (merely sensory) objects that can serve as the subjects of discourse whenever such adjectives are employed. The distinction, drawn here, between, on the one hand, those apparent qualities of objects that are genuinely properties of objects albeit subjective-dependent ones and, on the other hand, those that are merely subjective qualities (and therefore at best merely apparent properties of objects) is not a distinction that can be drawn if one continues to retain the aforementioned metaphysical commitments (of the sort that are insinuated at stage one in the dialectic) regarding the nature of secondary qualities.

Something structurally analogous is at least arguably true of each of the sorts of case which the later Nietzsche most likes to rehearse: what it is for something to be funny or ugly or ignoble cannot be adequately accounted for apart from some parallel story about its appearing funny or ugly or ignoble under suitable circumstances to a suitably disposed observer. But in the early essay Nietzsche wants to include within the scope of the concept of subjectivity, putatively so understood, not only the classical candidates for secondary qualities (such as color) and broader aesthetic and ethical categories (such as humor, beauty, and nobility) but also categories as fundamental as those of quantity, quality, substance and relation. Here we have the *second fundamental commitment* of Nietzsche's early perspectivism – that the category of subjectivity, so understood, can be coherently extended in this way.

One immediate corollary of this commitment is worth flagging separately: a conception of appearances as *opaque*, screening that which appears in experience from view. Nietzsche, the stage-three perspectivist, thinks that all of the so-called “properties of reality” which are accessible to humans are in the same boat that the stage-one perspectivist thinks only secondary qualities are. Once he has taken this step, and executed the third metaphorical extension of the concept, he has arrived at a conception according to which anything that is properly termed an “appearance” is *ipso facto* not a glimpse of reality. There is no longer anything admissible to say about that which does the appearing in an appearance. Thus, on this hyperbolic extension of the concept of a perspective, the stage-three perspectivist arrives at a conception of the relation between appearance and reality in which the ordinary grammar of appearance – the original internal relation between an object that appears and *its* appearance – breaks down. The early Nietzsche resolutely affirms this consequence of the conception. He writes:

“Appearance” is a word that contains many temptations, which is why I avoid it as much as possible. For it is not true that the essence of things “appears” in the empirical world. (1979, p. 86)

Many of Nietzsche's later remarks on the concept of appearance (some of which we will look at later on) are usefully read as attempts to work himself out of the paradoxical bind in which he here places himself – one in which the only available perspectives on to the world turn out to be glances into mirrors in which we can encounter nothing but our own reflection. According to his early analysis of the concept of appearance, however, we are only able to speak with justification about the character of the *appearing* and never in a position to vindicate our entitlement to any determinate claim regarding the

character of the *appearer*.⁴⁴

Even if the scope of the category of subjectivity is usually not stretched as far as the early Nietzsche here tries to stretch it, the schema offered above for what it is for something to be a subjective property still suffices to specify a fairly straightforward and time-honored conception of subjectivity. It also gives rise, however, to the following fateful formula for specifying in substantive terms what it means for a property to be *objective*: Any property that is not (in the above sense) subjective (i.e., subject-dependent) is objective.⁴⁵ On this conception of objectivity, any property that is subjective in the above sense is *a fortiori* subjective in the other sense (i.e., not objective). Objective knowledge of the world, thus understood, must involve knowledge of properties of the world that in no way depend upon the effects such properties typically have upon the cognizing subject. This has the following consequence: objective knowledge will be possible only for those beings who are able to piece together a picture of the universe which eschews all description in terms of properties that can be understood only through an essential reference to their effects on such beings.

Put this way, it can still look as if there is something which objective knowledge, so defined, could amount to. Such a conception of objective knowledge already begins to emerge at stage one of the dialectic and, at that stage, seems to require that we weed out all “secondary” qualities in order to attain a view of the world as it is in itself. It is further refined at stage two, at the cost of having most of our everyday concepts put in the same box as secondary qualities. And by stage three, none of our forms of perception or conception are any longer left out of the box. Once this happens, the following question becomes urgent: Are we able to attain to objective knowledge? And, as we have seen, it is the negative answer to this question, couched in his own terminology of ‘anthropomorphism’ and ‘the thing in itself’, to which the early Nietzsche, when he is stuck at stage three, finds himself driven over and over again.

Notice how the positions Nietzsche here seeks to reject (various Platonic and

44. This very naturally invites the reaction of stage-four perspectivism: If there is nothing determinate to say about the X which appears here then there is nothing to the concept of a “something” underlying appearances; the concept of such an X should be thrown out – leaving us with just the “appearances” themselves. Kant refers to this as ‘the absurd conclusion that there can be appearance without anything that appears’ (*Op. cit.*, B xxvi).

45. On this way of understanding what “objectivity” is, “subjectivity” (in the sense of subject-dependence) is the concept that wears the trousers, and objectivity is understood as the overcoming of subjectivity.

Christian versions of stage-two perspectivism) continue to cast their shadow over the position Nietzsche here embraces (stage-three perspectivism). The decisive common assumption of stage-two and stage-three perspectivisms is a certain way of conceiving the distinction between reality and appearance. Not only is an appearance taken to be the manner in which an element of reality presents itself when viewed from a certain perspective, but appearances are taken to reflect what is merely local in our perspective; so that any closer approach to objective reality seems to require of us that we first purify our view of the object of everything which is correspondingly local. Objective knowledge of reality, on this conception, must attain to a maximally non-perspectival point of view on the world. It is just on the other side of this common assumption, as we saw earlier, that stage-two and stage-three perspectivisms then begin to diverge: stage two identifies the overcoming of subjectivity with the attainment of a minimally perspectival point of view (something it alleges is attainable); whereas stage three identifies the overcoming of subjectivity with the overcoming of all perspectives (something it alleges is unattainable). And the doctrine defended by the early Nietzsche is clearly a version of the latter: objective knowledge of reality is unattainable; nonetheless, there is a reality that thus remains unknown. Here we encounter the *third fundamental commitment* of Nietzsche's early perspectivism – a conception of objectivity that it shares with those forms of perspectivism that it seeks to reject.

VII. A Tendency in Nietzsche's Thought

Here is a passage, from some years later, from *Human, All Too Human*:

Let us for once accept the validity of the skeptical point of departure: if there were no other, metaphysical world and all explanations of the only world known to us drawn from metaphysics were useless to us, in what light would we then regard men and things? This question can be thought through [*Diess kann man sich ausdenken*], and it is valuable to do so. (Nietzsche 1986, I, 21)

This quotation resembles the one with which this paper opens in that it may be – and has been – taken to express a commitment to a particular philosophical doctrine⁴⁶; but, on the face of it, what it does is simply to identify the importance

46. The opposition to metaphysics voiced here (and in many other similar passages of Nietzsche's) is often construed by commentators, not without some collateral textual justification, as an

of asking a particular question. Nietzsche does not claim here to have already succeeded in having thought this question through; and, indeed, in order to count as having done so, by his later lights, there are a number of phases his thought will still need to pass through. This passage is characteristic of many of Nietzsche's remarks regarding this and other philosophical issues. The formulation places the emphasis on the importance of thinking a particular philosophical question through, while remaining remarkably noncommittal about what line of answer is to be preferred. (This is a feature of Nietzsche's writing that can either madden or gladden a reader, depending in no small part on how he or she thinks progress in philosophy is best achieved.) Nevertheless, there is no denying that one possibility that Nietzsche's thought repeatedly flirts with – a flirtation that especially predominates in his middle-period writings – involves the affirmation not only of the importance of a skeptical point of departure, but also of a skeptical conclusion. Where this tendency is predominant, one can see Nietzsche properly recognizing that the doctrine of stage-three perspectivism rests on a false bottom, but this recognition by itself is of little help. A drop through that false bottom into stage four is difficult to forestall if one attempts to resolve the difficulties that arise at stage three while attempting to hold the three fundamental commitments (outlined in Part VI) in place; and this, for a time, is precisely what Nietzsche attempts.

Regrettably, when the term 'perspectivism' is used by philosophers today (to the extent that it means anything clear at all) it is generally as shorthand for some version of stage-four perspectivism. The source of this use can be traced in part to two things: first, to the assumption that if anyone was ever a perspectivist then it was Nietzsche, and, second, to a tendency genuinely, albeit rather inconstantly, present in Nietzsche's own thought to which his middle-period writings bear especially ample witness. I speak here only of *a tendency* in Nietzsche's thought because, as some of his interpreters have rightly noted, it is difficult to find much sustained defense of stage-four perspectivism in his published corpus (in the way one can, for example, find a sustained defense of stage-three perspectivism in *Truth and Lie in Their Extra-Moral Sense*); but

opposition not to metaphysics as such, but merely to *realist* metaphysics and thus as compatible with an anti-realist reading of Nietzsche. With the transition to Nietzsche's mature thought, however, comes an expansion in the scope of what he is willing to term "metaphysics". The epithet comes not only to assume an increasingly derogatory significance, but in particular to apply equally to realist (especially stage-two) and anti-realist (stage-four) varieties of perspectivism.

what one does find are a host of scattered remarks that document an intermittent temptation to drift in that direction (sometimes directly alongside other remarks that document a struggle to resist that temptation). In as much as our concern here is with a tendency in Nietzsche's thought, rather than with a sustained allegiance to a single fixed doctrine, the task of criticism becomes quite delicate. Yet, as Nietzsche himself is often only all too aware, philosophical tendencies are no less intellectually fateful than entrenched doctrines. A tendency need never harden into anything as determinate as a cluster of doctrinal commitments in order to exercise an equally philosophically catastrophic influence on both those who are attracted to it and those who are repelled by it. So, even if the relative indeterminateness of a mere tendency of thought does render it more difficult to attribute and specify, let alone criticize, it does not render the tasks of identification, articulation, and criticism any less urgent.

The tendency in question is in evidence in the following characteristic passage from *The Gay Science* – one that may stand for a great many others:

Origin of the logical. – How did logic come into existence in man's head? Certainly out of illogic, whose realm originally must have been immense. Innumerable beings who made inferences in ways different from ours perished; for all that, their ways might have been truer. Those, for example, who did not know how to find often enough what is "equal" as regards both nourishment and hostile animals – those, in other words, who subsumed things too slowly and cautiously – were favored with a lesser probability of survival than those who guessed immediately upon encountering similar instances that they must be equal. The dominant tendency, however, to treat as equal what is merely similar – an illogical tendency, for nothing is really equal – is what first created any basis for logic.

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 likewise necessary that for a long time one did not see nor perceive the changes in things. The beings that did not see so precisely had an advantage over those that saw everything "in flux". At bottom, every high degree of caution in making inference and every skeptical tendency constitute a great danger to life. No living beings would have survived if the opposite tendency – to affirm rather than suspend judgment, to err and *make up* things rather than wait, to assent rather than negate, to pass judgment rather than to be just – had not been bred to the point where it became extraordinarily strong.

The course of logical ideas and inferences in our brain today corre-

sponds to a process and a struggle among impulses that are, taken singly, very illogical and unjust. We generally experience only the result of this struggle because the primeval mechanism now runs its course so quickly and is so well concealed (Nietzsche 1974, 111).

What this passage seeks to do is give us some glimpse into what beings would be like who are not bound by the laws of logic as we are – bound by this ‘primeval mechanism’ that ‘now runs its course so quickly and is so well concealed’ that it is difficult for us to make its operations visible to ourselves. By rendering what is so well concealed at least partially visible, this passage hopes to give us some indication of what it would mean for us to transcend the constraints imposed on us by the laws of logic. The passage seeks to do this partly by envisioning pre-logical beings, offering some suggestions about how their patterns of reasoning might have originally differed from our own. At the same time, it tries to give us a sense of why the forms of judgment that logic imposes on us might be *confining*, and thus less than intellectually optimal, by attempting also to give some indication of how a sort of being not thus limited might be able to think. Thus the passage really seeks to give us glimpses into the possibility of two different sorts of beings – one that is more primitive than us (not yet having attained to the plateau of intellectual accomplishment presupposed by the capacity to think logically) and another that is at least potentially more sophisticated than we are (in virtue of possessing intellectual resources that enable him to go beyond the constraints of logic that fetter our minds).

Although it does not explicitly endorse either, the overall thrust of the above passage is strongly to encourage each of the following two conclusions: (1) although we take the laws of logic to be true, they are not really true, but rather merely “true for us”, and (2) we (mis)take the laws of logic – taking them to be something more than merely “true for us” – because we, as a species, could not survive without our dependence on them. We need not quibble here over questions concerning whether, to what degree, and in which writings, Nietzsche himself either positively celebrates or valiantly struggles to resist these conclusions. (Suffice to say that one can find both sorts of passages regarding each of these conclusions in his corpus.) It is enough for our present purpose simply to establish that there are passages such as the one quoted above to be found in his writing and that they are caught up in ways of thinking that make such conclusions difficult to forestall.

With regard to the topic of perspectivism, this passage is representative of the strain in Nietzsche’s thinking that has received more attention than any other. This is regrettable, not only because it represents him at his philosophi-

cally weakest, but because it misses what is of most interest in the occurrence of this tendency in Nietzsche's thinking: namely, that he works himself free of it. Since the above passage is characteristically confused in ways that one finds throughout the weaker passages in especially Nietzsche's middle-period writings, it will suffice to confine our attention to the confusions that arise in this one passage as a way of briefly indicating why Nietzsche found stage four to be an uncomfortable place along the dialectic of perspectivism at which to try to come to rest.

The passage purports to address its opening question ('How did logic come into existence in man's head?'), thus supposedly envisioning some pre-logical condition ('Certainly out of illogic, whose realm originally must have been immense.') of mankind. The passage, however, immediately begins to characterize the operations of these pre-logical beings in logical terms, as indeed it must, if it is to succeed in characterizing their thought-processes in an at all intelligible manner. To characterize their thought-processes in terms that did not draw at all on our logical capacities would be to offer an *unintelligible* characterization of them. In seeking to approximate such a characterization of a form of thought and in asking us to try to understand "it", Nietzsche is, in effect, asking us to try to jump out of our own skins. We are told that these pre-logical beings 'made inferences in ways different from ours'. How different? If, on the one hand, their "reasoning" was in no way in accord with logic, then it would not have been a form of reasoning at all; and thus what "they" would have been doing back then, in those pre-historic times, would not have been *making inferences* at all. If, on the other hand, what they were doing, back then, did fall into patterns of thought that we would be able to recognize as cases of drawing inferences, then it would not have been utterly pre-logical or illogical in nature, as the passage initially invites us to suppose. This sort of equivocation runs throughout the passage as a whole – one of wanting simultaneously to characterize the actions and thought-processes of these beings in utterly logically alien and in logically familiar but merely deviant terms.

Let us look in detail at one such equivocation: These pre-logical primitives are characterized as both being unable to distinguish what is equal from what is not equal (and thus presumably not really able to classify things at all) and as having mastered the use of concepts (indeed to a degree sufficient to frame the thought *that two things are equal*, before going on to misclassify some things as equal that are not equal). This overarching equivocation is made possible by various more local sorts of equivocation that recur throughout the passage – most of which depend upon the account of conceptualization that we encountered already in Part IV, according to which every act of conceptual-

ization involves an irreducible element of falsification. ('Every concept arises from the equation of unequal things. Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept 'leaf' is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences. [...] We obtain the concept [...] by overlooking what is individual and actual.' (Nietzsche 1979, p. 83).) Such an understanding of the inherently falsifying nature of conceptualization leads directly to the conclusion that the achievement of any sort of reflective consciousness requires the thorough-going entrenchment of a (historically initially much less entrenched) proclivity to cognize unlike cases as like in a manner that involves an increasingly irreversible form of distortion in one's cognition of objects. Such a picture of the attendant costs of being able to achieve any degree of generality in one's forms of thinking, in turn, inevitably fuels an attachment to a variety of perspectivism in which there is nothing left for the concept of a perspective to serve as a metaphor for other than a sort of point of view on the world that is necessarily inherently distorting. ('This is the essence of phenomenalism and perspectivism as I understand them: [...] all becoming conscious involves a great and thorough corruption, falsification, reduction to superficialities, and generalization' (Nietzsche 1974, 354).)

The roots of this tendency in Nietzsche's thought are particularly manifest in the mind-bending attempt in the above passage to offer us some indication of what pre-logical thought about "equality" might have been like. The whole discussion above of the manner in which our ancestors were prone to "subsume things as equal" trades on confusion around the word 'equal' or 'same' (either of these is an equally good translation of the German *gleich*). Talk of subsuming individuals under the concept *equal* suggests that the term "equality" is to be understood in this discussion as if it referred to a first-order concept. But what concept is that? There are two familiar meanings of the word 'equal' or 'same' primarily traded on here, neither of which involves predicating a concept of an object. Talk of "equality" or "sameness" here is ambiguous as to whether what is at issue is the identity of two objects (as in "This leaf is the same one I picked up yesterday") or the equivalence of two concepts (as in "These two things are of the same sort – they are both leaves"). When Nietzsche says these pre-logical beings "subsume" things under the concept *equal* or *same*, he speaks as if what is at issue were the predicating of a concept ("the concept" *equal*) of two or more objects. The appearance that some such first-order concept is available for predicative employment here arises through a systematic conflation of the two more familiar senses of the word 'equal' (or the German word *gleich*). Two apparently distinct things can turn out to be identical to one another (i.e., be the same individual), but then what is at issue are not two

things but only one thing, and then there is no concept in play under which the individual in question is subsumed; ‘equality’ then names not a concept, but a logical relation (namely, that of *identity*). Two things can also be equal in a different sense of the term ‘equal’: they can both be cases of, e.g., food (that is, they can be similar to one another in both being instances of a concept). But then the first-order concept under which they are subsumed is not “equal” but *food*. And in this sense of ‘equal’ or ‘same’, it only makes sense to ask of two things “Are they the same?”, if this question is asked with respect to some concept. (Any two things are like each other in some respect.⁴⁷) To say of two things that they are “equal” in this sense is simply to say that they fall under the same concept. According to this use of the term, what is said to be the “same” is the concept (e.g., *food*) that the two individuals fall under. When used in this way, the word ‘equal’ signifies a second-order concept. This sort of employment of the word is in no way invalidated by the fact that Nietzsche likes to lay so much emphasis on: namely, that the individuals that are thus asserted to be in some conceptually specifiable respect equivalent are not identical (i.e., not “equal” according to the other sense of the term distinguished above) and therefore are such as to differ from one another in countless further equally specifiable respects (and thus are such as to differ from one another with regard to which *other* concepts they fall under). Each of these two sorts of capacity “to recognize things as equal” (as Nietzsche tends misleadingly to phrase the matter) presupposes the other – the capacity, on the one hand, to re-identify the same object as it presents itself in different guises and the capacity, on the other hand, to recognize two distinct objects as being similar to one another in some specifiable respect.

The mutual exercise of these capacities, in turn, presupposes yet further capacities of a sort which Nietzsche nonetheless wishes to insinuate these pre-logical beings have yet to achieve. Talk, for example, of subsuming observed items under concepts (such as the concept *food*) presupposes a mastery of concepts of a sort that is possible only for beings who have already acquired a whole range of other logical abilities as well (such as the capacity to integrate inferential and non-inferential forms of knowledge). Nietzsche manages to overlook the fact that the term ‘subsumption’ is itself a name for the exercise

47. This confusion between identity (where what is at issue is numerically the same object) and sameness of concept (where what is at issue are similarities between numerically distinct objects) is especially evident in the last sentence of the first paragraph of the passage: ‘The dominant tendency, however, to treat as equal what is merely similar.’

of a logical capacity! The difference between beings who “subsume things slowly and cautiously” and those who do so quickly and incautiously is not a difference between fully logical and utterly pre-logical beings or between beings who are captive to the fetters of logic and those who are able to free themselves of them – it is a difference between logically adept and logically inept beings. The exercise of capacities such as a “high degree of caution in making inferences” and “a skeptical tendency” does not represent either a dawning or a transcending of our logical capacities, but rather a highly refined exercise of them – an exercise that presupposes the bare capacity to make inferences. Hence Nietzsche inevitably slides into surreptitiously ascribing such a capacity to the putatively pre-logical beings of his thought-experiment, while at the same time alleging them to be innocent of logic.

The feature of the above passage that is most pertinent to our present topic is its tendency to try to conceive of the laws of logic as if they, too, formed a part of our “perspective” – a perspective that we can no longer shake off, but which we can nonetheless come to appreciate as being in some sense “optional”, though we ourselves are fated to confinement within it. This attempt to imagine what life would be like if we were not bound by the laws of logic is typical of a kind of mind-bending thought-experiment that one finds throughout Nietzsche’s less mature writings. In the essay *Truth and Lie in Their Extra-Moral Sense*, for example, he sought to bring out how what we call “nature” is to ‘be grasped only as a creation which is subjective in the highest degree’ (1979, p. 87); here in *The Gay Science*, he seeks to bring out how we (mis)take the laws of logic for truths because we, as a species, could not survive unless we were bound by them. In these attempts to bring out the putatively merely perspectival character of our most fundamental forms of cognition, Nietzsche envisions extreme alternatives to our present conditions of thought and cognition. He then asks us to attempt to conceive of what it would be like to find ourselves subject to these alternative conditions and thus not subject to our present cognitive and intellectual constraints. The problem is that the successful completion of the attempt to conceive things as thus being radically otherwise presupposes nothing less than what constitutes, by Nietzsche’s own lights, the total abrogation of the conditions that enable us to believe or say or grasp anything. Such thought-experiments ask us to come to see why it is that we cannot transcend certain conditions of thought and knowledge, by asking us to do just what the thought-experiment itself is designed to show that we cannot do: namely, to grasp in thought what it would be to transcend these very conditions. Nietzsche, in his less mature writings, is

notably untroubled by the incoherence of such thought-experiments. He tends to reason as if one could, without further ado, derive philosophically secure conclusions from premises which are, by his own lights, unintelligible – as if an incoherent proposition represented a sort of super-falsity that deserved to be negated with far greater vehemence than a proposition that is merely false yet perfectly coherent.⁴⁸

One might wonder why one can't just construe the above passage from *The Gay Science* as an especially virulent expression of stage-three perspectivism. Why not say something like this: "In this passage, Nietzsche takes our laws of logic and a possible alternative to them to be just two differing perspectives on a single unknowable X which underlies both." This would allow us to construe the passage as being merely a strident variant of pseudo-Kantianism. Why say it "veers towards stage four" rather than merely saying it "remains firmly stuck at stage three"? The reason it veers towards stage four is because once we go as far as this passage invites, we deprive ourselves of any possible resource with which to articulate the idea of an unknowable X. The last remaining bit of air here goes out of Nietzsche's earlier, already highly deflated concept of an object. It is no longer possible to sustain the pretense that this concept remains (if only barely) non-empty. It has become hopelessly empty. The central claim of pseudo-Kantianism is that, although we cannot know this X, we can at least *think* it. But, now, even the most minimal resources that we might have hoped to have been able to draw upon in order to think (the bare possibility of such) an X turn out themselves to be merely perspectival. The idea of an unknowable X presupposes at least the very thin idea of a bare *something* that endures across perspectives – and thus presupposes our logical conceptions of what it is for two putatively distinct individuals to be the same thing and what it is for two genuinely distinct individuals to fall under the same concept. But all of this, too, is now to be folded into our concept of a perspective and exposed as merely perspectival – even the barest logical notions (such as that of *object*) are to be unmasked as merely subjective features of the contingent forms of thought that happen to be ours.⁴⁹

48. This is not an uncommon tendency in philosophy, especially when philosophical reflection turns to the topic of the status of the laws of logic. For further discussion and some examples, see my 'The Search for Logically Alien Thought' (1992).

49. It is partly in order to avoid just such a collapse that Kant himself is careful to maintain that, though *our* forms of sensibility may be peculiar to us, *the* laws of logic and *the* categories of the understanding are not peculiarly ours.

This tendency to try to fold everything into the purview of “our perspective” is already present in Nietzsche’s early writings, but it runs amok in passages from his middle period such as the one above, with the result being confusion of the sort we have just sampled. Part of the way out of trouble here requires abandoning the second of the fundamental commitments discussed in Part VI – unfolding and removing much of what has here been folded into the purview of “our perspective”, thereby alleviating the hyper-extended character of the metaphor. Just as the transition from Nietzsche’s early to his middle-period thought is usefully summed up by saying that it is one in which the metaphor of a perspective is subjected to an increasingly hyperbolic inflection (so that his thinking becomes hostage to a metaphor whose employment runs out of control), the transition to his later thought is equally helpfully summed up by saying that it is one in which the scope of the metaphor is scaled back (in an effort to restrict its application only to those forms of “subjectivity” that permit its employment to remain securely under control).⁵⁰

VIII. Nietzsche’s Way Out of the Perspectivist’s Dilemma

Although much of Nietzsche’s intellectual career is spent veering towards and exploring stage four of the dialectic, and discovering it to be a dead-end, what is of most interest is how he manages eventually to escape the impetus to move in this philosophical direction, by working himself free of the three fundamental commitments discussed in Part VI. To follow the path that Nietzsche took out of his middle-period oscillation between stages three and four, one needs to do what he eventually did – namely, subject each of these three commitments to critical scrutiny.

The literal concept of a perspective, as we saw at the beginning of Part I, involves an interplay of objective and subjective moments. What happens when the concept is philosophically extended is that it becomes increasingly difficult to hold these two moments together. They start to push each other out: the objective moment starts to push out any room in which a faculty of subjectivity might operate (“we can think the thing-in-itself but we cannot know it”) and the presence of any moment of subjectivity appears to start to threaten any claim to objectivity (“all knowledge is perspectival and we cannot transcend our perspectives”). It helps here to think of the perspectivist as

50. As we shall see, for later Nietzsche, the laws of logic would not count as a part of our – or anyone else’s – “perspective”.

confronted by a dilemma – where the horns of the dilemma in question might be termed *the problem of vacuous objectivity* and *the problem of untranscendable subjectivity* respectively. Each of the horns of this dilemma has already figured in the passages from Nietzsche canvassed in Part IV. But, by the time he writes *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche is drawn to consider them in immediate juxtaposition with one another, beginning to appreciate the extent to which they feed on and sustain one another.

The problem of vacuous objectivity threatens to come into focus, for early Nietzsche, whenever he begins to reflect on just how empty his own early concept of “the real essence of things” – the unknowable X – actually is. The problem is nicely summed up in the following, much later remark (from 1888): ‘As if a world would still remain over after one deducted the perspective!’ (1967b, 567). If our conception of the real essence of things does not possess any determinate content, any determinate specification of how things are – of their being *this* way rather than *that* – if it is merely a matter of *conceiving* of the world as however it is apart from how we are obliged to conceive it, then there is no way that we are (in conceiving it to be “as it is in itself”) thereby conceiving it to be. What is required to break out of the philosophical bind into which Nietzsche placed himself for much of his philosophical career is to hold on to this insight (i.e., that nothing is left of our concept of “the world” if we subtract from it everything that goes into every one of our more determinate conceptions of – or perspectives on – it) without thereby falling into the trap of folding the world itself into our concept of what a “perspective” is (so that there is nothing left for our perspectives to be perspectives on).

What Nietzsche appreciates from relatively early on is that this problem is no less a problem for the stage-two than the stage-three perspectivist. The stage-two perspectivist wants to sort between those appearances that are merely subjective and those that offer us some basis for an explanation of why it is that the real essences of things appear to us in the sorts of guises that they do. Such a project of explanation, as we saw, already arose at stage one, when the line between primary and secondary qualities seemed to be the promising place to make the cut between those appearances that are merely subjective and those that can be employed in a properly explanatory account of the underlying fabric of reality. But the following problem – which Berkeley helped to make pressing – threatens the integrity of any such cut: if any candidate for the latter sort of appearance (e.g., a primary quality) is itself an *appearance*, is its appearing so then not a mere consequence of our subjective disposition to be affected in a certain way under certain circumstances? It can begin to look as if any stable form of perspectivism will be able to sort properties in the

requisite manner, only if it also holds that objective properties are of such a sort that they necessarily elude our grasp – only if they are the sort of properties that have *no effect on us* whatsoever. But this threatens to place all such properties irretrievably beyond our reach.⁵¹

The initially attractive way around the first horn of the dilemma is to require our conception of the way the world is, as it is in itself, not be vacuous – that we attempt to frame a determinate conception of “the way” things are in themselves, of what is left when we subtract all our perspectives. This, however, leads to the second horn of the dilemma. Any putatively objective conception threatens to turn out to be nothing more than the attainment of yet another particular perspective on the world. Such a perspective will furnish us with nothing more than a conception of how things appear from *that* vantage point – thus merely furnishing us with yet one more appearance to add to all the others, while failing to furnish us with any means of transcending our subjectivity – thus failing to furnish us with what the stage-two perspectivist really desires: a set of objective categories in terms of which all the apparent (merely subjective) properties of the world are to be explained. It begins to seem as if all that can come into view are perspectives and more perspectives – and beyond that nothing.

What the very early Nietzsche does is to settle for the first horn of the dilemma and, when first faced with the problem that thereby opens up, simply to bite the bullet. He concludes that there is an objective reality, though we cannot know it. The middle-period Nietzsche, sensing the vacuousness of such a concept of “reality”, becomes dissatisfied with this answer and, instead, starts to succumb to the tendency in his thinking indicated in Part VII – one that threatens to impale him on the second horn of the dilemma: there is no way the world is (even) in itself, there are just are untranscendable forms of subjectivity: forms of mental operation that fetter our minds, conducive to a quest for survival but of no use in a quest for knowledge. A dim recognition of the incoherence of any attempt to take a step in this direction does not altogether escape him even in those of his writings in which he is most inclined to succumb to this tendency in his thinking. This, in turn, triggers an oscillation in his thinking between the twin horns of this dilemma – one that he eventually becomes in-

51. The transition to stage-two perspectivism – in which not only our secondary quality concepts, but almost all of our ordinary concepts come to be tainted with the subjectivity of the merely perspectival – makes this problem even more urgent, by leaving us with fewer and fewer resources with which to leverage ourselves out of our merely perspectival views on reality.

creasingly conscious and wary of, until he finally sets about the task of trying to diagnose its sources.

The mature Nietzsche's initial path out of this deadlock involves coming to see that the two horns of the dilemma sketched above do not represent two substantive philosophical options between which one must – or even can – choose. This requires breaking with the first of his fundamental commitments (outlined in Part VI). Once this step has been taken, it becomes possible to see that each horn of the dilemma is the mirror image of the other – that any attempt to affirm or deny either plunges one equally fatefully into the affirmation of a piece of nonsense. Already as early as in *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche begins tentatively to work his way towards this insight. In that book, he predicts that the day will come when:

we will recognize that the thing-in-itself is worth a Homeric laugh: that it seemed so much, indeed everything, and is actually empty, namely empty of meaning (1986, sec. 16).

The first-person plural and the future tense are both worth taking seriously here, in as much as Nietzsche himself has not, at this point in his trajectory, yet thought through the consequences of the claim that the notion of the thing-in-itself is 'empty of meaning'. To think this through would be to see that this emptiness infects the contrast between objectivity and subjectivity that informs all of the philosophical perspectivisms canvassed in Part II. And, as we have already seen, thinking this through is no easy matter. For if one simply jettisons the thing-in-itself, without thinking the consequences of its "emptiness" through, while allowing the other fundamental commitments operative at stage three of the dialectic to remain firmly in place, one simply plunges oneself into stage-four perspectivism.

To see why the emptiness of each of the horns of the aforementioned dilemma must spill over into the other – and thus what their "emptiness" really comes to – it helps to notice how the occupant of stage three might think that he is in an altogether different sort of position from other perspectivists and why he is mistaken in this thought. From the point of view of stage three, the occupants of stages two and four will seem to have something in common: they will appear to be involved in equally illicit attempts to stand back from our forms of thought and perception. The stage-three perspectivist's insistence that we cannot know the thing-in-itself is a misfired attempt to express what is illicit in these attempts – to call attention to how his neighbors in the dialectic both seem to be trying to jump out of their skins. We have just seen, in our examination of *The Gay Science* 111, how the occupant of stage four tries to jump out of his

skin, by attempting to achieve a perspective as if from outside the very forms of thinking he also claims we cannot get outside of. The occupant of stage two will seem to be attempting to do something similar insofar as his conception of objectivity requires the possibility of a sideways-on perspective from which to compare the contours of our thought and perception with those of the world as it is in itself (in order to ascertain which aspects of the former correspond without distortion to the latter and which do not). The occupant of stage three now wants to say to the occupants of stages two and four: “You are trying to do something that you *cannot* do – you cannot do *that* – you cannot stand back from our most fundamental forms of thought and perception. There is no further transcendent standpoint from which you can attain a sideways-on view of both the world and our modes of representing it and assess their degree of fit.” This all too natural way of expressing the moral of the failure of stage-two perspectivism can seem to license a substantive philosophical conclusion: there is *something we cannot do* here. Real progress here, later Nietzsche comes to think, involves not only seeing that the “cannot” here is as “empty of meaning” as is what it seeks to deny, but also seeing that any conclusion that has the form of further denying what is here denied is equally empty. To see that stage-two perspectivism is really *empty* means also seeing that the stage-four perspectivist goes equally wrong when he attempts to express his insight into the emptiness of stage-three perspectivism in the form of a claim. What later Nietzsche comes to see is that the apparent meaningfulness of what is claimed at each of these stages of the dialectic trades on the apparent meaningfulness of the position it seeks to reject as empty.

Section 374 of *The Gay Science* opens by formulating the topic at issue here in terms of the following question: How far does the perspectival character of existence extend; indeed, does it – could it – have any other character than a perspectival one? Nietzsche goes on in that section to answer this question with the following formulation: ‘We cannot look around our corner.’ *Wir können nicht um unsere Ecke sehen*. Later in the passage, he says ‘But I think that today we are at least far way from the ridiculous immodesty of decreeing from our angle [*von unserer Ecke aus*] that perspectives are permitted only from this angle [*von dieser Ecke aus*].’ In trying to capture the sense of this passage, ‘*Ecke*’ is perhaps best translated first (in trying to capture the sense of ‘*Wir können nicht um unsere Ecke sehen*’) as ‘corner’ for that which we cannot look around and later (in trying to capture the sense of locutions such as ‘*von unserer Ecke aus*’) as ‘angle’ for the angle of vision that determines our line of sight (and hence our perspective) on the world. But what is being asserted about our corner or angle in the declaration *Wir können nicht um*

unsere Ecke sehen? That our perspective on things must always be from some angle or other is a truism. But this remark seems to want to express more than a truism. It might seem to articulate a philosophical insight – or at least to reject something that is often taken by philosophers to be an insight. But what? What has become clear is that what these words say depends upon the sense of the ‘cannot’ here – and hence upon the manner in which we are called upon by the passage as a whole to appreciate the sense in which we are restricted to an “angle” on things.

Nietzsche’s later view is that we cannot look around our corner because we are unable to make sense of what it would be for us (or for anyone else) to be able to have a glimpse of how things are without our also having some determinate angle on things from which they are so much as able to appear as being this way rather than that. But the fateful tendency (which, as we saw in Part VII, is so pronounced in various portions of the first four books of *The Gay Science*) is still not yet entirely purged from even the later and more mature fifth book to which section 374 belongs (which was added only later to the second edition of *The Gay Science*) – namely, the tendency to insinuate that we cannot look around our corner because we run up against a limit of our *powers* whenever we try to do so. There is something that it would be to be able to view things from no angle in particular but we are *unable* to do it. The insinuation of this thought has the effect not only of suggesting a negative answer to the opening question of section 374 (‘Does existence have any other character than a perspectival one?’), but of further suggesting that the right answer to the question must be: Existence has – can have – no other character than a *merely* perspectival one. The crucial assumption that yields this answer – rendering, as we saw in Part IV, already by the time we reach stage three of the dialectic, all of our perspectives nothing more than *mere* perspectives – is one that remains in place throughout the sequence of transitions from stage two to stage three and from stage three to stage four of the dialectic.

The early Nietzsche looks upon the stage-two project of limning the contours of the “true world” as representing an attempt to do something perfectly intelligible, yet hopelessly impossible. He begins by rejecting a (stage-two) view of us as being *able* to step outside our own skins in favor of a (stage-three) view of us as being *unable* to do so. This picture of us as *confined* to our perspectives remains in place in his subsequent flirtation with stage four. To take seriously the idea, broached already in *Human, All Too Human*, that the upshot of stage two is (not a substantive philosophical thesis, but “actually” something which is) “empty of meaning” – to think *that* through – requires taking up the question whether the negation of something “empty of meaning” can itself, in

turn, constitute a substantive philosophical insight. To press that question all the way – to place the question mark at a deep enough place here – is to begin to question whether the entire picture of *confinement* (of being trapped inside our forms of subjectivity) which animates stages three and four in the dialectic is compulsory.⁵² It is to begin to see that the attempt to affirm the upshot of *either* horn of the dilemma in substantive terms is to fall prey to a “seduction of words”; and to see this is to see that, as between the philosophical options represented by stages three and four, there is nothing to choose.

After a number of nods in its direction, Nietzsche’s first begins to embrace this thought more fully in *Beyond Good and Evil*. In sections 15 and 16 of that work, in rapid succession, he rejects the problems of vacuous objectivity and untranscendable subjectivity as equally unintelligible. The exposure of the first horn, as we have seen, has been under preparation for some time and has, by this time, been repeated a number of times in Nietzsche’s previous works, so that he is by now able to put it succinctly:

That [expressions such as] “immediate certainty”, as well as “absolute knowledge” and the “thing-in-itself”, involve a *contradicto in adjecto*, I shall repeat a hundred times: we really ought to free ourselves from the seduction of words! (1966, 16)

The thing-in-itself is rejected here not on the grounds that he earlier rejected it (because it represents an impossible attempt to transcend our perspective and speak of something that lies outside of it). It is rejected here because it is a seductive form of words that has yet to have been given any clear meaning. If this is true, then to affirm its existence and to deny it are equally empty. What is a comparatively recent note to be struck in Nietzsche’s work comes next, in his emphasis on the consequent unintelligibility of the second horn of the dilemma:

To study physiology with a clear conscience, one must insist that the sense organs are *not* phenomena in the sense of idealistic philosophy. [...] What? And others even say that the external world is the work of our organs? But then our body, as a part of this external world, would be the work of our organs! But then our organs themselves would be [...] the work of our organs! It seems to me that this is a complete *reductio ad absurdum*. (1966, 15)

52. This insight, if it is sustained, also renders otiose Nietzsche’s earlier project of trying to figure out how one ought to comport oneself towards the conclusion forced upon one by pseudo-Kantianism. As we saw, that conclusion initially seemed to him to give rise to a

We see Nietzsche here also wanting to break with the second fundamental commitment of his earlier philosophy, thereby carving out a space for the reintroduction of distinctions effaced in his prior hyperbolic extension of the concept of a perspective. A desire to break with the second commitment is signaled by Nietzsche's no longer being willing to equate that which is disclosed by our sense organs with "phenomena" in the sense of idealistic philosophy. (What it means, for later Nietzsche, to understand something as a "phenomenon" in this sense is still just what it meant for early Nietzsche: a phenomenon is the opaque appearance of an underlying noumenal reality – a reality that remains screened from view.⁵³) If one simply denies the existence of the (pseudo-Kantian) thing-in-itself – or noumenon – while holding the other commitments of pseudo-Kantianism in place, one ends up affirming that all there can be are "phenomena in the sense of idealistic philosophy". But, for

pressing existential task: we needed to accommodate ourselves to limits (imposed on us by the nature of our forms of sentience and understanding) disclosed by philosophical reflection and determine what the appropriate posture of accommodation to our tendency to chafe against these limits should be (the Kleistian, the Schopenhauerian, or the Nietzschean). But, if there are no such limits then we cannot chafe against them and hence there is nothing for us to accommodate ourselves to. This is not to say that there is nothing worth understanding about the philosophical impulse to picture ourselves as chafing against the limits of our finitude – an impulse that, at a certain moment in the history of philosophy, begins to find expression in a skeptical despair regarding our confinement to our forms of subjectivity. It is only to say that later Nietzsche has reasons to question his earlier tendency to acquiesce in a very particular understanding of what gives rise to this impulse – namely, the one that fuels the dialectic of perspectivism. To borrow a Cavellian formulation of a central Nietzschean leitmotif: nothing could be more human than the wish to deny our humanity. This means that there is something important about what it is to be human that here calls for understanding; and it remains a central task of Nietzsche's mature philosophy (and, in particular, his later genealogy of the ascetic ideal) to understand precisely this: to diagnose and elucidate why it is that the human animal is driven simultaneously to deny its animality and its humanity (and thus why it has hitherto been unable to achieve a genuine equipoise of animality and humanity in its self-understanding of what it is to be a rational animal), while, at the same time, attempting to purge such an understanding of the distorting influence of the commitments of his early pseudo-Kantianism. So there remains a pressing task here – which for later Nietzsche remains both a philosophical and an existential task – but his earlier characterization of the task (as one of figuring out how best to accommodate oneself to the limits imposed on human knowledge by our forms of subjectivity) figures in his later thinking only as a significant additional symptom of the sickness requiring treatment, rather than as a characterization of its possible cure.

53. Nietzsche never improves as a reader of Kant! Thus later Nietzsche assumes that the rejection of such a conception of "phenomena" itself constitutes a rejection of "idealistic philosophy" *tout court*.

later Nietzsche, this (pseudo-Kantian) conception of a phenomenon is now fingered as the philosophical complement of the *contradicto in adjecto* of the “thing-in-itself”. He now sees that if our forms of sensibility are to be understood as able to furnish *perspectives* on the external world, then that which they provide a perspective *on* must not be understood as itself belonging to that perspective, else we saddle ourselves with a conclusion of the following form: Our perspectives themselves would be ... the work of our perspectives! This *reductio ad absurdum* of the hyperbolic extension of the concept of a perspective is a *reductio* of Nietzsche’s own former position.

IX. Towards Nietzsche’s Mature Perspectivism

We have just seen Nietzsche *wanting* to break with the second fundamental commitment of his earlier philosophy, but we have not yet seen *how* he intends to do this – i.e., how he wants to understand what falls within the scope of subjectivity and what does not – in a manner that relieves the pressure to plunge on to stage four of the dialectic. The above passage raises the question: What is it to conceive of the deliverances of the sense organs in some way other than as “phenomena” in the sense assigned to that term by the “idealistic philosophy” (on a pseudo-Kantian interpretation of that philosophy)? It evidently requires that we rethink what a phenomenon (an appearance) is. At the hands of the “idealistic philosophy” (on Nietzsche’s understanding of that philosophy) all phenomena (appearances) turn out, at the end of the day, to be *mere* phenomena (*mere* appearances). But how is this conclusion to be avoided other than simply by moving backwards to an earlier stage in the dialectic? What direction is there to move here other than forward (to stage four) or backward (to stages one or two) along the spectrum of varieties of philosophical perspectivism outlined in Part II?

To follow the movement of Nietzsche’s thought here, it is helpful first to go back and consider the progress, previous to this point, in his reflection on the fateful concept of an appearance that he inherits from the (pseudo-Kantian variety of) idealistic philosophy. A number of these remarks found in his middle-period writings can be seen as pointing the way to his later philosophy. Consider the following pair of passages:

What is “appearance” for me now? Certainly not the opposite of some essence: what could I say about any essence except to name the attributes of its appearance! Certainly not a dead mask that one could place on an unknown X or remove from it. (1974, 54)

The antithesis “thing-in-itself” and “appearance” is untenable; with that, however, the concept “appearance” also disappears. (1967b, 552)

The second of the remarks is often quoted. But it is helpful, in order to avoid a common misreading of it, to consider it in conjunction with the first. We find Nietzsche in these two remarks beginning to grope his way towards the insight that if the concept of a “thing-in-itself” is empty then the entire “idealist” antithesis between “thing-in-itself” and “appearance” falls apart. If the (pseudo-Kantian) contrast between “thing-in-itself” and “appearance” is untenable, then the (pseudo-Kantian) concept of appearance must be rethought as well. If we really think this through, we will be left with no way to formulate stage-three or stage-four perspectivism. For stage-three perspectivism just is the doctrine that there is a thing-in-itself but, since we cannot reach it, all we enjoy are mere appearances (in this dubious sense of “appearance” in which that which appears is screened from view by its appearances); and stage-four perspectivism just is the doctrine that we land ourselves in when we try to deny only the first half of what is thus affirmed by stage-three perspectivism (namely, that there is “behind” or “beneath” these “appearances” an underlying “something” that they are appearances of). Nietzsche now seeks a way to conceive of an “appearance” in terms that do not exclude conceiving of (what shows itself in an appearance as) an essence. When he exclaims ‘What could I say about any essence except to name the attributes of its appearance!’, he acknowledges something that is both a truism and a surprising thought in the light of the commitments of his early philosophy: namely, that a thing’s nature can be disclosed – can appear, can come into view – in and through experience (i.e., in an encounter whose very possibility depends upon human forms of subjectivity). To take this thought on board is, as he here sees, to concede that an appearance must not be thought of as “a dead mask” that screens an unknown and unknowable X from view. This means that if a particular perspective on a thing offers a distorted view of the thing, it may be transcended; and thus not every alteration of perspective is *ipso facto* the exchange of one distorted perspective for another equally “merely subjective” one. If sense can be made of the idea that the appearance disclosed by a particular perspective masks the true shape of things, then it must also be possible to make sense of the idea that we can remove the mask and look the world in the face.

We are now in a position to make sense of late Nietzsche’s own survey of the shape of the dialectic: He breaks it down into six stations:

How the ‘True World’ at last became a Myth

HISTORY OF AN ERROR

1. The true world, attainable to the wise, the pious, the virtuous man – he dwells in it, *he is it*.

(Oldest form of the idea, relatively sensible, simple, convincing. A reiteration of the proposition “I, Plato, *am* the truth.”)

2. The true world, unattainable for the moment, but promised to the wise, the pious, the virtuous man (“to the sinner who repents”).
(Progress of the idea: it grows more refined, more enticing, more incomprehensible – ... it becomes Christian...)
3. The true world, unattainable, indemonstrable, cannot be promised, but even when merely thought of a consolation, a duty, an imperative.
(...[T]he idea grown sublime, pale, northerly, Königsbergian.)
4. The true world – unattainable? Unattained, at any rate. And if unattained also *unknown*. Consequently also no consolation, no redemption, no duty: how could we have a duty towards something unknown?
(The first grey of dawn. First yawnings of reason. Cockcrow of positivism.)
5. The “true world” – an idea no longer of any use, not even a duty any longer – an idea grown useless, superfluous, *consequently* a refuted idea: let us abolish it!
(Broad daylight; breakfast, return of cheerfulness and *bon sens*; Plato blushes for shame; all free spirits run riot.)
6. We have abolished the real world: what world is left? The apparent world perhaps?... But no! With the real world we have also abolished the apparent world!
(Mid-day; moment of the shortest shadow; end of the longest error...)
(1954c, pp. 40-41 – I have amended the translation.)

Nietzsche’s notation differs from mine. In particular, his numbering of stations along the dialectic does not correspond to my own earlier numerical partitioning of the dialectic into stages.⁵⁴ The first two stations here correspond to the

54. I speak of *stations* here in order to keep those moments in the dialectic to which Nietzsche’s own numbering attaches (in the above passage) distinct from other ways of carving up the dialectic – in particular to keep them distinct from (what I have called) *stages* (distinguished and numbered in Part II) and *phases* (moments within these stages discussed in Part V).

Platonic and Christian phases of stage-one perspectivism. What is at issue in the first station is the distinction between the manner in which the world appears to the ordinary (i.e., philosophically unenlightened) person and the manner in which it is disclosed to the Platonic philosopher (i.e., he who is wise, pious, and virtuous). For such a philosopher, a frontal view of the true world – a non-distorting perspective on reality – is attainable in this life. What is at issue in the second station is how this Platonic distinction (between the apparent and the true world) comes to be transformed in the course of its inheritance in Christian thought: a full disclosure of the true world is no longer attainable in this life, but rather is promised to him who leads the life of a true Christian (i.e., who struggles during his sojourn in this merely apparent world to be wise, pious, and virtuous). The transition to the first of these stations (like so much else in ancient Greek thought and culture) has its virtuous aspects for Nietzsche: it involves an acknowledgement of our finitude, it sets up the possibility of a quest for truth, gives rise to the concomitant obligation to subject our beliefs to critical scrutiny, and thus makes possible the cultivation of his favorite virtue: honesty. Yet with the inception of this quest came also the introduction of the concept of the “true world”. The words ‘true world’ appear in scare quotes in the title of the tale to indicate that what is at issue here is the history of a particular error – of a particular mistaken conception of how the concepts *truth* and *world* are to be deployed. The later Nietzsche is here at pains not to identify a rejection of this particular conception with a rejection of these two concepts themselves. On the contrary, Nietzsche now thinks, it is only once we liberate ourselves from this conception that we are in a position to fully recover and retain these concepts. The conception of the “true world” at issue here rests on a particular philosophical picture of how the world must be such that knowledge of it is possible – one that rests, in turn, on a correlative philosophical conception of what knowledge must be in order for it to be truly objective. It is this concept of the “true world” – one that leaves our world seeming merely apparent – that is here to be revealed as myth. Once this concept and the correlative conception of knowledge are exposed as mythical, we are free to recover the world once again as something that can be known through its appearances.

The mythical conception of objective knowledge (i.e., the one that comes together with the fateful concept of the “true world”) is the conception of a potentially attainable but not yet attained perspective on reality that is free of all distortions introduced by our forms of subjectivity. The “true world” is that which would be disclosed by the attainment of such an untainted perspective. The introduction of this fateful concept furnishes the “ground upon which ‘this’ world is designated as [merely] apparent” (1954c, 39). Nietzsche’s third

station is restricted to the first phase of stage three: the sublime, pale, northerly version of it that Nietzsche identifies with Kant and the early proponents of the Kantian philosophy. The idea which formerly figured in the second station has here grown Königsbergian (i.e., pseudo-Kantian): the true world has been moved farther out to the point where it has become unattainable; but the idea of it can still be thought and it is our duty to think it. With the fourth station come the subsequent phases of stage three – the more engaged and less dutiful responses (such as those of Kleist, Schopenhauer and early Nietzsche) to the impossibility of attaining knowledge of the true world. Here, at the fourth station, the fateful concept has still yet to be jettisoned (it still figures as an unattainable goal); and, as long as it remains in place, it precludes the achievement of the resolutely this-worldly conception of objectivity that is the cornerstone of Nietzsche's mature perspectivism. It is only when we reach the final stage of the dialectic that we truly recognize the fateful concept 'to be no more than a *moral-optical* illusion' (1954c, p. 39).

With the fifth station, we enter into stage-four perspectivism; we now try to throw away the first half of the pseudo-Kantian contrast (between that which belongs to the unknowable essence of things and which is merely perspectival) while holding on to the second half. With phase five, we are on the verge of a breakthrough. We now want to declare: 'The 'true world' is an idea no longer of any use to us – it is an idea that has grown useless and superfluous – so let us abolish it!' This announcement holds open the promise of progress. But, as we have seen, if we simply try to *abolish* the fateful concept (rather than try to think through the consequences of its emptiness), progress does not ensue. It does not ensue from a denial of what was previously affirmed, even if the denial is accompanied by a hearty desire for a return to cheerfulness and *bon sens*. As Parts V-VIII of this paper have sought to make clear, no one ought to know better than Nietzsche himself that many uninterrupted years of urging a posture of cheerfulness do not suffice to move one from the fifth to the sixth station. And without some further movement – away from the gnawing skepticism that intensifies as we move through stations three, four and five – cheerfulness is bound to fade. For it is one thing to realize that progress requires the abolition of the fateful concept, and another thing to see how to make it genuinely disappear. But what critical step still remains untaken? How do we advance to the sixth station? Nietzsche sees the plunge here towards the fifth station as representing a genuinely therapeutic break with the past – a new morning on which free spirits (such as his middle-period self) can run riot – but one on which the fateful concept continues to cast a long shadow. The question that haunts his later thought is therefore the following: how do we achieve a philosophical mid-day – a moment of shortest shadow – in which the

fateful concept no longer darkens or distorts our picture of (our perspectives on) the world we inhabit?

It is worth pausing, now, to say something about how the next critical step in Nietzsche's thought is sometimes understood by commentators on Nietzsche's work. The second of the quotations regarding the nature of appearances presented above as a pair (the one that declares that 'the antithesis 'thing-in-itself' and 'appearance' is untenable; with that ... the concept 'appearance' also disappears') is often read as if its point were (not that a particular *philosophical concept* of "appearance" can be seen thereby to disappear, but rather) simply that the *word* 'appearance' should now be made to disappear. That is to say, it is often read as if all that it were recommending were that we re-label the stuff that we previously called "mere subjectivity" and "mere appearances" by terms (putatively) designating their opposites (say, "objectivity" and "objects") and eliminate the troublesome contrast by dropping all talk of "pure knowledge" and "the thing-in-itself". One utterly misses – and indeed reverses – the thrust of Nietzsche's mature thought if one thinks it can be summarized by some such motto as the following: "Since all our 'knowledge' depends upon untranscendable forms of subjectivity, and since there is nothing else left to mean by the word 'knowledge', we might as well call whatever these forms of subjectivity deliver up to us 'forms of knowledge'." Simply to withhold the word 'appearance', and to start redeploying concepts like 'truth' (as in, e.g., "truths are those illusions we cannot do without") and 'objectivity' (as in, e.g., "those features of our perspective that we cannot transcend are objective for us") in ways that utterly distort their original grammar, will not hold at bay what Nietzsche, from remarkably early on (despite his own tendency to succumb to such a strategy), predicts will be the ultimate consequences of a strategy of philosophical denial when faced with this problem – 'a gnawing and disintegrating skepticism and relativism' (1997, p. 140). This re-labeling maneuver fails to think the problem through and thereby to recognize itself for what it is – a strategy for covering the difficulty up and leaving it to fester.

So what does it take to progress to the sixth station? One must make both the fateful (pre-Kantian) concept of the "true world" and its equally fateful counterpart concept of a "mere appearance" disappear together. To do this, Nietzsche must find a way to let go of the third fundamental commitment of his earlier perspectivism and thereby rethink the common presupposition of the earlier stages of the dialectic: namely, the way the contrast between objectivity and subjectivity is drawn. According to the mature Nietzsche, it is this presupposition that is the fundamental engine that drives the dialectic, and it is only once it is fully exorcized that the dialectic can be defused. The character of the contrast between objectivity and subjectivity presupposed by prior philo-

sophical perspectivism fails to permit the sort of interplay between objective and subjective moments of experience presupposed in any literal employment of the concept of perspective. In order to allow that an essence is the sort of thing that can appear – that can come into view – in experience, we need to be able to regard our modes of sensibility as involving operations of subjectivity *and* as affording us genuine glimpses of the world. It is taken for granted by the occupants of each of the four stages of the dialectic that what is subjective in the sense of involving operations of subjectivity is not objective, and thus that objective knowledge (conceived as knowledge of the “true world”) must be couched solely in terms of properties whose nature in no way depends on how they affect the subject. When we reach the climax of the fourth stage, this commitment issues in an utterly paradoxical conception of a “perspective”: it is a perspective which is not a perspective *on* anything – an eye which does not see anything, which is pointed in no particular direction. To think one’s way through to the sixth station of Nietzsche’s tale of *How the ‘True World’ at last Became a Myth* means finding a way to break free of this last fundamental commitment of prior philosophical perspectivism – the one that fuels the dialectic and gives rise to the fateful concept of the “true world”.

In the third book of *The Genealogy of Morals*, there are signs that Nietzsche is well on his way to doing this. Section 12 announces the need to re-think ‘the entire conceptual antithesis ‘subject’ and ‘object’ in such a way as to avoid ‘the ascetic self-contempt and self-mockery of reason [that] ... declares: ‘there is a realm of truth and being, but reason is *excluded* from it!’.’⁵⁵ He immediately goes on to point how even in “the Kantian philosophy” such ascetic self-contempt and self-mockery of reason are at work:

[E]ven in the Kantian concept of the “intelligible character of things” something remains of this lascivious ascetic discord that loves to turn reason against reason: for “intelligible character” signifies in Kant that things are so constituted that the intellect comprehends just enough of them to know that for the intellect they are – *utterly incomprehensible* (1969, III, 12).

This criticism of the Kantian concept of the “intelligible character of things” applies equally to his own early concept of the unknowable X. But here he sees clearly that it is not enough merely to reject such a concept, one needs

55. This quotation betrays the extent to which the later Nietzsche retains his earlier (pseudo-Kantian) understanding of “the Kantian philosophy”.

to think through its *utter incomprehensibility* in order to be able to come out the other side and attain to a concept of knowledge over which the ascetic self-contempt and self-mockery of reason no longer cast their shadow. The passage continues:

[P]recisely because we seek knowledge, let us not be ungrateful to such resolute reversals of accustomed perspective and valuations with which the spirit has, with apparent mischievousness and futility, raged against itself for so long: to see differently in this way for once, to *want* to see differently, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its future “objectivity” – the latter understood not as “contemplation without interest” (which is a nonsensical absurdity), but as the ability *to control* one’s Pro and Con and to dispose of them, so that one knows how to employ a *variety* of perspectives and affective interpretations in the service of knowledge (1969, III, 12).

We see here how, in Nietzsche’s mature perspectivism, the concept of perspective is deployed in such a way that one can now move back and forth between a *variety* of perspectives without their impugning one another. Objectivity is no longer identified with the wholesale transcendence of all that is perspectival in our view of reality. On the contrary, recourse to alternating perspectives is here identified as a means to objectivity. The perspectives and affective interpretations to which we attain (rather than serving as nagging reminders of our degree of confinement within forms of subjectivity) are taken here to be the very instruments that enable us to overcome epistemic confinement.

The immediate apposition here of “perspectives” and “affective interpretations” is itself significant. It indicates that the aforementioned expansion in Nietzsche’s conception of what falls within the scope of the category of objectivity (so that it is now able to encompass, e.g., appearances) is accompanied by a correlative contraction in his substantive conception of what falls within the scope of the category of subjectivity. Nietzsche here equates the realm of the perspectival (the subjective in the sense of that which is subject-dependent) with the domain of (what he here calls) “affective interpretation”. Nietzsche’s handling of the metaphor now takes seriously the *affective* aspect of subjectivity (the aspect that underwrites the schema discussed in Part VI for specifying which properties are subjective⁵⁶) in a way that his previous handling of it did

56. That is to say: those properties whose very conception involves essential reference to how a thing which possesses such a property *affects* the subject.

not (thereby encouraging the elision of the two different senses of ‘subjective’ distinguished in Part VI). Nietzsche throughout his later work construes the domain of affectivity very broadly so as to include not only our modes of perception but also our modes of valuation.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the employment of the metaphor of perspective here does not range beyond those properties that are “perspectival” (or “subjective”) in this still comparatively restricted sense. Nietzsche’s later employment of the metaphor thus differs radically from the earlier indiscriminate use that he makes of it. It now requires neither that every cognitive or intellectual capacity – e.g., the capacity to draw logical inferences – be regarded as the function of a perspective (or form of subjectivity), nor that those features of experience that are perspectival (or subjective in the pertinent sense) be regarded as *a fortiori* subjective in the other sense of ‘subjective’ (i.e., not objective, merely perspectival). This way of unpacking the metaphor continues to allow many features of our experience – including our perceptions of humor, beauty, and nobility – to be perspectival (or subjective in the relevant sense), without the metaphor running out of control and plunging us into either the philosophical fantasy of there being a “true world” hidden behind the apparent one or the *reductio ad absurdum* of having to claim: “Our perspectives themselves are ... the work of our perspectives!”

We begin to see here what is required to move to the sixth station in Nietzsche’s tale: It is to appreciate that a property can be subjective (i.e., one whose very conception involves essential reference to how a thing which possesses such a property affects the subject) *and* objective (i.e., one that applies not only to how things seem, but to how things are).⁵⁸ It is to allow not only that the moment of subjectivity in our experience that invites the metaphorical extension of the concept of a perspective (thus giving rise to its initial employment in

57. ‘[A]ll evaluation is made from a definite perspective’ (1967b, 259). Many commentators have noted Nietzsche’s insistence on this point. But they are often too quick to draw a particular philosophical moral from it. To claim that values and secondary qualities are alike in being “perspective-dependent” commits one only to a determinate philosophical view about the status of values given a particular view about the status of secondary qualities. And, as we shall see, Nietzsche’s later employment of the concept of perspective resists the move that permits the standard stage-one devaluation of secondary qualities. He seeks a way to affirm the perspective-dependence (or subject-dependence) of such features of experience without having to concede that such features are therefore metaphysically second-class (i.e., not features of the “true world”).

58. The mature Nietzsche thus rejects the fundamental assumption that drives the ascent up the stages of the dialectic of perspectivism. It is because each of them thinks that a genuinely

naive perspectivism) and the moment of objectivity in our experience that is required by any coherent conception of knowledge (allowing us to distinguish between something's looking elliptical and its being elliptical) are perfectly compatible moments – that one and the same moment of experience can be both (in the relevant senses) subjective and objective.

For later Nietzsche, a particular perspective may always involve distortion, but, if so, that can be due only to the angle it affords on the object and not to its being a perspective as such. For later Nietzsche, if the distortion in question is due to (something properly termed) “a perspective” then it admits of correction through the adoption of alternative perspectives. Thus, in his later employment of the term ‘perspective’, Nietzsche permits the initial extension of the metaphor to be stretched as far as it can without causing it to come apart in the manner that it does as soon as it gets caught up (as it already begins to at stage one of the dialectic) in an incoherent attempt to denote two epistemically distinct kinds of “perspective” at once – both a kind that does not necessarily and a kind that necessarily does involve an inherently distorted modality of apprehension. The only sorts of perspectives there are for later Nietzsche are ones that do not involve irremediable distortion.

The mature Nietzsche therefore does not abandon the concept of a perspective as a metaphor for our forms of subjectivity; but he does radically alter the way he makes use of it. His use of it is now informed by a more liberal conception of objectivity (one which allows exercises of subjectivity to count as modes of objective knowledge) and a less liberal conception of our forms of subjectivity (one which counts as essentially subject-dependent only those exercises of our cognitive and intellectual capacities that essentially involve our modes of perception, affection, and evaluation). Once these reversals are in

objective view of reality must be purged of all irremediably subjective elements that the stage-one perspectivist, on the one hand, feels the need to draw his distinction between primary and secondary qualities, and the stage-two perspectivist, on the other, feels the need to draw his distinction between primary and secondary modes of conception and description. It is the rejection of their distinctions combined with the retention of their shared fundamental assumption that triggers the further ascent to stages three and four of the dialectic. In Nietzsche's mature perspectivism the crucial assumption is abandoned and hence there is no longer any bar to treating what lies on either side of either of these distinctions as equally metaphysically respectable. For later Nietzsche, spatial properties (such as square or circular) and color properties (such as magenta or mauve), scientific properties (such as positive electric charge or average mean velocity) and aesthetic properties (such as ugly or tedious) are all equally revelatory of genuine aspects of the world in which we live.

place, it becomes possible to recover the features of the concept that furnished the original license for its metaphorical inflection. The following five basic features of the original concept are reintroduced and respected in Nietzsche's mature employment of the metaphor: (1) a perspective is the sort of thing that can be freely *altered*, (2) it affords a *view* of an object, (3) it has a specifiable location in a *matrix* of alternative perspectives, (4) multiple perspectives may share a *common* object (or set of objects), and (5) a multiplicity of perspectives allow us to correct for distortion and attain *knowledge*. Having reincorporated these five features, in its metaphorical inflection of the concept of a perspective, Nietzsche's mature perspectivism is now able not only to allow, but positively to encourage each of the following five thoughts: (1) if something is to count as a *perspective* (as opposed to a mere illusion), it must afford a *glimpse* of the object which it is a perspective on, (2) we must *alternate* perspectives if we wish to gauge the object accurately, (3) the glimpses afforded by one perspective must be *compared* with those afforded by another, (4) only through such *triangulation* can we attain knowledge, (5) the more such glimpses we can compare the more *objective* our knowledge may become.

This in no way denies that our perspectives *sometimes* distort: some of our putative glimpses of an object may turn out to be merely subjective, i.e., not genuine glimpses of an *object* at all (as in the case in which someone dying of thirst in the desert hallucinates an oasis), and some of the apparent properties of objects registered in a genuine glimpse may turn out to be merely apparent, i.e. not genuine *features* of the object at all (as in the case in which a penny or a stick merely appears to be elliptical or bent while still quite accurately appearing to be a penny or a stick.). But which cases are of one of these sorts and which are not are now matters to be determined through empirical inquiry – through further glimpses afforded by further perspectival views of the world – not through *a priori* philosophical reflection. Indeed, on Nietzsche's mature and comparatively circumspect employment of the metaphor of perspective, it should no longer be clear what, if any, *a priori* philosophical or metaphysical commitments such an employment of the metaphor (hence such a “perspectivism”) carries with it – unless, that is, one thinks one already commits oneself to a metaphysical thesis in affirming a claim such as the following: “The particular affects and values that people bring to their encounters with the world shape how they perceive it.” It is not wrong to think that the later Nietzsche is committed to such a claim. But he is not committed to any of the traditional metaphysical interpretations of its significance – either of a realist (as in stages one, two and three) or anti-realist (as in stage four) variety. Nietzsche's later employment of the concept of a perspective reduces that “claim” to a platitude.

To say that Nietzsche's later employment of the metaphor does not itself aim at underwriting a metaphysical thesis is not to say that there is no philosophical punch to it. What Nietzsche's manner of employing the metaphor certainly does aim to do (in insisting that we do not debar ourselves from knowing the world in allowing our conceptions of it to be shaped by our modes of perception and valuation) is to oppose some of the most influential philosophical stories ever told – stories about what knowledge is (i.e., “pure knowledge” of the “true world”) and counter-stories about why (because such “knowledge” of such a “world” is impossible) knowledge is impossible – stories frequently encountered not only in the writings of other philosophers, but also in his own earlier writings.

The continuation of the passage quoted above furnishes a vivid illustration of how, in Nietzsche's later philosophical writings, the metaphor of a perspective comes to be employed:

Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a “pure, willing, painless, timeless knowing subject”; let us guard against the snares of such contradictory concepts as “pure reason,” “absolute spirituality,” “knowledge in itself”: they always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing *something*, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective “knowing”; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our “concept” of this thing, our “objectivity”, be. But to eliminate the will altogether, to suspend each and every affect, supposing we were capable of this – what would that mean but to *castrate* the intellect? (1969, III, 12)

One immediate and straightforward sign that Nietzsche has here broken free of the shackles of his immature perspectivism is that he no longer feels the slightest need to qualify or hedge the claim that we can see things or know things or that there are truths.⁵⁹ The concepts *truth* and *knowledge* have here been

59. I will return to this point in the coda to this paper.

recovered and distinguished from their mythical philosophical counterparts, so that the words denoting them can once again be unabashedly employed without scare-quotes. Moreover, to attempt to deny the mediation of perspectives (forms of subjectivity) a significant role in the achievement of knowledge, Nietzsche now thinks, is to *castrate* the intellect. Not only are the operations of subjectivity exonerated of the charge of being merely perspectival, but now “the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing be”. The more perspectives we are able to bring to bear on our experience, the more complete will our objectivity be. He now likens a mode of objectivity that has no recourse to subjectivity to an eye that cannot move – “an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces are lacking”. Just as the eye needs to alternate perspectives (in the literal sense of ‘perspective’) in order to see anything, the human subject needs to alternate perspectives (in a metaphorical sense of ‘perspective’) in order to *know* anything.

Nietzsche puts his finger in the above passage on the fatal flaw in his own earlier analysis of the concept of an appearance: such an analysis does not permit seeing to be seeing *something*, hence rendering the very idea of perceptual knowledge of an *object* “an absurdity and a nonsense”. Nietzsche’s mature conception of “a perspectival seeing” and “a perspectival knowing” no longer pushes the concept of objectivity out of the picture. It replaces an earlier (incoherent) concept of objectivity with a (coherent) one, undoing the distortions in the grammars of the concepts of “seeing” and “knowing” perpetrated by prior philosophical misappropriations of the metaphor. Indeed, the warning that introduces his recourse to the metaphor here (to “be on guard” against “dangerous old conceptual fictions” and “contradictory concepts”) again suggests that the primary aim of Nietzsche’s later employment of the metaphor is not to supplant previous metaphysical conceptions with an alternative such conception, but rather to diagnose and exorcize the “conceptual fictions” and “contradictory concepts” spawned by such conceptions, thereby correcting the prior (mis)employments of the metaphor that have so often been encouraged and inculcated in our thinking by philosophers of the past (including his own earlier self).⁶⁰ The feature of philosophy’s past that Nietzsche here seeks to correct still widely characterizes its present.

60. Thus the reading of the above passages offered here does not seek to dig out of them a blueprint for some alternative metaphysical account – one specially licensed by his later

The “conceptual fictions” and “contradictory concepts” that Nietzsche, in this passage, seems most concerned to criticize are the very ones that any stage-four perspectivist would immediately single out for criticism. So, in order to grasp the transformation that Nietzsche’s own perspectivism undergoes in the transition to his later thought, we need to understand the transformation in his understanding of how such fictions and concepts are to be criticized and how this criticism places all the varieties of philosophical perspectivism canvassed in Part II under a single indictment. What do the following four philosophical notions – all mentioned in the passage above – have in common?

- (1) “a pure, willing, painless, timeless, knowing subject”
- (2) “pure reason”
- (3) “absolute spirituality”
- (4) “knowledge in itself”

Each equates the attainment of objectivity with a form of “purity” or “absoluteness” that requires the pruning away of every admixture of subjectivity. Nietzsche calls these “contradictory concepts” because he now views the quest for objectivity (i.e., the true estimation of how things are) without recourse

employment of the metaphor. What it seeks to do instead is to read these passages as elucidating the concept of perspective through a set of observations that are primarily concerned with shipwrecking all previous such accounts. It should be admitted, however, that in this respect the reading offered here bucks a widespread tendency among Nietzsche’s scholars. The tendency is to adduce passages such as the above from Nietzsche’s later writings as furnishing the outlines of a *theory* of truth or knowledge or both. This burgeoning consensus attaches not only to the idea that the later Nietzsche subscribes to a substantive perspectivist metaphysical doctrine, but that just these remarks from *The Genealogy of Morals* (1969, III, 12) constitute a seminal statement of it. (When it comes to saying just what sort of doctrine it is that is supposedly here advanced the consensus quickly breaks down). But it is difficult to see how such remarks (remarks such as “there is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective knowing”) can by themselves be credited with limning the contours of a worked-out theory of the desired sort without the interpolation of a great deal of supplementary doctrine of a sort that such passages themselves seem neither prepared to supply nor especially eager to encourage. This lacuna leads one to hunt for further remarks that do appear to exhibit a proper interest in working out the details of a doctrine of the desired sort; and such remarks are, indeed, to be found elsewhere in Nietzsche’s writings – writings that give expression to very different moments in the development of his philosophy than the one so eloquently summed up in *The Genealogy of Morals* (1969, III, 12) – i.e., writings from either his early or middle period. But, as I have tried to show, the perspectivisms those earlier writings advance are of just the sort that the later Nietzsche is here concerned to reject.

to forms of subjectivity (i.e., capacities for apprehending properties that are subject-dependent) as a contradiction. The later Nietzsche here remains a critic of those philosophers whom he had earlier sought to criticize – those whom Zarathustra dubs ‘the pure perceivers’ with their ideal of ‘immaculate perception’ (1954b, II, 15) – but the criticism no longer rests on its earlier ground. The point of attack in the criticism of the metaphysics of pure perception has shifted significantly in his later work. The middle-period Nietzsche rejected the philosophy of the early Nietzsche because of its reliance on the pseudo-Kantian concept of the thing-in-itself. But the early and the middle-period Nietzsche were equally led to the disastrous conclusion that a rejection of the possibility of “pure knowledge” must entail the impossibility of any form of genuinely “accurate perception” because they both continued to retain (what later Nietzsche seeks to highlight as) the crucial presupposition of the metaphysics of pure perception: namely, that any degree of dependence on our forms of subjectivity entails a correlative loss in the degree of objectivity. By his later lights – contrary to his own middle-period characterizations of himself – in his middle-period work he had not yet truly emancipated himself from the pure perceivers’ longing for immaculate perception. An unacknowledged nostalgia for such an unattainable form of knowledge continued to haunt his philosophy. Full emancipation from this seductive philosophical ideal comes only with an appreciation of what it is that is really “dangerous” about the contradictory conceptual fictions of the philosophers: namely, the identification of objectivity with the elimination of every admixture of subject-dependence. It is this identification that blocks the possibility of the sort of interplay between the moments of subjectivity and objectivity in our experience that any coherent employment (literal or metaphorical) of the concept of perspective presupposes.

As long as this philosophical block remains in place, with its misplaced horror of the very forms of subjectivity we cannot do without, an oscillation is bound to ensue between an insistence upon a vacuous conception of objectivity and a misdirected recoil into a celebration of just the sorts of subjectivity we can do without – an oscillation that is vividly enacted in the halting and tortured transition between Nietzsche’s early and his middle-period attempts to find a firm footing somewhere along the later stations of the dialectic of perspectivism. The crucial final step that enables Nietzsche’s mature employment of the metaphor to escape this oscillation, lies in his coming to appreciate that a proper understanding of the dimension of subjectivity in our experience that invites the metaphorical identification of subjectivity with perspectivality in no way precludes a feature of our experience from being subjective (in the sense of

depending on our perceptual or evaluative perspective) and at the same time objective (in the sense of affording a true estimation of how things are).

X. Coda: The Place of Truth in Nietzsche's Mature Perspectivism

I have, in the preceding discussion, traced the development of Nietzsche's so-called "perspectivism" while largely ignoring many of his more intricate discussions of the topic of truth and a variety of closely related topics – topics such as (what he calls) "the question of the value of truth", the sources of (what he calls) "the will to truth", the relationship between various philosophical understandings of the nature of truth and the time-honored virtue of honesty, etc. The evasion was deliberate. For Nietzsche's numerous treatments of these latter topics are complex and nuanced, themselves undergoing considerable transformation in the course of the development of his philosophy, and along the way introducing a great many collateral issues that can easily serve as unhelpful distractions in the context of an attempt to attain a perspicuous overview of the stations he successively occupies and overcomes in (what I have been calling) the dialectic of perspectivism. Nevertheless, as should be evident from the foregoing, Nietzsche's employment of the concept of a perspective and his employment of the concept of truth are, at each stage in his thinking, closely bound up with one another.⁶¹ Hence if, perhaps influenced by certain strictures certainly present in his earlier writings, a reader of Nietzsche remains attached to an overly dark conception of what and how much in the way of (an employment of the concept of) truth his mature philosophy is able to allow, that reader thereby introduces insurmountable obstacles into the correlative task of attempting to understand Nietzsche's later (employment of the) concept of a perspective. The aim of this coda is to help loosen such strictures – or more precisely, briefly to trace a few of the steps along the path Nietzsche travels in loosening them himself.

The Genealogy of Morals begins by announcing that it will traffic in 'plain, harsh, ugly repellent, unchristian, immoral truth. – For such truths do exist.'

61. I follow Nietzsche here in occasionally speaking of "the concept of truth". A philosopher who has more at stake than Nietzsche does in making fine-grained logical distinctions – and therefore might have reason to distinguish between concepts and a great many other forms of expression (each of which makes a logically distinct sort of contribution to the articulation and assessment of thought) – might well have reason to worry about the idea that truth is a concept. Such worries are not to the point here.

(Nietzsche 1969, I, 1). Contrary to what some commentators seem to suppose, such an unabashed employment of the concept of truth pervades Nietzsche's later writings – often accompanied by equally unabashed expressions of devotion to its pursuit, such as the following:

Truth has to be fought for every step of the way, almost everything else dear to our hearts, on which our love and our trust in life depend, has had to be sacrificed to it. Greatness of soul is needed for it; the service of truth is the hardest service (1954a, 50).

But, even if one notices that he becomes thus able to deploy the term 'truth' in his later work without holding it at arm's length, one still goes badly wrong in one's reading of that work if one fails to appreciate that the quest for such "plain, harsh truth" – the category of truths later Nietzsche affirms do exist – is to be contrasted with the quest for metaphysical truth. Among those commentators who are comparatively attentive to such passages as the above in Nietzsche's later writing, some read them not only (as I do) as marking a rejection of his immature perspectivism, but also (as I do not) as expressing a retraction of the sort of view outlined in passages such as the following – in which he rejects (what he takes to be) our present metaphysical understanding of the ground of our devotion to truth:

In What Way We, Too, Are Still Pious. [...] The unconditional will to truth – what is it? Is it the will not to let oneself be deceived? Is it the will *not to deceive*? [...] But why not deceive? But why not allow oneself to be deceived? [...] [T]he faith in science [...] cannot owe its origin to [...] a calculus of utility; it must have originated in spite of the fact that the disutility and dangerousness of "the will to truth", of "truth at any price" is proved to it constantly. [...] No doubt, those who are truthful in that audacious and ultimate sense that is presupposed by the faith in science *thus affirm another world* than the world of life, nature, and history; and insofar as they affirm this "other world" – look, must they not by the same token negate its counterpart, this world, *our world*? – But you will have gathered what I am driving at, namely, that it is still a *metaphysical faith* upon which our faith in science rests – that even we seekers after knowledge today, we godless anti-metaphysicians still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by a faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine. (Nietzsche 1974, 344)

These two sorts of passages – ones that affirm a devotion to truth and ones that question certain understandings of what justifies our will to truth – need not

be taken to be in tension with one another. There is no contradiction between writing about the importance and difficulty of devoting oneself to the quest for truth and writing an exposé of spurious metaphysical justifications of that quest. Yet it is surely the case that the author of *The Gay Science* – though he is the author of both such eulogies and such exposés – does feel a tension here. There are many passages that suggest that he is not altogether sanguine about the possibility of overcoming this tension and achieving a harmonious alignment of his respective commitments – his commitment to expose the increasingly intellectually untenable basis of our present willingness to devote ourselves at any price to the truth and his commitment to continue in the name of honesty, thus to devote himself. One of the aims of Nietzsche’s later work is to dissolve the appearance of any irresolvable conflict here – an appearance that his earlier work does so much to encourage.

The crucial continuity in this region of Nietzsche’s thought is to be found in his concern to trace a devaluation of our world (and the “plain, harsh truths” that can be spoken about it) to a fantasy of an underlying, alternative, real world (and its Truth). The crucial discontinuity is that, for later Nietzsche, the exorcism of this fantasy (and the correlative conception of Truth) no longer destabilizes the category of plain, harsh truth. The author of the *Genealogy*, unlike the author of *The Gay Science*, no longer sees “we seekers after knowledge today, we godless anti-metaphysicians” as in a tight corner simply in virtue of our commitment to seek the truth. For later Nietzsche sees far more clearly than his earlier self ever did that there is no tension between holding that truth should be valued above all else and “fought for every step of the way” and holding that – as he puts it in *Beyond Good and Evil* – “nobody yet has been truthful enough about what ‘truthfulness’ is” (1966, 177). In that remark from *Beyond Good and Evil*, the former of the two invocations of the concept of truthfulness (i.e., a commitment to uncover the truth about truth) makes sense only in the context of a continuing commitment to the concept which figures in the latter invocation of it (which bespeaks a commitment to truth *simpliciter*, shorn of its misplaced metaphysical pretensions). The passage quoted above from *The Anti-Christ* continues as follows:

For what does it mean to be *honest* in intellectual things? That one is stern towards one’s heart, that one despises “fine feelings”, that one makes every Yes and No a question of conscience (1954a, 50).

Faithfulness to this ideal does not require allegiance to any particular metaphysical conception of truth, and thus not to those forms of faith that figure in passages such as the one from *The Gay Science* above – forms of faith such as “that God is the truth, that truth is divine”.

In its exploration of “the ascetic ideal”, *The Genealogy of Morals* – the book that begins by announcing that it will traffic in ‘plain, harsh ... truths ... for such truths do exist’ – takes up and seeks to extend the project outlined in *The Gay Science* of diagnosing and exposing the underpinnings of our metaphysical faith in truth. But, in Nietzsche’s later writing, the prosecution of this project does not (as it did in his early writing) threaten to culminate in the pseudo-Kantian conclusion that ‘truths are illusions we have forgotten are illusions’ (1979, p. 84). On the contrary, he now seeks to unmask as philosophical twins the temptation to affirm what the pseudo-Kantian seeks to reject (i.e., that there is an underlying True World) and the temptation to embrace what the pseudo-Kantian affirms (i.e., that there are no non-illusory “truths” to which we can attain). These are to be revealed as coeval consequences of a single continuing entanglement in one and the same set of metaphysical assumptions. A central task of Nietzsche’s mature philosophy is to disentangle what is involved in talking plain unvarnished truth – and our commitment to engage in such talk – from the fabric of metaphysical assumptions whose gradual disintegration threatens to leave us feeling driven to conclude that (if we are unable to know the True World, then) we are unable to attain to anything more than illusion and hence to conclude that any philosophically open-eyed effort to advance plain unvarnished truths must be a sham. In the later work, the pseudo-Kantian discovery that “truths are illusions” is itself unmasked as the expression of a disappointed metaphysical faith; and this, in turn, serves as the point of departure for a radical rethinking of how the proper philosophical inflection of the concept of a perspective is to be executed. The touchstone of one’s having fully achieved the standpoint of Nietzsche’s mature philosophy (i.e., of having successfully exorcised the crucial presupposition that fuels the dialectic of perspectivism) is that one is now simultaneously immune to the stage-one and stage-two perspectivists’ feeling of longing for a True World (i.e., a world that is to be opposed to the one that is disclosed to us in ordinary perception) and equally immune to the stage-three and stage-four perspectivists’ feeling of embarrassment and need for circumspection when it comes to the topic of truth (i.e., their insinuation that any unabashed commitment to the telling of plain unvarnished truths must, in and of itself, involve an at least tacit commitment to the existence of a True World).

It is a common mistake to assume that Nietzsche thinks that the unsavory genealogy of the will to truth advanced in *The Genealogy of Morals* itself constitutes some sort of argument (against not only certain entrenched metaphysical assumptions regarding truth – regarding the nature of its ground and value – but also) against the will to truth *per se*. This misses the internal character

of Nietzsche's mature critique of the ascetic ideal. ('I have every respect for the ascetic ideal *in so far as it is honest!*' (1969, III, 26).) Nietzsche's rejection of certain metaphysical conceptions of truth is not a rejection of the ideal of truthfulness as such, but rather only of certain untruthful understandings of wherein truthfulness must consist – what it requires, what it can guarantee, and where it may lead. To read Nietzsche's critique of the ascetic ideal as a merely external one – seeking to reject every aspect of that ideal – is precisely to confuse his own mature response to (what he takes to be) the central philosophical crisis of our times with the very one he himself most deplores and strives to derail. It is to identify Nietzsche's response with that of (what he calls) *nihilism* – the response that takes the collapse of time-honored metaphysical justifications for our most fundamental and cherished ideals to entail the bankruptcy of every aspect of those ideals themselves. To read Nietzsche in this way is to miss everything that is most challenging and original in his mature philosophy.⁶²

James Conant
 University of Chicago
 j-conant@uchicago.edu

Literature

Conant J (1992), 'The Search for Logically Alien Thought', in *The Philosophy of Hilary Putnam, Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 115–180.

Conant J (2001), 'Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of Schopenhauer as Educator', in *Nietzsche's Postmoralism*, edited by Richard Schacht, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kant I (1998), *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, [1781/1787].

Kant I (1929), *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Smith NK London: Macmillan & Co.

62. This paper would not have come into being but for Richard Schacht's patience and perseverance. It is also indebted to conversations with Stanley Cavell about the human, all-too-human, wish to deny one's humanity, with John Haugeland and John McDowell about objectivity and subjectivity, with Hilary Putnam about how to read (and especially how not to read) Nietzsche, and with Joel Snyder about linear perspective and the history of thought about it. But none of them is in any way to blame for the result. Each of them will, in all likelihood, find things to disagree with in what I here say about humanity, subjectivity, Nietzsche, and perspective respectively. No doubt soon I will, too.

- Kleist H (1982), *The Letters of Heinrich von Kleist*, edited and translated by Philip Miller, New York: Dutton.
- Muth L (1954), *Kleist und Kant*, Cologne: Kölneruniversitätsverlag.
- Nietzsche F (1954a), *The Anti-Christ*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage: New York.
- Nietzsche F (1954b), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage: New York.
- Nietzsche F (1954c), *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage: New York.
- Nietzsche F (1954d), *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage: New York.
- Nietzsche F (1966), *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage.
- Nietzsche F (1967a), *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter Press.
- Nietzsche F (1967b), *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, Vintage: New York.
- Nietzsche F (1969), *On the Genealogy of Morals & Ecce Homo*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Random House.
- Nietzsche F (1974), *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Random House.
- Nietzsche F (1979), 'On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense', in *Philosophy of Truth*, translated by Daniel Breazeale. Highlands, N.J: Humanities Press, .
- Nietzsche F (1986), *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nietzsche F (1997), 'Schopenhauer as Educator', in *Untimely Meditations*, 2. edition, Transl. R.J Hollingdale, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1874].
- Russell B (1945), *The History of Western Philosophy*, New York: Simon Schuster.